

# Sri Lanka's Rehabilitation Program: A New Frontier in Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency

BY MALKANTHI HETTIARACHCHI

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), sometimes referred to as the Tamil Tigers, or simply the Tigers, was a separatist militant organization based in northern Sri Lanka. It was founded in May 1976 by Prabhakaran and waged a violent secessionist and nationalist campaign to create an independent state in the north and east of Sri Lanka for the Tamil people. This campaign evolved into the Sri Lankan Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The Tigers were considered one of the most ruthless insurgent and terrorist organisations in the world.<sup>2</sup> They were vanquished by the Sri Lankan armed forces in May 2009.<sup>3</sup> In order to rehabilitate the 11,664<sup>4</sup> Tigers who had surrendered or been taken captive, Sri Lanka developed a multifaceted program to engage and transform the violent attitudes and behaviours of the Tiger leaders, members and collaborators.<sup>5</sup> Since the end of the LTTE's three-decade campaign of insurgency and terrorism, there has not been a single act of terrorism in the country. Many attribute Sri Lanka's post-conflict stability to the success of the insurgent and terrorist rehabilitation program.

Globally, rehabilitation and community engagement is a new frontier in the fight against ideological extremism and its violent manifestations – terrorism and insurgency.<sup>6</sup> Following a period of captivity or imprisonment, insurgents and terrorists are released back into society. Without their disengagement and de-radicalization, they will pose a continuing security threat. The recidivist will carry out attacks and politicize, radicalize, and militarize the next generation of fighters. Furthermore, they will become a part of the insurgent and terrorist iconography. To break the cycle of violence, governments of countries that suffer from terrorism must build partnerships with communities and other stakeholders in maintaining peace and stability. Working with communities, the media, academic circles, and the private sector, governments should invest time and energy into mainstreaming the thinking of those who have deviated into ideological extremism and violence.

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### Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program in Context: Global Rehabilitation Programs

As every conflict differs, there is no common template applicable to all rehabilitation programs. Nevertheless, there are some common principles of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is about changing the thinking and behaviour of offenders. Prior to the reintegration of former terrorists into mainstream society, offenders must move away from violent extremist thinking. If the

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mindset is locked into an ideology of intolerance and violence against another ethnic or religious community, strategies must focus on changing their thinking patterns. In order to facilitate a shift within the offender, to a non-violent lifestyle, the violence justifying thought patterns must be identified, as well as the mechanisms that introduced, nurtured, and reinforced these thought patterns. To facilitate this transformation of thinking, genuine and continuous engagement is required in both the custodial rehabilitation and community rehabilitation phases.<sup>7</sup>

Global rehabilitation programs can be characterized as developed, developing, and defunct programs. The most developed programs are operating in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The developing programs are in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Colombia, while defunct programs are in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya.<sup>8</sup> Although publicizing their model as uniquely Sri Lankan, the program benefited from drawing practical lessons and applicable concepts from existing rehabilitation programs. For example, the concept and term “beneficiary,” used in Saudi Arabia to refer to terrorists undergoing rehabilitation, was

recommended by Singapore to visiting Sri Lankan officials, who adopted it and subsequently shared it with Pakistani counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

In the process of creating a program that was applicable to Sri Lanka, existing global programs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were reviewed. Through emphasizing national ownership, the rehabilitation staff and advisors helped to indigenise the best practices of other programs. Singapore’s rehabilitation model, considered one of the best global programs with its large number of psychologists and religious counsellors, was particularly instructive. The six modes of rehabilitation developed in the Singapore rehabilitation program were indigenized, adapted, and developed to a high standard in Sri Lanka. The founders of the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program named it the “6+1 model.” It consists of the following modes of rehabilitation and community engagement:<sup>10</sup>

1. Educational
2. Vocational
3. Psychosocial and creative therapies
4. Social, cultural, and family
5. Spiritual and religious
6. Recreational
- +1: Community rehabilitation

### Rehabilitation Program in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan spirit itself was conducive for embracing rehabilitation. Rather than adopting the classic retributive justice model, Sri Lanka embraced the restorative justice model.<sup>11</sup> The then Attorney General Mohan Peiris crafted the legal framework for rehabilitation. Sri Lanka drew from its own rich heritage of moderation, toleration, and coexistence – communities in Sri Lanka have lived side by side for centuries.<sup>12</sup> Sri Lanka also has a history of rehabilitating violent youth after the insurrections in the south in 1971 and 1987-1989. Sri Lanka’s first experience in rehabilitation



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53 former LTTE cadres were married in Vavuniya. They are being moved to family houses, but still kept in the rehabilitation program.

was after security forces defeated the Peoples Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna), a vicious Marxist-Leninist group that adopted Maoist tactics, in 1971. Although the programs were not as robust as the contemporary program, there was hardly any recidivism among the participants.<sup>13</sup> After a period of incarceration, the state did not oppose and at times facilitated the re-entry of some of the key players of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna into the political mainstream.

The Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR) was founded as the special state authority responsible for the

rehabilitation and reintegration program following the defeat of LTTE in 2009. Even before the fighting ended in May 2009, the BCGR managed rehabilitation centers in Ambepussa in the south, and Thelippale in the north for Tiger captives.<sup>14</sup> These centers were named Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs), accommodating nearly 11,500 cadres that either surrendered or were identified while masquerading as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the end of the conflict.

Approximately 254 staff<sup>15</sup> work within Sri Lankan rehabilitation centers, attending to the

welfare requirements of the beneficiaries as well as facilitating the rehabilitative input provided by several agencies. This figure does not include security staff dedicated to perimeter security. The Sri Lankan Government has spent USD 9,136,370<sup>16</sup> to manage rehabilitation centers. The amount spent annually fluctuates based on the number of beneficiaries within the system, and does not include the costs associated with complementary efforts of individual “specialist programs,” charities, national non-governmental organizations, international and local non-governmental organizations, government institutions, ministries and well-wishers.

The rehabilitation process was aimed at reintegrating the former LTTE leaders, members, and collaborators into the community. During the process, beneficiaries within the PARCs were supported to engage in a range of activities and through these activities reconnect to all aspects of individual and communal life, including familial, social, cultural, and religious. The beneficiaries were supported to shift their thinking away from the narrow hate-filled ideology targeted towards the Sinhalese, Muslims, and national and international figures that opposed the LTTE agenda. Upon reflection on their actions and experiences, the former terrorists and insurgents found new meaning in their lives. They were transformed into champions of peace with values of moderation, toleration, and co-existence replacing hate, anger, and the mono-ethnic single narrative.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of the beneficiaries were reintegrated within the 24-month mandated period and as of November 2012 approximately 11,044<sup>18</sup> beneficiaries had been reintegrated. 594 child beneficiaries<sup>19</sup> were reintegrated within the stipulated one-year rehabilitation period for children. The reintegration of students, the disabled, and the aged were prioritised, and the BCGR engaged the community to enlist their support

for rehabilitation. As of November 2012, the BCGR remains responsible for the rehabilitation of approximately 800 remaining beneficiaries.

The government faced many challenges. Although the public in the south, which had been targeted and suffered from LTTE terrorism, supported rehabilitation, northerners shunned the return of the rehabilitated terrorists into their midst. In the North, the LTTE had forcibly recruited children, extorted funds, and induced untold suffering on civilian populations, which earned the resentment and anger of northern families. In the last phases of the fight, the LTTE left their village bases and took nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians as hostage. They were the sons and daughters of the northern Tamil community and this suffering made the northerners reject the former LTTE cadres and their separatist ideology.

The BCGR encouraged contact with the community through visits, letters, and phone contact, among other means. Furthermore, the reintegration ceremonies – the transfer of the beneficiary back to their families and communities – were conducted publicly with community participation. After organizing a mass marriage ceremony of fifty-three former LTTE cadres, the BCGR organized for the couples to live within a specially built peace village.<sup>20</sup> Responsibility for guiding, mentoring, and mainstreaming former cadres was gradually transferred to their local communities.

As the state itself lacked sufficient funds, the Sri Lankan private sector played a role in supporting both custodial rehabilitation and community reintegration. Sri Lankan blue chip companies<sup>21</sup> supported vocational training to build skills and later employ former LTTE cadres. A number of international organizations and non-governmental organizations, notably the International Organization of Migrants (IOM), which had access to the rehabilitation centers, also assisted and advised the government.<sup>22</sup>

## Categorization of the Detainees

The rehabilitation phase was aimed at working towards the successful reintegration of the beneficiaries through reconciliation and resettlement. The first step in the process was to categorize the surrendered and apprehended insurgents and terrorists. Utilizing interviews and background information, law enforcement authorities and intelligence agencies categorized former insurgents based on their depth of involvement, period of involvement, and activities conducted during involvement. They were labeled as high, medium, or low risk, and allocated to detention and PARCs accordingly. Assessing the risk level of the detainees enabled the state to categorize them into A, B, C, D, E, and F groups.<sup>23</sup>

