



*A female soldier of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam walks through an L.T.T.E. cemetery in Kilinochchi, in September, 2007.*



A REPORTER AT LARGE

## DEATH OF THE TIGER

*Sri Lanka's brutal victory over its Tamil insurgents.*

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

*Government soldiers later destroyed the cemetery. Photograph by Ron Haviv.*

### I. THE BEACH

The mobile-phone video clip shows a pair of soldiers pushing a naked, blindfolded man into the frame. His hands are tied behind his back. One soldier, dressed in the uniform of the Sri Lankan Army, forces him into a sitting position on the ground, kicks him in the back, and steps out of the way as the other soldier comes forward and shoots him in the back of the head. The man's body jolts and flops down. Off camera, the shooter can be heard laughing giddily and exclaiming, "It's like he jumped!" The soldiers kill two other men in similar fashion, and then dispatch a number of wounded prisoners. The camera turns to show at least eight other bodies, including those of several half-naked women, lying in pools of blood. All of them appear to have been freshly executed.

When the end came for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in May, 2009, it was overwhelming and unmerciful. In a three-year offensive of increasing sophistication, the Sri Lankan Army had outmaneuvered one of the world's most ruthless insurgent armies. The battlefield defeat ended a vicious conflict that for twenty-six years had divided Sri Lanka along ethnic lines, as the country's Tamils, a mostly Hindu minority, fought for the creation of a separate state against the ruling majority of Sinhalese Buddhists. The Tamil army—known as the L.T.T.E., or simply the Tigers—was led by Velupillai Prabhakaran, a charismatic, elusive man who had become one of the most successful guerrilla leaders of modern times. The Tigers were persistent suicide bombers, as well as relentless guerrilla fighters, and the war took at least a hundred thousand lives in Sri Lanka. In many respects—its entrenched religious and ethnic conflicts, its festering guerrilla warfare and suicide bombings, its seamless interchange between civilians and combatants—the war prefigured any number of later conflicts. Where it differed was in the government's brutal effectiveness in putting down the insurgency. To the extent that a counter-insurgency campaign can be successful, Sri Lanka is a grisly test case for success in modern warfare.

The Tigers' collapse began in January, 2009, when they lost the town of Kilinochchi, their de-facto capital. For an

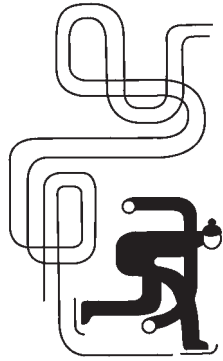
organization that had controlled much of northern and eastern Sri Lanka for nearly a decade, it was a devastating reversal. Their remaining fighters, a force of about fifteen thousand, retreated into the jungle near the coastal town of Mullaittivu, taking along more than three hundred thousand Tamil civilians who were trapped with them. With international concern mounting over the safety of the civilians, the Sri Lankan Army designated a series of “no-fire zones” and told civilians to assemble there. It then shelled those zones repeatedly, while issuing denials that it was doing so and forbidding journalists access to the area. Hundreds of people were killed every day. By mid-April, the Tamil rebels and the civilians were trapped on a bloody stretch of beach about a mile long. Hemmed in by the sea, a lagoon, and a hundred thousand government soldiers, they were all but helpless, as the Army kept up a barrage of fire from gunboats, aircraft, and field artillery.

On April 21st, the Army broke through the Tigers’ defenses, creating a chaotic corridor that, over several days, allowed nearly two hundred thousand famished and wounded civilians to flee into its custody. The Army had ordered most relief workers and all international observers to leave the area, but it nonetheless billed its offensive as a “humanitarian operation” to rescue hostages from the Tigers. (The Tigers did in fact prevent some civilians from fleeing, and shot hundreds of them as they tried to escape.) The Tigers’ defenders, meanwhile, claimed that the Army was committing genocide. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton admonished Sri Lanka’s government, saying that “the entire world is very disappointed” by the “untold suffering” that was being caused by its efforts to end the war. There were later reports, which the government denied, that as many as forty thousand civilians were killed during the Army’s final offensive, and that their bodies were burned or buried in secret mass graves.

The foreign secretaries of France and Great Britain flew to Sri Lanka, where they pleaded with the government to call a ceasefire in order to rescue the civilians who were still trapped. Suspi-

cious that the diplomats also wanted to save the Tiger leaders, the government ignored them. Tens of thousands of civilians remained in the kill zone, which continued to shrink until it was no bigger than four football fields.

A survivor of the final stand at Mullaittivu, a young pastor, described the scene to me. He and four other pastors and a group of sixty orphans in their care had been dug into shallow bunkers on the beach. “It was the first thing we did whenever we reached a new position—digging and making bags with cut-up women’s saris,” he said. “Only afterward would we go and look for food or water.” The Tamil fighters were in bunkers all around



them. “Most of them were Black Tigers,” he said, referring to the Tamil suicide squad. “Prabhakaran was among us, too, but none of us saw him.” He described a charnel ground, with artillery shells landing at random. “All we could see was dead people, people crying for food and for water, and burning vehicles everywhere.”

On May 16th, Army troops took the last coastal positions, and, as they pursued the remaining Tigers, the Army commander, General Sarath Fonseka, declared victory. The next day, a Tiger spokesman posted a statement on the organization’s Web site: “This battle has reached its bitter end. . . . We have decided to silence our guns. Our only regrets are for the lives lost and that we could not hold out for longer.”

In the bunker, the pastor’s group talked by cell phone with a brigadier general in the Sri Lankan Army who told them to stay there until they saw soldiers, then identify themselves with white flags. The group had run out of food and went foraging in an abandoned bunker nearby. “We found food packets—meat, chocolates,” the pastor said, and they took as much as they could carry, dodging incoming fire. The next morning, a young man in their group was fatally shot as he defecated outside.

By evening, they could see soldiers approaching. “Two or three of us went out with several children, and we took white flags, as the brigadier had sug-

gested,” the pastor recalled. “But as we approached they said, ‘Don’t come,’ and fired guns in the air.” The soldiers had been told there could be suicide bombers among the last Tigers, and in fact several insurgents blew themselves up in the midst of civilian refugees turning themselves in to the Army. “We fell on the ground. They were about fifty metres away. We crawled back to the bunker, and then they fired at the bunker. The whole night, I could hear the Army throwing grenades in the bunkers near us. There were explosions, and people were crying and saying, ‘Help us.’”

At dawn, the pastor said he “felt courage” and decided to go out and confront the soldiers. “I went with another pastor and a white flag,” he said. “We explained who we were, and they told everyone to come forward out of the bunker. They ordered us to kneel down. There were about fifteen soldiers. Their faces were covered with black cloth. One soldier said, in Sinhala—I understand a little—‘We have orders to shoot everyone.’ We were shouting for them not to shoot.” After a tense standoff, the pastor was strip-searched, along with the children, and then allowed to collect his belongings from the bunker. “A pastor came behind me, but he was punched in the chest by a soldier. He fell down. He died later that day. The same soldier who hit him stuck his fingers in the wounds of the young men with us who had been injured.”

After another strip search and a long interrogation, the pastors were reunited with the children and put in a detention camp. When I asked the pastor how the experience had affected him, he said, “It is in my mind. When I sleep, automatically it comes out—things I only saw in films in my youth. Bodies without heads. Bodies with the stomach open and the liver coming out.” He added, “At the end, we were walking out through fire and past dead people, and the soldiers were laughing at us and saying, ‘We have killed all your leaders. Now you are our slaves.’ You can imagine how I feel about my country.”