Serious insurgents were categorized into the A and B groups. They were frontline leaders and members. These prisoners were allocated to detention and not rehabilitation, and forced to go through a judicial process. Following the findings of the investigation and assessments of the detainees' levels of cooperation, and based on those findings, the detainees were offered the option of joining the rehabilitation process or the judicial process. The moderate group (category C and D) were assessed and allocated to either detention or to one of the twenty-four PARCs. The low risk group (category E and F) was allocated to the PARCs.

A baseline survey was conducted to assess the changing attitudes and opinions of the beneficiaries. To determine their degree of radicalization, the survey results were assessed by University of Maryland psychologists Arie Kruglanski and Michele Gelfand. There was a significant decline in the levels of radicalization following the beginning of rehabilitation interventions and the way in which the staff interacted with the beneficiaries.<sup>24</sup>

## Modes of Rehabilitation

Six modes of rehabilitation were utilized at the PARCs: educational, vocational, spiritual, recreational, psychosocial, and familiar, social, and cultural.

- **Educational rehabilitation:** The Tamil Tigers recruited from a cross section of society, but mostly from poor and under-aged groups. Many of the terrorist cadres had either not completed their education or failed to achieve the country's national standard of completing the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level Examination (requiring ten years of study). Given that one of the main aims of the rehabilitation program is education, the BCGR focused on promoting academic education. Between ten to twenty-five percent of the beneficiaries needed help with reading and writing in the Tamil language, and the majority spoke neither the national language of Sri Lanka, Sinhalese, nor the link language, English.<sup>25</sup> The rehabilitation program created a space for providing formal education to those beneficiaries less than eighteen years of age within a residential school environment. Adult supplementary education was provided for adults in need of literacy and numeracy skills. Informal education also took place in groups within each rehabilitation centre. Beneficiaries identified as having teaching skills conducted informal classes to facilitate learning to read and write Tamil, as well as to learn English, Sinhala, and math.

- **Vocational rehabilitation:** According to survey results, almost every ex-cadre was keen to be employed. Follow-up surveys indicated that beneficiaries' desire for vocational training and employment gradually increased as their period in rehabilitation progressed.<sup>26</sup> The

BCGR therefore facilitated vocational training. Based on the beneficiaries' interests, their families' traditional vocations and businesses, and regional vocational opportunities, the beneficiaries were divided into centers for agriculture, carpentry, masonry, motor mechanics, beauty-culture, and the garment industry, among others. Members of the different industries' business communities were also involved in the program and eventually pledged training and jobs in their factories to the cadres in rehabilitation. Forty-two vocational training programs were conducted within rehabilitation centers and externally by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), International NGOs (INGOs), private businesses, state ministries, and volunteer organizations.<sup>27</sup> The different business communities provided residential facilities for the beneficiaries to engage in vocational training programs on-site with mainstream populations. The beneficiaries received all company benefits accessed by the mainstream interns. The vocational training also helped to gradually develop beneficiary confidence in using their own skills to carve out a livelihood instead of following orders. The beneficiaries were motivated to engage in vocational training that would help them secure future financial stability and dignity by engaging in a vocation that would help themselves, their families, their communities, and their country.<sup>28</sup>

- **Spiritual rehabilitation:** Throughout the course of rehabilitation, many beneficiaries were faced with the realities of their actions. They felt the need to spiritually reconcile with their past and look forward to the future. The Brahma Kumari spiritual group from India conducted yoga and meditation for beneficiaries that relaxes the mind and nurtures a healthy balance between inner and outer

worlds. The Goenka Vipassana program from India provided, "mindfulness training." This training involves developing self-awareness of emotions and thoughts.<sup>29</sup> Those beneficiaries trained in mindfulness supported their peers to practice this method of meditation. Different religious organizations, including leaders from the Hindu, Satya Sai, and Christian traditions, also conducted religious ceremonies, rites, and rituals based on each person's faith. Finally, praying and chanting constituted a large part of spiritual rehabilitation with each PARC constructing Hindu temples or *kovils* for prayer and faith practice.