On the same day, May 18th, the Army announced that the Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, had been killed, along with two hundred and fifty others, during an overnight

escape attempt across the Nandikadal Lagoon, which separated the beach from the mainland. Images were released of his body lying at the feet of Army troops, a handkerchief over his forehead to conceal a yawning wound. The Army claimed that it had cremated his remains. Prabhakaran's eldest child, Charles Anthony, was killed the day before, along with other fighters who launched a final assault on Army lines. Soon after, the Army said it had also recovered the bodies of Prabhakaran's wife, their daughter, and their youngest child, a boy, all of them dead of gunshot wounds.

Dozens of unarmed Tamils, including several senior Tiger political leaders and their families, were also shot dead by soldiers as they walked out of the kill zone carrying white flags. Their surrender had been personally approved by Sri Lanka's President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, after being negotiated over a satellite-phone link by the U.N.'s special envoy to Sri Lanka and Marie Colvin, a correspondent for the *Sunday Times* of London, whom the Tamil leaders had asked to be their intermediary. "This was not the chaos of battle," Colvin said. "It was a negotiated surrender. Promises were made and they were broken."

After the announcement of victory, there were fireworks in Colombo, the nation's capital, and across Sinhalese Sri Lanka. In an address to Parliament on May 19th, Rajapaksa declared a national holiday. "We have liberated the whole country from L.T.T.E. terrorism," he said. "Our intention was to save the Tamil people from the cruel grip of the L.T.T.E. We all must now live as equals in this free country."

Rajapaksa is a veteran politician with a commanding physical presence, a trademark smile, and a folksy charisma, which his admirers liken to that of the late Ronald Reagan. In office since 2005, he seized on the mood of national euphoria that followed his war victory to call an early election last January, in which he was duly reelected to a new five-year term. Rajapaksa is the son of a well-known politician, but his family comes from a village in the deep south of the country, rather than from Colombo's Western-educated elite; in Sri Lanka's highly stratified society,

they are considered nouveau-riche upstarts. He has made his rusticity a political asset, however, and he enjoys a huge following among rural Sinhalese. One of his brothers, Gotabaya, is his defense minister; another, Basil, is his chief of staff and minister for economic development; and a third, Chamal, is Speaker of Parliament. His twenty-four-year-old son Namal was recently elected to Parliament, and forty-odd additional brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, and in-laws hold various other government posts.

After the war, Rajapaksa's government adopted a posture of triumphalism at home and defensive resentment of the outrage that the carnage had caused abroad. When the U.N. created an "accountability panel," government-sponsored rioters mobbed its headquarters in Colombo, forcing it to close. Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in London complained to me that his country was being unfairly singled out: "Colombia has been contaminating the world for years with its cocaine, and now Somalia is with its piracy. What do we hear about that in the U.N.? Nothing." The important thing, he said, was that Sri Lanka had ended terrorism, making it the first country in the modern age to have done so. In military circles around the world, the "Sri Lanka option" for counter-insurgency was discussed with admiration. Its basic

tenets were: deny access to the media, the United Nations, and human-rights groups; isolate your opponents, and kill them as quickly as possible; and segregate and terrify the survivors—or, ideally, leave no witnesses at all.

## 2. THE PAST

In 1914, Leonard Woolf's younger sister, Bella Sidney Woolf, published an illustrated guidebook titled "How to See Ceylon." Leonard, who had not yet married the novelist Virginia Stephen, worked in Ceylon as a colonial administrator, and Bella went to visit him before settling there herself. It was the Edwardian era of languorous travel by rail and rickshaw, croquet clubs, and afternoon teas attended by servants. Woolf wrote, "The stranger, looking down on the motley throng that threads the streets of Ceylon, is bewildered, puzzled. How is he to distinguish between all these people?" She ventured a brief comparison of the island's two main ethnicities: "The Tamil cooly, it must be conferred, is a much more law abiding, peaceful person than the Sinhalese. Apart from the hot temper which leads to the flashing out of a knife and murder, there is an undercurrent of malice in village life."

Under the British, tensions festered between the Sinhalese, who make up seventy-five per cent of the population,



*"I try to be royal without being regal."*



*A billboard of Mahinda Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's President, who has a huge following among the country's rural Sinhalese population.*

and the Tamils, with seventeen per cent. (There was also friction with other ethnicities; in 1915, Sinhalese mobs attacked the island's Muslim minority.) The Tamils were seen as having unfairly benefitted from colonial rule; they held a disproportionately high number of civil-service jobs and university enrollments, and more of them were fluent in English. After Ceylon gained its independence, in 1948, Sinhalese nationalists grew increasingly insistent that the Tamils were "invaders," whose presence threatened the very existence of the Sinhalese culture.

The Sinhalese have traditionally lived in the south, with its lush land and ancient reservoir-fed rice paddies. The Tamils lived in the arid scrublands of

the north, known as the Vanni, and the lowland jungles of the east, areas their ancestors had occupied two thousand years ago, during wars of conquest waged by Hindu kings from Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of India. Sinhalese nationalists trace their lineage to Aryan tribes of northern India, despite the lack of evidence to support the idea. Although intermarriage across language barriers was fairly common, especially among the upper castes, Sinhalese politics by the early twentieth century had become infused with racialist theories on "Aryanism" then being promulgated in Europe. Anagarika Dharmapala, the leader of the Sinhalese Buddhist revival movement that began under British co-

lonial rule, said, in a frequently quoted speech, "This bright, beautiful island was made into a Paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals. . . . This ancient, historic, refined people, under the diabolism of vicious paganism, introduced by the British administrators, are now declining and slowly dying away."

The "vandals" Dharmapala referred to were the Tamils, of course, and the "vicious paganism" their Hindu faith. By the time of independence, the seeds of sectarian hatred had taken root. In 1948, Sinhalese nationalists introduced legislation to deny citizenship to hundreds of thousands of so-called "Indian Tamils," most



*Photograph by Patrick Brown.*

of them tea-plantation workers descended from laborers brought to the island by the British. Then a new law made Sinhala the country's official language, replacing English, and many Tamils working for the government lost their positions for being unable to speak the language. In the seventies, legislation was enacted to favor Sinhalese students in university admissions, and soon after, a new constitution made Buddhism the state religion. Tamil politicians called for Gandhi-style campaigns of civil disobedience, but young radicals advocated an armed struggle for "national liberation." Militant groups formed and began squabbling over the way to bring about a separate, secular, socialist Tamil state. Some

travelled to Lebanon and received military training from Palestinian guerrillas.

In 1975, the pro-government mayor of Jaffna, the informal Tamil capital, was shot dead as he arrived for prayers at a Hindu temple. The assassin was Velupillai Prabhakaran, a thin, goggle-eyed twenty-year-old who had left high school and gone into hiding to devote himself to the fight for Tamil independence. Prabhakaran is said to have torn up all pictures of himself in the family's photo album to prevent police from identifying him. (His father, a civil servant, was horrified by his son's extremism, and remained estranged from him. He died this month, in Army custody.) At the time of the shooting, Prabhakaran was a member of a fledgling group called the Tamil New Tigers. Within a year, he had formed his own breakaway organization, the L.T.T.E. Prabhakaran—known to his followers as Thamby, or Little Brother—had a flamboyant touch: in his early days as the Tiger leader, he posed for pictures with a pet leopard cub, and spoke with admiration of Napoleon Bonaparte and Alexander the Great. His contemporary heroes included Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood, and he often showed their movies to his young fighters, whom he called his "cubs." The Tigers soon emerged as the most ruthless of the Tamil militant groups, and eventually annihilated all their rivals.

On July 24, 1983, the Tigers killed thirteen soldiers in a land-mine ambush, and Sinhalese residents of Colombo turned on their Tamil neighbors. In a murderous orgy that spread quickly across the southern part of the island, they hacked, raped, burned, and shot as many as three thousand people. The killing went on for a week, and thousands of Tamil homes and businesses were torched and looted. The authorities, by and large, did not intervene, and in some cases cooperated with the mobs.

The violence was a historic watershed. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils who had lived in the south fled to the north and east; many of them entered the Tigers' training camps, where a movement was growing for a separate Tamil homeland. Another wave of refugees moved abroad, and these "diaspora Tamils" began to support the Tigers' cause. India's sizable Tamil population was outraged, and their poli-

ticians called for action. In response, Indira Gandhi's government began providing the militants with covert financial assistance and military training. Sri Lanka's civil war had begun.

In December, 1986, I arrived in Sri Lanka with my brother Scott. The conflict was only three years old, and its body count—around five thousand—was still relatively modest. But the Tigers were already notable for their unusual discipline and ferocity. In addition to carrying out a few massacres of their own (including an especially brutal one in 1985, in which a hundred and forty-six civilians were killed in a raid on one of the holiest Buddhist shrines in Sri Lanka), the Tigers had instituted a reign of terror among their fellow-Tamils, imposing absolute authority, levying war taxes, and eliminating their rivals. A master of battlefield innovation, Prabhakaran devised a form of execution for collaborators with the enemy: the victim was tied to a lamppost and blown to pieces with Cordex explosive fuse wire.

During our visit, Colombo was quiet, and the Sinhalese areas of the country remained largely untouched by the war. In the eastern city of Batticaloa, however, we found an atmosphere of violence and contained hysteria. The Army's antiterrorist Special Task Force, created for the purpose of fighting Tamil insurgents, had taken over the city's police stations; its soldiers were bunkered in behind sandbags and razor wire, their guns pointing out through sniper holes. After dusk no one ventured out on the streets. Groups of women in saris recognized us as foreigners and beseeched us to help them find their sons, who had been detained by the S.T.F. The Army had developed a pattern of mass arrests, torture, and, with growing frequency, murder. A Tamil Catholic priest, Father Chandra Fernando, told us that disappearances and indiscriminate shootings occurred daily in the area, and that every male between fifteen and forty had been arrested at least once. The conflict had grown so terrible, he said, that he had come to question the very existence of God.

Through Father Chandra, we made arrangements to visit the Tigers' nearest camp, a journey that took us by motorcycle, ferry, and jeep into a remote area of sparse jungle. When we arrived,

wicker chairs had been placed in a half-circle inside a thatched hut. A group of perhaps forty fighters, teen-agers mostly, stood by, armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades. The Tiger commander of the Eastern Province, Colonel Kumarappa, appeared. A heavy-set Tamil with a drooping mustache, he wore khaki trousers and a white shirt and had a revolver tucked in his belt. He sat down in one of the chairs and motioned for us to do the same. His fighters crowded into the hut around us.

Guerrilla commanders often lay out a philosophical and historical argument for their use of violence, but Kumarappa's case for war seemed almost offhand; for the Tigers, killing and dying seemed to be virtues in themselves. When I asked him what kind of government he wanted for the new Tamil state of Eelam, he paused for a long while before replying, "Oh, yeah, socialist. A socialist country, yeah, because in here sixty per cent of the people are poor—only ten per cent are very rich. Corruption, you know?" The Tigers, like insurgents who

came later in other parts of the world, led constrained lives; they were denied alcohol, cigarettes, and premarital sex, and maintained a worshipful devotion to Prabhakaran, which they demonstrated with their willingness to perform suicide missions. Kumarappa boasted that his fighters were obliged to wear cyanide capsules around their necks and to swallow them if they were captured. "I think the cyanide helps our morale, you know?" Recently, he said, Army commandos had captured a handful of fighters without their cyanide, and the Tigers had evaded interrogation by struggling until their captors were forced to shoot them.

Kumarappa acknowledged killing civilians: "Sometimes, you know, we don't have any alternatives. Sometimes we have to do that job, too." But the Tigers had a higher purpose—the cause of a Tamil homeland—and therefore had no choice but to punish those who collaborated with the enemy. Kumarappa said that he had captured many spies; he had one in camp at that moment, a woman of thirty-

six. He ordered his men to bring her in. She was tiny, with unkempt hair and a bad limp, and her eyes were wide and unfocused. She was made to sit in a chair next to Kumarappa. Her name was Athuma, he said. His men had caught her two days earlier, after she infiltrated their area, and accused her of spying for the Sri Lankan Army. Kumarappa said she had already confessed: "Without any torture, she accepts everything." Her relationship with the Army had begun when an officer agreed to take two of her children to be adopted by his sister in Colombo. Afterward, he had demanded that she collect information.

Athuma mumbled in Tamil, and her eyes roved around. Kumarappa translated: "She asks me for her life."

"Has she said why she did it?"

"Because of money. She's suffering in poverty, you know."

Scott asked, "What does she think is going to happen to her?" Athuma said something in a soft voice. Kumarappa said, "She knows very well the final decision. She knows we're going to kill her."

Athuma spoke to Scott and me, repeating something over and over. Kumarappa said, "She's pleading, 'They're going to take my life.'" I asked if people had died as a result of her information, and Kumarappa said no.

"Then why can't you forgive her?" I asked.

Kumarappa sighed. "Because, you know, she made a big mistake." He waved, and Athuma was taken away by several fighters.

Both sides of the Sri Lankan civil war insisted on their victimhood, which only prolonged the fighting. A few hours' drive from Colombo, we visited a camp for Tamil political suspects who had been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. There were a hundred and twenty-five inmates, ranging in age from fifteen to sixty-seven, all of whom had been picked up by the Special Task Force. Although most of them were uneducated farmers and fishermen, and denied having anything to do with the Tamil militant organizations, they had been tortured and humiliated, they said. Their guard, a Muslim, nodded sympathetically as they spoke. At one point, he whispered to us, "They are all innocent."



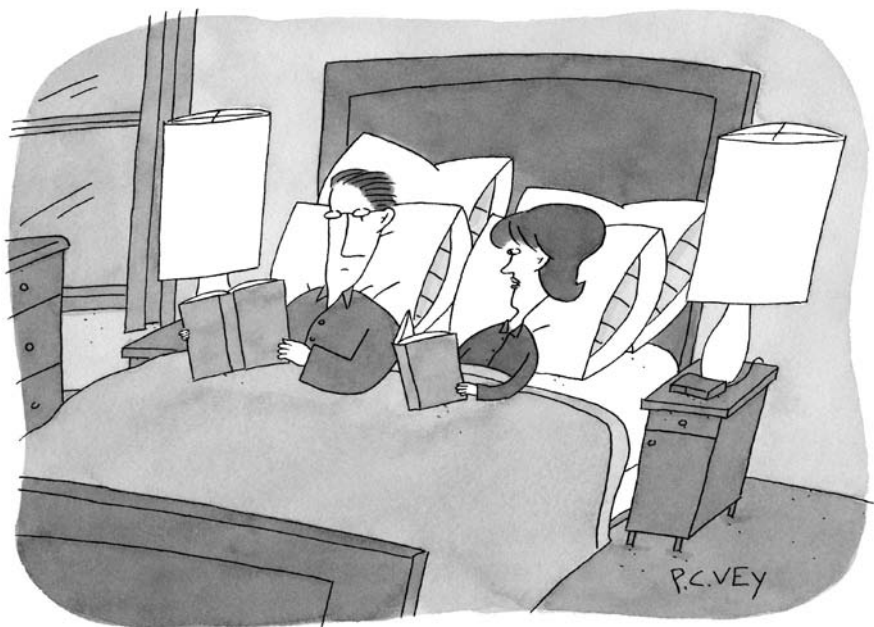
*"Rosalie—your poor performance this year has reduced your parents' investment in you by almost seventy per cent."*

At the day's end, we joined our host, Bobby Wickremasinghe, the deputy minister for prisons, on the veranda of the camp administrator's house. "Nobody sees our problem," he said. "We are just a few Sinhalese, but the Tamils are millions, here and in South India. They can go to India, where there are so many Tamils. They can go all over the world. Who will take me, a Sinhalese? I must live and die on this island! . . . Does no one see that for us, the Sinhalese Buddhists, it is a problem of survival? It is the perishing of a race." The Sinhalese, of course, constituted three-quarters of the population. "If we wanted to, we could wipe out the Tamils in an hour or two. But we haven't done that, because we are Buddhists."