- **Recreational rehabilitation:** Most LTTE cadres put on weight during their period of rehabilitation. It was therefore vital that all the beneficiaries exercised both their minds and bodies. Cricket, volleyball, traditional sports, and other sports activities were conducted at every centre on a daily basis. Specific sports programs conducted included "Cricket for Change," regional athletic meets, inter-center cricket and netball matches, sports meets, and New Year Festival activities. Board games such as carom were also popular. Gardening was also conducted in small plots within the centers.

- **Psychosocial rehabilitation:** Enhanced interpersonal interaction contributed to beneficiaries expanding their skills in relating and engaging with people at a social and community level. Beneficiaries were observed to have undergone a significant transformation in their attitudes and behavior towards the Sinhalese, Muslims, and security forces personnel over the course of the first seven months of rehabilitation. This cognitive transformation appears to have taken place through informal interpersonal engagement with the center staff. The beneficiaries built an excellent rapport with the staff and engaged in meaningful discussion



related to the future and desire to build peace. The thinking espoused was that there are no winners and losers in war but tragic loss of life on every side. Beneficiaries focused on how they can now build a life for themselves.

Having the opportunity to share their thoughts with the staff, the interpersonal interactional initiatives were a large part of the rehabilitation program because they allowed beneficiaries to engage in discussions cultivating their thinking in terms of family, future, and peace building. Less time was spent with thoughts of violence and hatred. Engaging in discussion related to society, social responsibility, and contributing towards the economy helped to cultivate a sense of citizenship.

The BCGR conducted training sessions for their center staff on counseling and advanced psychosocial skills training. Staff training sessions were conducted by a clinical psychologist, a counseling psychologist, counselors, therapists, a community mental health worker and a psychology lecturer in the different PARCs to build in-house capability for counseling.

The ongoing mentorship programs are essential to shift beneficiary thinking away from violence and separatism. A group of successful and well-respected persons in the Tamil community acted as mentors, reflecting a sense of responsibility and of a future that is achievable through unity rather than divisions. They motivated the beneficiaries to work hard and to build a successful future.<sup>30</sup> These business people, film stars, and athletes were testimony to the ability of people from the region to make a successful life with the opportunities available in Sri Lanka.

Other psychosocial rehabilitation programs included Girl Guide and Boy Scout programs, creativity therapy programs, and

art therapy. The Sri Lanka Girl Guides and Boy Scouts conducted Girl Guide and Boy Scout programs.<sup>31</sup> These programs were aimed at building a sense of social responsibility and comradeship among young people in rehabilitation. Creative therapy rehabilitation provided effective ways for participants to express their inner thoughts and feelings through indirect means. Creative therapies can have a healing effect on large groups of people. Examples of creative therapy conducted in the centers included theatre, drama, and music programs designed to help beneficiaries communicate and transform their audiences (who were also beneficiaries).

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*the thinking espoused was that there are no winners and losers in war but tragic loss of life on every side*

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Art work and art therapy provided a medium for expression and assessment. The beneficiaries engaged in artwork to give expression to issues close to their hearts. They expressed their desires for family life, freedom, peace, and unity. Creative writing exercises included poetry, short stories, and booklets related to the themes of freedom, loss, appreciation of rehabilitation, new thinking, future plans, and development.

Anoja Weerasinghe and her team trained those beneficiaries that expressed an interest in dance and music.<sup>32</sup> The performing arts included not only music and dance but also drama. Drama therapy included productions of plays that reflect unity. The beneficiaries had access to short stories, articles, and historical words of wisdom that promote peace and unity. Narrative and Bibliotherapy involved the recitation and reading of historical and

contemporary texts that promoted reflection. Beneficiaries engaged in making jewelry, soap carvings, cards, knitting caps, and baby clothes. Opportunities to make handicrafts, especially ornaments using coconut shells, were especially appreciated. Some were purchased by visitors to the centers and exhibited at popular community events that gave pride and recognition to the work.

■ **Social, Cultural and Family Rehabilitation:** Social and educational tours were conducted for beneficiaries to provide experience of seeing the different parts of Sri Lanka, hitherto having had no access due to the Tamil Tiger control of the north and east of the country. The majority of beneficiaries (estimates are as high as 99 percent) have not travelled in their lifetime out of the conflict area of the northeast to witness social and cultural life in the rest of the country. The Tamil Tigers had fought a war based on the propaganda, without ever having met their “enemy” the Sinhalese that they targeted for thirty years. The beneficiaries who were ready to receive this exposure witnessed a part of their own country developed, that was not held by the grip of terrorism. It was vital for them to see all ethnic communities living together in the rest of the country, the inter-marriages, working together, studying in university, in schools, partaking in sports and all walks of life. The beneficiaries realize that it is possible to develop and grow in strength in the absence of violence and terrorism.