Over the decades, there were periodic ceasefires and peace negotiations, but the two sides could never agree to durable terms. Both relied on the ongoing fight for political leverage. Sinhalese politicians needed the nationalist vote, and Prabhakaran, who was primarily a battlefield strategist, seemed incapable of political compromise.

The social and economic effects of the war were huge. Tourism dwindled, depriving the country of a crucial source of revenue. The expenditures for the military diverted money from social-welfare projects and energized leftist activism among Sinhalese nationalists. The government allowed Indian peace-keeping troops into northern Sri Lanka in 1987, which further inflamed the nationalists and helped set off a Sinhalese-on-Sinhalese civil war that cost an estimated fifty thousand lives. In the war with the Tigers, at least a hundred thousand people were killed; perhaps half of them were Tamil civilians, and roughly a quarter were members of Sri Lanka's armed forces. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils were displaced from their homes, and a million more fled abroad.

The Tigers killed one Sri Lankan President by suicide bomb, in 1993, and came close to killing two more; they also assassinated scores of government ministers, parliamentarians, military officers, and other officials. In 1991, in the world's first female suicide bombing, a Black Tiger named Dhanu set off explosives concealed under her clothing as she knelt at the feet of Rajiv Gandhi, the former In-



*"I had no idea a sexless marriage would involve so much reading."*

dian Prime Minister, during a public ceremony, blowing him and fourteen other people to bits.

The closest the Tigers came to ruling a Tamil homeland was in the period that followed the peace accord of February, 2002. During that time, the Tamil lands of the north and east were united, and the Tigers' political administration began to function as a virtual state, with its own army, navy, border guards, and customs officials. (Bizarrely, everything from the supply of electricity to health and education services continued to be funded and run by the Sri Lankan government.) Acting as conflict negotiators, Norwegian diplomats paid calls on Tiger officials and carried messages to their government counterparts in Colombo.

But by the time Mahinda Rajapaksa stood for election in November, 2005, the ceasefire was already unravelling. Just two months earlier, the country's foreign minister, a moderate Tamil, had been assassinated by a suspected Tiger sniper. The Tigers encouraged a boycott of the election, and, ironically, the dearth of Tamil voters helped Rajapaksa win by a slender margin. At his inauguration, Rajapaksa invited the Tigers to a new round of talks, but amid mounting violence they withdrew. In July, 2006, after the Tigers blocked a

reservoir that supplied water to thousands of farmers, Rajapaksa authorized a new military offensive against them. This was followed by a political blow: in October, the Supreme Court ordered that the Northern and Eastern Provinces be separated, diminishing hopes for the Tamil homeland.

The next month, Prabhakaran declared a renewal of the "freedom struggle." The war had begun again. With the help of two Tiger defectors named Karuna and Pellian, the Army took over the east, and then moved its offensive north, pursuing Prabhakaran's troops into the Vanni. At the same time, the Army embarked on a huge recruitment drive: between 2005 and 2009, it grew from a hundred and twenty-five thousand troops to three hundred thousand. By January, 2008, Rajapaksa, determined to crush the Tigers, announced a formal end to the ceasefire.

Sri Lanka's war dragged to its bloody climax just as Obama took office. Perhaps for this reason, the official American position was one of lawyerly, largely ineffective disapproval, with the U.S. Ambassador, Robert Blake, voicing humanitarian concerns and occasional criticism of the government, but otherwise keeping quiet. The U.S. and the European Union did curb arms sales to Sri Lanka, so the Rajapaksa government





turned instead to Eastern nations. China, in the last year of the war, supplied a billion dollars' worth of military aid, including fighter jets, air-surveillance radar, and anti-aircraft batteries; Russia and Pakistan provided artillery shells and small arms; Iran supplied fuel.

Unofficially, however, the United States had provided some help. Sri Lankan diplomats and military officers acknowledged to me privately that U.S. satellite intelligence had been crucial when, in 2008, Sri Lanka's Navy sank seven Tiger ships loaded with military cargo. The ships—members of the Sea Pigeons fleet, which sailed without identification from various Asian seaports—were cruising in international waters, as far as a thousand miles from Sri Lanka, when they were attacked. They carried war material worth tens of millions of dollars, and their destruction deprived the Tigers of their traditional means of military resupply just as the Sri Lankan Army ramped up hostilities. From then on, the Tigers were on the run, herded ineluctably into shrinking territory.

The Tigers' defeat was not preordained. The events that led to their demise had everything to do with the personality of their leader. Prabhakaran had been dictating the terms of the war in Sri

Lanka for so long, and built up such extraordinary power, that he appears to have lost his sense of proportion. At some point during the Army's siege of his headquarters at Kilinochchi—before the city fell, in January, 2009—he is believed to have escaped with his wife and children and their bodyguards to one of his hiding places in the jungle, in an area called Visuamadu. For weeks at a time, they lived literally underground in an elaborate hideout.

The house was so ingeniously concealed that its existence was discovered only in 2009, when soldiers stumbled across it. They discovered an underground lair of rooms descending fifty feet, with bulletproof doors, air-conditioning, surveillance cameras, and electricity from a soundproof generator. They claimed to have also found oxygen tanks, a bottle of cognac, and a supply of insulin (suggesting that Prabhakaran, who had grown rotund in recent years, may have been diabetic), as well as a Marks & Spencer shirt with a forty-two-and-a-half-inch chest.

The Army maintained the compound as a private museum for select visitors. At the end of a paved road just wide enough for a single jeep was a modest-looking pink bungalow, its roof camouflaged by dried palm fronds. Another palm-covered structure concealed a drive-down

subterranean garage. Next to the fenced entrance of the compound was an open-air funeral bier, where the bodies of slain Tiger officers were brought so that Prabhakaran could pronounce words of homage before they were disposed of.

Down a narrow stairwell from the bungalow's front room was a claustrophobic series of small, tile-floored rooms. The last one held an emergency exit, where an iron staircase spiraled up to ground level at the rear of the house. From the top of the stairs, Prabhakaran would have had to run only a few feet to reach the protection of the surrounding jungle.

At Mullaitivu, after years of evasion, Prabhakaran was finally trapped. Because all the people around him have been killed, it is difficult to know how he spent his last moments—whether, as the Army says, he was killed in combat, or whether he was caught and executed. The Tiger leaders clearly hoped for a deal that would spare their lives. Weeks before the massacre, Prabhakaran's aides began calling their intermediary Marie Colvin, and on the evening of May 17th one of them relayed surrender terms: the Tigers would lay down their arms in return for a guarantee of safety for fifty of their leaders and a thousand of their fighters. Colvin said that this surprisingly low number most likely represented all the Tiger fighters left alive on the beach. She heard machine-gun fire behind the aide's voice, suggesting that the fighting was close by.

Until the very end, Prabhakaran believed that the international relief community, the U.N., and Western governments would save the Tigers. "The L.T.T.E. continued to read the world as if it was pre-9/11," Jayampathy Wickramaratne, an adviser to Sri Lanka's past two Presidents, explained. "What happened was that many countries, such as the U.S., took a different view of the L.T.T.E. than they had before—even if they sympathized with the Tamil people." In May, 2006, after years of accommodating the L.T.T.E., the European Union branded it a terrorist organization. The U.S. had done so a decade earlier, and George W. Bush's Administration had supported Sri Lanka's counterinsurgency campaign directly.