A welcoming, relaxed and warm atmosphere enabled family or next of kin to visit the beneficiaries. The relatively relaxed atmosphere prevailing within the PARCs enabled the redevelopment of family bonds. The level of perimeter security was low as the beneficiaries were engaged well within the PARCs. Family visits

were encouraged and staff engaged with family members if required to facilitate the family engagement process. The LTTE functioned as a pseudo-family, with the terrorist cadre commitment and loyalty to the group instead of responsibility towards family. Often young people joined the terrorist group against the wishes of their family. There was reluctance to face the families some of the beneficiaries had defied and left behind in order to join the LTTE. Therefore the restoration of fragmented family bonds was an essential part of the rehabilitation process to ensure the individual nurtures family relationships instead of idolizing the terrorist group.<sup>33</sup>

Although the beneficiaries had no access to personal phones, they had the opportunity to call their families. The beneficiaries also could write and receive letters. The beneficiaries also had opportunities to visit their home in the event of a celebration, illness or a death. Social, cultural and family rehabilitation brought the beneficiaries close to their family and prepared the LTTE cadres for reintegration into society.

### Effectiveness of Rehabilitation

The assessment phase involved four pillars to obtain a broad understanding of the individual. First, interviews with the beneficiary; second, reviewing past records; third, observations noted by the staff working day to day within the PARCs documenting beneficiary response to a range of activities and programs; and fourth, formal assessment using psychometrics where possible. This assessment method ensures a comprehensive process to overcome deception. Assessment should be conducted in a safe and secure environment where the beneficiaries are free to engage in discussion and express their thoughts openly without fear of reprisal.





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A young girl in Kurunjipadi camp, Tamil Nadu

Interviews with former LTTE cadres gathered as the fighting ended in May 2009, reflected uncertainty and fear of reprisal. Assessment therefore should be an ongoing process, to capture beneficiary attitudes and opinions as they change. The de-radicalization profiling in December 2009, when compared with initial profiling soon after the cadres gave themselves up, indicated some inconsistencies. However, with greater confidence in the process the beneficiaries provided more accurate and detailed information. Some surrendering LTTE cadres who had heard of the Thelippale rehabilitation center – which was operational well before the end of the war – remarked, “we knew the government will treat us well.”<sup>34</sup> These cadres encouraged others to surrender. Therefore timely and ongoing assessment was an important part of the program.

### Engaging the Beneficiaries

Engagement is the key to understanding the individual mindset. Thought patterns are intangible. Whilst thought patterns can be accessed by using interviews, paper and pencil tests, one must consider aspects such as deception and social desirability. Particularly in the case of the LTTE, both ruthlessness and deception were a part of the training. Considered masters at deception,<sup>35</sup> a few in the terrorist cadres that entered rehabilitation did not disclose the full extent of their involvement. Similar examples are found in Iraq and Afghanistan, where former terrorists of the Al Qaeda movement worked with the US military and other agencies but without revealing their true intentions. In the Sri Lankan case, there were only a few that attempted such deception because the conflict had come to an end.

Over time beneficiaries understood the rehabilitation process. They became less anxious and more confident about the process. As the beneficiaries reflected on their past, they rejected violence and embraced peace. They voluntarily provided more accurate and more detailed information. There were few instances of information contaminated with peer opinions and theories or information doctored to gain early reintegration. There was evidence of deception in the creation of a phantom individual and projecting one's role onto another individual and/or denial of own actions. At the same time the beneficiaries who disclosed their own information accurately, also informed the interviewers of those that hid their involvement within the terrorist movement.<sup>36</sup>

### *effective engagement requires staff training, guidance and discipline*

Some senior members of the terrorist movement within the PARCs attempted to maintain a senior position.<sup>37</sup> Without mingling, they attempted to get the junior members to do their chores.<sup>38</sup> Another aspect noted was that with time, the beneficiaries were more open to speaking about their activities when working with the terrorist group.<sup>39</sup> These changes occurred within the PARC atmosphere that was relaxed with no fear of reprisals. These disclosures were taken as part of the healing process. However those beneficiaries who lied at the assessment or withheld information were detained for further investigation.<sup>40</sup> Deception and resistance would occur when one believed that the information provided by the beneficiary would result in negative consequences and/or when the beneficiary does not wish to transform. Therefore it is vital that the staff engaging the beneficiary not function in an investigative capacity. It was necessary to keep

the investigation and rehabilitation processes separate to ensure effective engagement.

The military personnel that engaged the beneficiaries developed an attitude different from other military personnel. These service personnel engaged with beneficiaries by looking into their welfare and supporting the rehabilitation service providers to deliver an effective service. The military personnel responsible for the security of the perimeter did not interact with the beneficiaries. Officers in charge had a clear understanding of what was required at each level. Effective engagement requires staff training, guidance and discipline. Although some staff were naturally oriented towards engagement and did not require training, staff guidance and discipline was considered imperative.

### **Investigation**

Within the Sri Lankan context, the role of the investigating arm of the state and the rehabilitative role of the BCGR were separated. The information shared by the beneficiaries within rehabilitation did not have a negative impact on the beneficiaries. This ethos helped to minimize resistance and deception, as it is important to engage the beneficiary genuinely and consistently.

Investigation and reinvestigation have occurred when new information is received on those who have not disclosed their actual in-depth involvement in LTTE activities. In some cases, those living in the community disclosed greater depth of involvement of identified Tamil Tigers and those that had not entered rehabilitation. The Tamil community living in the villages expressed their anger towards the former cadres who held them hostage and persecuted them through a rule of law unto themselves. The anger towards the LTTE was reflected among the displaced Tamil population within internally displaced persons (IDP) centers.<sup>41</sup> IDPs

temporarily remained within these centers, until the terrorist cadres were identified and villages were cleared of mines to enable resettlement.<sup>42</sup> Tamil civilians suffered much at the hands of the LTTE. A civilian remarked that during the final stages of the war “they knew they were going to lose, so why keep us as a shield for them to be protected? They did not care about us; it was all about what they wanted.”<sup>43</sup>

Staff working within the PARCs engaged in a caring and supportive role and assessed risk. Deception and resistance would occur when beneficiaries believed their revelations would be used against them – that concern often resulted in unwillingness to shed the violent extremist attitude. Therefore, it is vital that the staff engaging the beneficiary do not function in an investigative capacity.

### Ethos of Rehabilitation

The ethos of the center staff reflected professionalism, compassion, and discipline. Security concerns related to rioting or running away were virtually absent, with a relatively small number of security personnel guarding the perimeter both in June 2009 and December 2009. There were isolated incidents reported where beneficiaries requested to go to hospital and then ran away. The ethos was to treat the ex-combatants with care and respect, and help them return to society. The approach within the centers was one of care and respect. With these guiding principles the beneficiaries settled quickly and began to appreciate the rehabilitation initiative and admired the military that conducted the rehabilitation. This is evident in the positive ratings reported by the ex-combatants of the rehabilitation center staff (96.43%),<sup>44</sup> the rehabilitation center (70.14%)<sup>45</sup> and the rehabilitation center guards (94.57%).<sup>46</sup>

The rehabilitation centers' treatment of beneficiaries has been commended. In a message

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to mark America's Independence Day, the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Patricia Butenis, said, “The government has also made great progress with the rehabilitation of ex-combatants.”<sup>47</sup> Several LTTE cadres today are championing peace initiatives.<sup>48</sup> Some have returned to the rehabilitation centers following reintegration to reside and follow courses. LEADS, a National NGO facilitated “pre-school training” for a group of reintegrated beneficiaries who opted to return to the Vavuniya PARC. Most beneficiaries moved on to employment and self-employment in sectors ranging from the garment industry to the film making industry, or worked with NGOs, INGO's and with government.<sup>49</sup>

### Effective Management and Engagement

The Sri Lankan military managed the centers but civilians staffed the rehabilitation intervention programs. The Sri Lankan military was trained in a way that they would acquire skills required to manage a vast number of former LTTE cadres. The Sri Lankan state including the Army commenced the process of rehabilitation with limited knowledge of how to rehabilitate. Neither political leaders nor military officials in charge of rehabilitation had any previous relevant experience. They had limited access to literature on rehabilitation and exposure to rehabilitation programs conducted overseas. For example, Minister Milinda Moragoda, the Minister of Justice and Law Reform, who was in charge of the rehabilitation program was keen to learn and he received briefings from the specialist staff engaged in rehabilitation at Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). Similarly, General Daya Ratnayake, the

## *General Daya Ratnayaka managed to steer the rehabilitation process chartering new territory with sound leadership*

Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (CGR) visited Singapore and Colombia and received guidance on the modes of rehabilitation. They quickly embraced the idea of rehabilitation, drew from the key concepts, and practical lessons. Although formal knowledge on how to rehabilitate terrorist cadres was useful, the Sri Lankan rehabilitation program developed largely through a commonsense approach. Sri Lankan military personnel acquired many of the qualities essential to engage communities during their training and service. They also learned how to approach and work with beneficiaries at the rehabilitation centers.