Prabhakaran also crucially underestimated Mahinda Rajapaksa. "Pre-

Rajapaksa governments never went one hundred per cent all out to wipe out the L.T.T.E.," Wickramaratne explained. "They used military force, but always had a political solution in mind. But then came Rajapaksa, and he was prepared, rightly or wrongly, to go whole hog. If you look at the L.T.T.E., it's a case of them arrogantly refusing opportunities. They thought they could just keep telling the world that they were willing to talk, but not follow through. They thought they were the exception, until Rajapaksa came along and said, 'I'm not going to let you do it.'"

### 3. THE CONQUERED LANDS

With the Tigers' defeat at Mullaitivu, all of Sri Lanka's territory came under government control for the first time in nearly thirty years. In the north and east, the Army occupied the land, pursuing a kind of clear-and-hold strategy, in which it herded the Tamil inhabitants into a series of Army-run "welfare camps"—essentially military prisons—and did not allow them out until they were deemed harmless. The camps initially held three hundred and twenty thousand Tamil civilians; an estimated twelve thousand Tigers were kept in separate facilities. With the north largely emptied out and the sites of the fiercest fighting off limits to all but military personnel, secrecy descended over the former Tiger territory.

President Rajapaksa had described his postwar vision as "one nation, one people"—in which no single ethnic group would lay claim over any part of the land—and called for "economic development and prosperity" as the route to reconciliation. But many Tamils believed that this was simply the first step toward complete Sinhalese domination. Without the Tigers to defend the land, the government would flood the north and east with Sinhalese soldiers and their families; much as China did in Tibet, they would weaken the Tamil claim on the region with unrelenting force and by diluting the population.

The military prohibited access to the north to all foreigners without special permits, but a Tamil social worker, whom I will call Siva, agreed to take me through the less guarded back roads of the Vanni. We set out by jeep for Kilinochchi, the

Tigers' former capital. There were Army bivouacs every hundred yards or so, and larger military camps every few miles. The soldiers scrutinized us closely as we drove by, but allowed us through the roadblocks. The Vanni was a wasteland of low bushes and fallow farms and a succession of war-ruined hamlets.

We stopped in one tiny fishing village: a welter of roofless houses, trash-strewn sand, and scrubby trees—and an Army post. The hundred-odd families there had been released from the detention camps five months earlier, and were now living in lean-tos made out of sheet metal or U.N.-issue blue plastic; some had fenced themselves in with woven palm palisades. No one in the community spoke Sinhala, and the soldiers did not speak Tamil; the community leader told Siva that they wanted someone to be sent to live with them who could talk to the soldiers on their behalf. In the past few nights, someone had tried to break into a number of homes, and the villagers believed it was Sinhalese soldiers. "We don't know if they are trying to steal or if they are looking for women to rape," the community leader said.

It was one of many allegations of rape I heard. Over the years, groups like the Asian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International have documented numerous cases in which Sinhalese soldiers raped Tamil women and girls. In the cell-phone video from Mullaitivu, the soldiers appraise the dead women and make lewd comments that strongly suggest that they have been sexually assaulted.

We drove north on the main road from Colombo to Jaffna, the historic capital of the Tamils. The road had been reopened to the public for the first time in years; the British-era railway, whose rails and wooden ties had been torn up and used as bunker reinforcements by the Tigers, was also being rebuilt. Cafés and picnic grounds had sprung up by the side of the road, with signs identifying them as "People's Rests" and "Army Welfare Canteens." They were occupied by soldiers and busloads of Sinhalese tourists. Siva remarked, "They are increasing, not re-

ducing, their presence. This is permanent." Entire military cantonments, made out of special materials supplied by the Chinese, were being erected all over the north. We passed many more Army camps along the road.

The Army had said that it was waiting until mines could be cleared to return Tamils to their homes, but Siva was dubious. "I wouldn't be surprised if they are looking for gold on the corpses," he said. "The Tamil people are famous for liking jewelry and gold. I think that's it; otherwise there is no reason why they shouldn't allow people to go back to their places. That and evidence of mass graves, war crimes. Maybe they are moving the bodies."

Siva's claims at times had the ring of conspiracy theory. But later Major General Mahinda Hathurusingha, the security commander of Jaffna, confirmed for me that the cantonments were indeed intended to be permanent. From the military's perspective, the war continued. "The L.T.T.E. inculcation of the youth—this is a big problem for us," he said. The Army needed to maintain a presence in the north to insure that Tamil radicalism never started again. To gather intelligence, another senior officer told me, it had infiltrated the Tamil population and installed electronic surveillance systems.

During the war, signs of the Tigers' presence were ubiquitous in Tamil areas. Throughout the north, hand-painted billboards advertised their sacrifices on behalf of their people. One of them showed two Tamil mothers, both wondering where their daughters were. On the left side of the billboard, one of the daughters, an adolescent girl in pigtails and a pink dress, is depicted in three panels. In the first, she is at home alone, meekly receiving three armed government soldiers. In the second, she looks out through the bars of a jail cell. In the third, her pink skirt and legs protrude from a bush, while the soldiers dig a shallow grave. On the right side, the other daughter, wearing tiger-striped camouflage, looks strong and determined; she wields a weapon during combat in the jungle, and steers a Sea-Tiger launch on the ocean.

Now the Army had methodically



erased all traces of the Tigers in the north. Kilinochchi's cemetery had been totally eradicated. Pointing to mounds of broken gravestones and piles of rubble, Siva explained, "The Army has come along and just bulldozed them." In the center of Kilinochchi, the Army had erected a victory monument: a giant concrete cube with a bullet hole cracking its fascia and a lotus flower rising from the top. Soldiers stood at attention before a marble plinth, whose inscription extolled the Rajapaksa's leadership during "a humanitarian operation which paved the way to eradicate terrorism entirely from our motherland, restoring her territorial integrity and the noble peace."

Though the Rajapaksa government denies plans for the "Sinhalization" of the north and east, it has done little to assuage the Tamils' fears. These anxieties are fuelled by a sense of communal humiliation. During a stop at a friend's house in Kilinochchi, Siva complained of "seeing soldiers everywhere, occupying our places. But people are resigned. They feel they can't fight the Army presence anymore." His friend added that he had heard a local Tamil vegetable seller calling out in Sinhala. When he asked why, the vender told him, "Tamil has no place now."

Among many Tamils, as well as Sinhalese, the Tigers were despised for violently upsetting Sri Lanka's delicate status quo. Middle-class and upper-class Tamils were targeted for extortion; those who opposed the Tigers' separatist campaign risked assassination. But in the backlands of the north and east the Tigers, despite their brutality, were the only government that most Tamils knew, and were more representative of their community than the postwar Sinhalese administration. Siva said, "After all, who were the L.T.T.E.? They were our children! O.K., maybe even they were terrorists, but people here, because they were their children, had feelings for them."

At one point during our trip, two women approached Siva. The older one, in her forties, with a long ponytail and a red bindi dot on her forehead, carried a photograph of a slim youth standing in front of a shrine. She identified him as

her son, and explained that he had been forcibly conscripted by the Tigers in 2002. In the areas they controlled, the Tigers had demanded that each Tamil family contribute at least one member to the cause; children as young as fifteen, girls as well as boys, were often conscripted. If they weren't produced voluntarily, they were taken by force.

The other woman had lost her daughter in 2006. The girl, twenty-four at the time, had gone out to attend a birthday party and hadn't returned. She, too, had ended up in the Tigers. Neither woman had heard anything of her child since the end of the war. They told Siva of going to the detention camps and getting the runaround from authorities. They had come to him because they had heard rumors of a secret detention camp and hoped he'd know where it was.

The younger woman had last heard news of her daughter from another female fighter who had survived the siege at Mullaittivu. "That girl told me that they had been together, that my daughter had a chest injury, and that in the fighting she had lost sight of her. She said that just behind her the Sri Lankan Army was coming, so it's possible they caught and saved her." The mother added, hopefully, "She was in Intelligence. She had finished high school, and she spoke some English."

The older woman said that other detainees had told her that her son was captured alive, and he had been collaborating with the Army by leading it to the Tigers' hidden weapons caches. If the reports were true, she said, sobbing, it meant that her son had been tortured. I asked Siva what the chances were that either of the women's children were alive. "Very little," he said. Of the woman's daughter, he told me, in English, "Most likely they killed her on the spot."



#### 4. THE POSTWAR CAMPAIGN

Major General Kamal Gunaratne was the field commander of the Special Forces troops that finished off Prabhakaran. During my visit, he was running the north from his base at Vavuniya, a town that, in the old days,

marked the northern limits of government control. He and his officers met me in a dark wood-paneled conference room, where framed photographs showed the General and his soldiers standing over Prabhakaran's body. Gunaratne, a tall, blustering man wearing a red beret and a camouflage uniform with a chestful of medals, described the war in heroic terms: "Our youth is gone now, but we had no choice, we had to live with this problem. But we didn't want our children to live with it, so we decided to end it. It was a mammoth task, but we have done that for the nation." His men had paid for Sri Lanka's peace with their "blood, sweat, and body parts." In the end, he said, the three-year offensive killed six thousand of his soldiers and twenty-three thousand Tigers. He added, "Since the death of the ruthless terrorist leader Prabhakaran, there have been no deaths in Sri Lanka from a terrorist act." Gunaratne was echoing the Sri Lankan government's official dogma: the postwar peace justifies whatever was necessary to achieve it.

Gunaratne showed me some private snapshots of the dead Prabhakaran, including one in which the handkerchief that covered his forehead had been removed, revealing a gaping hole in his forehead. It suggested an exit wound, as if he had been shot from behind at close range. Gunaratne had taken Prabhakaran's dog tags, which he had given to Sarath Fonseka, the Army commander, and his Tiger I.D. card, which he had kept for himself. He pulled out his wallet and extracted it from among his credit cards. The serial number on the I.D., he pointed out, was 001. I asked if he intended to keep his trophy. He took the card and looked at it for a moment, then put it back in his wallet. "Maybe one day I'll give it to the Army for its museum or something. But right now it's mine. I think I've earned it."

For nations operating in the age of instant media, counter-insurgency is in significant measure a public-relations problem. What should victory look like? No matter what else happened in Vietnam, many Americans' image of the war was formed most vividly by the photograph of the huddled civilians of My Lai moments before they were killed by U.S. soldiers. Since the cell-phone video from

Mullaitivu leaked out, the Rajapaksa government has fought a second campaign to define the massacre as a glorious victory. Sri Lanka has found friends who are willing to agree, or at least not to care; these include China and other Eastern nations, as well as military experts from around the world who are impressed by the effectiveness of its tactics. The government has largely ostracized those who disagree; within its borders, it has silenced them by force.

A week after the war's end, the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva was the scene of a political standoff between a bloc of Western nations that called for an investigation and another—led by Sri Lanka and including Brazil, Cuba, India, and Pakistan—that called for a resolution praising Sri Lanka for the “promotion and protection of all human rights.” The latter resolution won, with twenty-nine votes in favor, twelve against, and six abstentions.

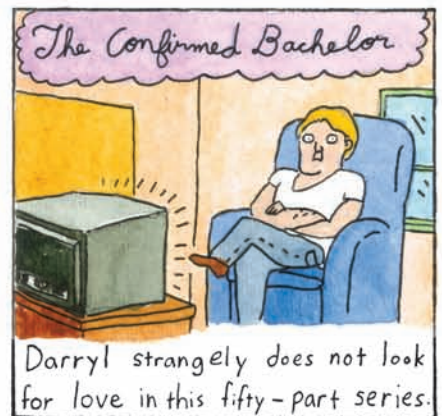
In the following months, lawyers in the U.S. Justice Department began exploring the possibility of war-crimes prosecution of Gotabaya Rajapaksa—who lived in the United States for a time and acquired citizenship—as well as the former Army commander Sarath Fonseka, a green-card holder. On a visit to the U.S. in the fall of 2009, Fonseka dodged an interview request from Homeland Security and flew back to Sri Lanka. For the most part, though, the Obama Administration has maintained a policy of circumspection.

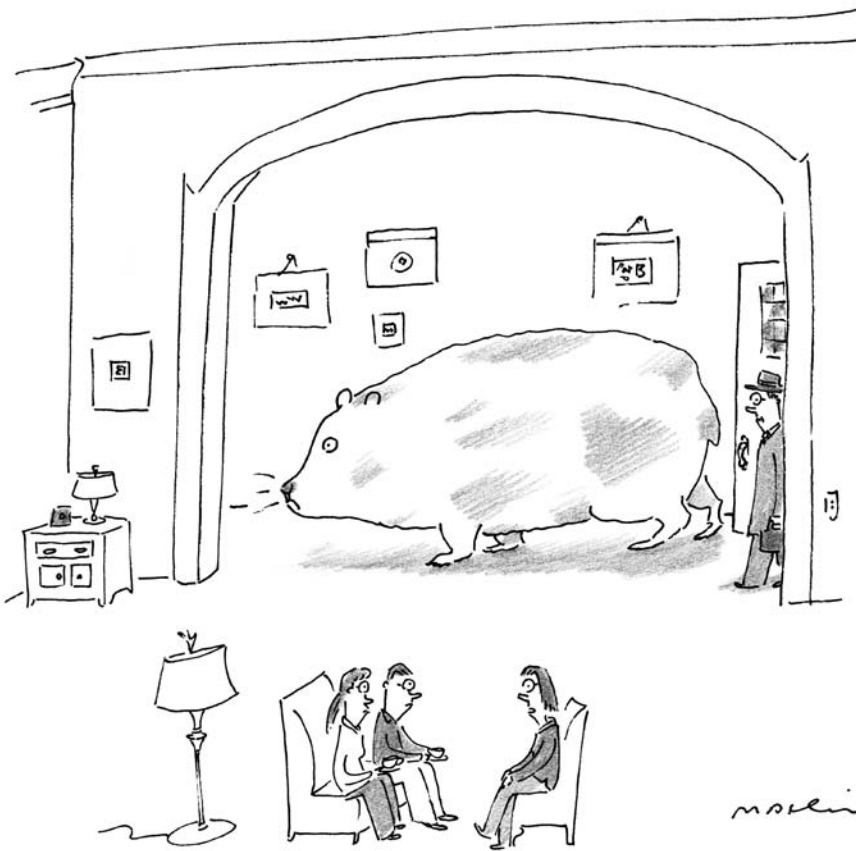
One senior Administration official told me, “With regard to Sri Lanka, I can assure you that war crimes and crimes against humanity are a big part of our bilateral discussions.” But the Administration’s only public acts have been to send Stephen Rapp, the State Department emissary on war crimes, to Sri Lanka, as well as its two senior human-rights officials on the national-security council, Samantha Power and David Pressman. Rapp filed two fact-finding reports with Congress, while Power and Pressman urged the Rajapaksa government to show greater accountability for its actions during the war.

Rajapaksa, meanwhile, has said that his government was “looking east,” and he signed a number of economic deals with China, including one for the construction of a large port in his home dis-

SKETCHBOOK BY ZACHARY KANIN

## New Reality Shows for 2011





*"And of course Allen continues his work with super-sized hamsters."*

trict of Hambantota. In August, he presided over a lavish ceremony to mark the opening of the port's first phase, which a thousand Chinese laborers and engineers, along with Sri Lankans, had completed in a year of around-the-clock shifts. Before an audience of hundreds of dignitaries, Rajapaksa stood at the helm of a giant model ship, turned the wheel, and watched the seawater enter the muddy basin carved out by the Chinese.

In the not too distant future, Sri Lanka may be seen as an early skirmish in a new "Great Game" of influence between China and the United States and their proxies. "Sri Lanka has read the situation and seen that the West's influence is diminishing," Harim Peiris, a Sri Lankan political analyst, said. "So this government has made some strange friends: Iran, Pakistan, Myanmar, Russia, and Japan. China is probably our biggest single investor. These are 'softies'—soft loans without pressure. So who's putting the pressure? Oh—Sweden and the E.U.!" Peiris

laughed derisively, and said, "There is no serious international pressure."

A Western diplomat in Colombo said, "We don't have a lot of influence here. We're not a big fish. China is. It's pouring in billions of dollars that are described as soft loans, but someday they will have to be paid back. And they don't ask about human rights."

Jaliya Wickramasuriya, another relative of President Rajapaksa's, is Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Washington. He suggested to me that the U.S. was missing out. With the war over, Sri Lanka was going to boom economically. "We want the U.S. to come in," he said. "America, hurry up!" Laughing, he added, "But there are a lot of suitors, and if the suitor takes a lot of time . . . however good-looking, there are always others!"

**T**he Sri Lankan government does have supporters in the U.S., particularly in military circles. Senior officials told me that their government owed much to a Pentagon official named James

Clad, "a great friend of Sri Lanka." Clad was the Bush Administration's Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia, in charge of the Pentagon's dealings with India and Sri Lanka, until he was replaced by the Obama Administration in January, 2009.

I telephoned Clad, and he invited me to his home, in suburban Washington, D.C. Clad is an articulate man in his late fifties, with a ready sense of humor. Citing official oaths of secrecy, he demurred when it came to questions about U.S. aid to the Sri Lankan military, but he made it clear that he had been supportive of the Sri Lankan government's war effort, and that he felt that the criticisms expressed by the West had been counterproductive to Western interests.

"The self-imposed marginalization by the U.S. and other Western countries in Sri Lanka has led directly to increased influence by China, Pakistan, and Iran, none of which share the Western humanitarian agenda, to put it mildly," he said. As evidence, he mentioned a Chinese arms dealer that had advanced ammunition to the Sri Lankan government throughout the military campaign; the debt was later satisfied by arrangements that gave China commercial advantages in Sri Lanka.

Clad has known the Rajapaksas for many years. He referred to the President's brother Gotabaya, the defense minister, as "Gota." A fierce critic of the Tigers, Clad said that the organization had assassinated several Sri Lankans whom he regarded as personal friends. "The L.T.T.E. was the most deliberately ruthless terrorist group, bar none, certainly in Asia," he said.

In order to reform Sri Lanka's public image, Clad, who recently retired from the Pentagon's National Defense University, recommended to Gotabaya Rajapaksa that he host a meeting on maritime-security concerns in the Indian Ocean. It would help Sri Lanka "get out of its box as a 'single-issue country' and reconnect it with an earlier maritime heritage," he said. In August, Clad invited me to the Galle Dialogue, a two-day conference attended by senior naval officers from more than a dozen countries. The conclave was held at a luxurious seaside hotel outside the old colonial fortress city of Galle, in the south.

The assembled commodores and admirals discussed everything from the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 to the problem of Somali piracy. But mostly the conference was an opportunity for Sri Lanka's military leaders to boast to their colleagues about beating the Tigers. The foreign speakers congratulated them on their achievement, and asked eagerly about the techniques they had used. Brigadier General Stanley Osserman, of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Command, said, "Sri Lanka has a lot to offer in the field of terrorism prevention and maritime security." Sri Lanka's Special Forces commander said he had adopted the Tigers' own tactics by sending his commandos in small, guerrilla-style bands to hunt them down.

The keynote speaker was Gotabaya Rajapaksa, an owlish, watchful man with a mustache, wearing spectacles and a gray suit. "Sri Lanka's victory over terrorism is an unprecedented event that the world can learn from," he said. He spoke of how the Tigers' international support network had enabled it to raise funds from the Tamil diaspora and to ship weapons into Sri Lanka. "At one point, the L.T.T.E. controlled one-third of the Sri Lankan coastline," he said. "In this way, heavy weaponry and enormous quantities of ammunition were brought to Sri Lanka. And this happened in a post-9/11 world." Rajapaksa was congratulating the American observers; it had been the U.S. that helped locate the Tigers' ships.

Later, the Sri Lankan terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna underscored much of what Gotabaya had said. "It is a dream that no civilians will be killed in a counter-insurgency campaign, and civilians died in Sri Lanka's," he said. "But I can assure you that no Sri Lankan soldier deliberately killed a civilian." Gotabaya stood up in the audience and said, "From the very beginning, we had in mind the safety of the civilian population, and gave our campaign a humanitarian component along with the military one. One of the ways we did this was to call our campaign a 'humanitarian mission.'"

Gotabaya didn't address the allegations that festered in international circles, many of which focussed on him as the ultimate overseer of the war. The European Union had just announced

that it was rescinding a trade-tariff agreement on textiles worth several hundred million dollars a year. And in the past few weeks his government had fought with the United Nations; after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asked to send an advisory commission to Colombo to discuss accountability issues, an ultra-nationalist government minister besieged the U.N. Mission in Colombo at the head of a mob of angry demonstrators. President Rajapaksa said the U.N.'s involvement was not needed: a "Lessons Learnt" commission, which he had appointed, would look into things instead.

A Western military observer told me that he believed that the abortive U.N. human-rights resolution had come at exactly the wrong time. "All that did was to box them in and give heart to the most extreme Sinhalese voices," he said. "You have to keep in mind the Sinhalese national psyche. They do not say thank you, and they do not say sorry. That's from the Defense Minister on down. He's very nice, but if you box him in he'll turn into a nasty little animal."

Within Sri Lanka, even Sinhalese critics of the Rajapaksas have been savagely attacked, and challenges to the government's explanation of the war have been brutally put down.

The most prominent critic has been General Sarath Fonseka, Gotabaya's handpicked subordinate and the commander of the final offensive against the Tigers. When Mahinda Rajapaksa called the snap Presidential election, after the war's end, Fonseka announced his own candidacy. The campaign was ugly. Fonseka, who had been the face of Sri Lanka's military victory, presented himself as the country's true liberator. Rajapaksa accused him of plotting a coup and revealed bank accounts that hinted he was corrupt. Fonseka lost the election badly, but he emerged as the country's main opposition leader.

In an interview two weeks after the election, Fonseka insinuated that Gotabaya was guilty of war crimes for ordering the execution of Tiger leaders who had surrendered. "I am definitely going to reveal what I know, what I was told, and what I heard," he said. "Anyone who has committed war crimes should definitely be brought into the courts." Within hours, Fonseka had been arrested. He was later charged with corruption and violating his military oath of office by plotting his political career while still in uniform. Gotabaya suggested that he could be tried for treason, and told a



*"So there you are—I thought I heard someone squishing moodily about the moors."*

BBC reporter that he should hang if he was found guilty. With Fonseka in prison, his wife carried on a campaign in his name for a subsequent parliamentary election, which he won, even though his loyalists were harassed and, in some cases, abducted by plainclothes thugs.

In Colombo, a Sinhalese human-rights lawyer said, “The Fonseka case shows people that the Rajapaksas will go after anyone seen as a threat. They defeated the L.T.T.E. and have decimated their main political opposition, and now they are going after those who are critical of them.” The government has acted unsparingly against journalists, human-rights activists, civic leaders, and others. In the most notorious case, in January, 2009, the prominent newspaper editor Lasantha Wickrematunge was attacked as he drove to work in Colombo’s city center; motorcycle-riding assailants forced his car to stop and fatally shot him in front of dozens of onlookers. At the time of his murder, his newspaper, the *Sunday Leader*, was being sued for defamation by Gotabaya Rajapaksa after it implicated him in alleged corruption.

A few days later, the newspaper ran an editorial titled “And Then They Came for Me,” which Wickrematunge had left behind in the event of his murder. In it, he excoriated Mahinda Rajapaksa, whom he described as an old friend who had become power-hungry and corrupt, for undermining Sri Lanka’s democracy through state terror. “Murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty,” he wrote. “When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me.” Addressing Rajapaksa, he predicted, “In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too.”

In an interview afterward with *Time*, President Rajapaksa was asked about Wickrematunge. “He was a good friend of mine. He had informed somebody to inform me” that he was in danger, he said. “But unfortunately, I didn’t get

that message. I would have told him to go to the nearest police station. No one knows what happened.”

Gotabaya Rajapaksa received James Clad and me in a sitting room of his house, a British-era villa in a large garden compound in Colombo. The room was impersonally furnished with fifties-style blue settees and abstract geometric paintings, all government-issue. The Defense Minister was casually attired in a T-shirt, sweatpants, and flip-flops. He coughed in a compulsive way, as if he had a nervous tic. It was a little before the dinner hour, so he called for an orderly to bring in the liquor trolley. He didn’t drink, he said, and didn’t know what he had in the house. He knew only that he had a bottle of “Fonseka.” Would we like a drink of that? He grinned. On the trolley was a bottle of Fonseca Bin No. 27, a brand of port. He laughed delightedly at his joke. He had a high-pitched giggle, which broke out at odd moments throughout the evening.

That was the day that Sri Lanka’s papers had carried the news that a military court had convicted Fonseka of involvement in politics while in service and stripped him of his rank and military honors. (He was later sentenced to thirty months in prison.) I suggested that the timing of Fonseka’s arrest—only hours after he had accused Gotabaya of war crimes—made it look like a personal vendetta. Gotabaya coughed and giggled and waved his hands dismissively. “No, no. He made those same accusations during the campaign, many times. I could have arrested him then if it was about that. In fact, I should have arrested him earlier.”

Gotabaya evinced a grudging admiration for Prabhakaran, for his “ruthless dedication to his cause,” but acknowledged that he had felt “very happy” when he was told of his death. As for Sri Lanka’s national reconciliation, Gotabaya said that he believed his brother’s pro-

posals, to win the peace through economic development, showed the right way forward. The average Tamil, like the average Sinhalese, he said, just wanted to get on with his life. Referring to the Tamils’ long-standing wish for secession, he said, “All that business about separation is something only politicians care about.” When I asked about the suspicions that the government was attempting to change the demographics of the Tamil lands by swamping them with Sinhalese soldiers, he said, with a laugh, “We should do that, but it’s difficult.”

Clad gently lobbied Gotabaya to renew the country’s relationship with the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the last days of the war, the I.C.R.C. had been restricted to removing wounded civilians from Mullaitivu by sea, and ever since it had been grounded at its headquarters in Colombo. In the final months of the war, the Army had repeatedly bombed the I.C.R.C.’s emergency hospital facilities, killing three employees and scores of patients. Gotabaya had blamed the Tigers. In a report prepared by the International Crisis Group, “War Crimes in Sri Lanka,” the hospital attacks feature strongly in the case against Gotabaya.

Gotabaya warily said that he was willing to have the Red Cross stay on if the organization would agree to a new understanding of its activities on the island. “We must forget the past and look to the future,” he said. Lowering his voice confidentially, he added, “The problem is the I.C.R.C.—some of their people had been here for a long time, and became friendly with the L.T.T.E.” He suggested that the Red Cross and other international relief agencies were long-time accomplices of the Tigers. In December, 2006, he had nearly been assassinated by a Black Tiger driving a rickshaw rigged with explosives; he pointed out that the bomber had been a Tamil employee of the relief organization CARE. He said, “So I say to the I.C.R.C., ‘Bring new people and let’s have a fresh start.’”

After dinner, Gotabaya led us outside. Across his lawn, by the garden’s high security wall, was a huge, illuminated outdoor aquarium. Inside, several large, unmistakable shapes moved relentlessly back and forth.



"Are those sharks?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said. "Do you want to see them?"

We crossed the lawn and stood in front of the tank, which was eight feet tall and twenty feet wide. There were four sharks, each about four feet long, swimming among smaller fish.

I told Gotabaya that they looked like black-tipped reef sharks. He shrugged. "They're my wife's," he said. She knew everything about them, he explained, but she was away on a visit to the States. All he knew was that the tank needed to be changed with fresh seawater every two weeks. "They bring it in special tanker trucks," he said, watching the sharks. He giggled softly.

## 5. RECKONING

"Is it over?" I asked a Sinhalese politician in Colombo.

"The war is over, but the conflict is not," he replied. "The problem goes beyond the existence of the L.T.T.E. The problem is that this country does not accommodate its minorities well." Several of Sri Lanka's governments had attempted to make political accommodations to the Tamils, he said, but Sinhalese nationalists had always vetoed them. "This is the perfect time to offer an accommodation to the moderate Tamils who have rejected violence." But, he said, "I think Rajapaksa will not make conciliatory gestures, because he is himself an ardent Sinhala nationalist." The politician explained that he needed to speak off the record, because, although he knew Rajapaksa personally, it would be "counterproductive" to voice his criticisms publicly.

By the second anniversary of the war's end, the Army's "welfare camps" had been largely emptied out. But many of the Tamils I encountered felt that the peace was perilously fragile. In an eastern town called Vakarai, a Tamil youth leader who went by the name Prabhakaran told me, "We only hope the international community can bring pressure to bear on the government, because a dignified and honorable solution is necessary for the Tamil people." Without it, he said, "we cannot say that a second war will not come. It will bring great destruction if and when it happens."

In Lasantha Wickrematunge's post-



*"The entrance to my cubicle is three feet away. Please respect my partition."*

humorous editorial, published four months before the Tigers were crushed at Mullaitivu, he wrote, "There is no gainsaying that [the Tigers] must be eradicated." But, he argued, a "military occupation of the country's north and east will require the Tamil people of those regions to live eternally as second-class citizens, deprived of all self-respect. Do not imagine you can placate them by showering 'development' and 'reconstruction' on them in the postwar era. The wounds of war will scar them forever, and you will have an even more bitter and hateful diaspora to contend with. A problem amenable to a political solution will thus become a festering wound that will yield strife for all eternity."

The same might be written about any number of entrenched conflicts around the world. To solve these problems, General David Petraeus and others have placed great hope in a doctrine of counter-insurgency that tempers military action with nation-building and careful community work. But it should not be forgotten that the more effective counter-insurgencies, like Sri Lanka's, are hideous in practice. They involve killing many

people and terrorizing many more. In Afghanistan, Petraeus has told his field commanders to "drink lots of tea" with the locals. This effort had at best mixed results. At the same time, along the border with Pakistan, the C.I.A. has been successfully sponsoring the Counterterrorist Pursuit Team, a paramilitary group of three thousand Afghans. It was with the help of such proxies that Petraeus rolled back Iraq's insurgency in 2007 and 2008. That effort involved a great deal of outright killing, both on and off the battlefield. In the end, it mostly worked.

We know that Sri Lanka's conflict ended in a bloodbath, even though it occurred, as intended, out of sight. In the face of all the official denials and the diplomatic language about accountability, there is Wickrematunge's grim prediction of his country's future and his own. And there is the stubbornly ineradicable video of naked Tamils being kicked and shot and laughed at by their uniformed killers. ♦

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Jon Lee Anderson talks about Sri Lanka.