### **Rehabilitation Staff**

In many ways, the CGR established a standard through his own conduct towards beneficiaries. The first Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, General Daya Ratnayaka, overcame several challenges from funding to a legal framework. He managed to steer the rehabilitation process chartering new territory with sound leadership. Following the end of the Sri Lankan conflict, Colonel Manjula Gunasinghe was the Coordinator for Rehabilitation in Vavuniya since the inception of rehabilitation. He worked with four consecutive Commissioner Generals of Rehabilitation; General Daya Ratnayake, General Sudantha Ranasinghe, General Chandana Rajaguru and Brigadier Dharshana Hettiarachchi. He provided the highest quality of leadership and managed 24 PARCs that housed male, female and child beneficiaries without a single incident. He harnessed his staff and provided the required care and facilitated rehabilitation intervention

programs without compromising safety or security. Managing staff and beneficiaries of multiple centers was no easy task. His commitment to staff training was high and his ability to work with a range of INGOs, NGOs, volunteer professionals, corporate sector entities, and Ministries to implement rehabilitation interventions received praise.

It was observed that the military training following clear guidance helped the staff at the ground level to effectively engage with the ex-combatants. An officer conducting rehabilitation Captain Aluthwala stated, "When we give 100% to the beneficiaries it is a combination of 50% from our head and 50% from our heart." He elaborated further to say that they would be mindful, alert and also compassionate. Other officers described, "the importance of understanding the person from within their context, to be able to help them adjust to a new reality."<sup>50</sup> Still others said that though they are all injured and the injuries were sustained during the battle with the terrorist cadres, that, "I don't want my children to grow up with terrorism," and, "I don't want to leave terrorism to be faced by the next generation."<sup>51</sup>

The rehabilitation personnel received their guidance and supervision from within the hierarchical structure and from among their peer group. Formal trainings arranged for staff were few and far between. The staff learned from practice and applied commonsense to situations, and the compassion instilled within the culture and religion was extended to the beneficiaries. A rehabilitation staff member, who had lost 7 of his family members in the civil war, expressed his perspective on working with the former LTTE cadres in rehabilitation. He stated that, "I don't want my children to see another war;" pointing to a beneficiary he added, "I want my children to be able to play with his children and in that way we won't have another war."<sup>52</sup> His words

captured the essence of the motivation of the security forces personnel working tirelessly within the rehabilitation centers. Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program does not have the luxuries of the Saudi Rehabilitation Program, the facilities of the Singapore model, nor the funding of the Pakistani program, but it is rich in commitment, compassion and genuine in its effort.<sup>53</sup>

Almost every citizen in the country has lost someone in the thirty-year war. The Tamil Tiger cadres inflicted many casualties and indeed most staff conducting rehabilitation had been wounded, and carried embedded shell pieces; others were aware first hand of the LTTE terrorism having seen massacred border villagers, and still others have had their friends die in battle. Most stated that they did not know how they could work with the former insurgents, but gradually they realized the importance of guiding them onto a peaceful path. Most stated that the LTTE cadres were made to believe in a different reality.

### De-Radicalization

The individual has to de-radicalize to be able to disengage from violence and re-engage in harmonious living.<sup>54</sup> Rehabilitation is the method to achieve this end. The LTTE leadership developed the mastery of indoctrinating the masses, especially the youth. LTTE leaders groomed and motivated their members to sacrifice themselves in suicide attacks and to sacrifice the wellbeing of one's own kith and kin in the pursuit of a violent radical ideology. Radicalization was the tool used to engage and sustain its membership. Therefore a multifaceted rehabilitation program was necessary to engage the surrendered and apprehended detainees' hearts and minds to facilitate de-radicalization.

Those detained for rehabilitation includes male and female adults, adolescents and children who were members, helpers and supporters of the

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LTTE. Detainees were both injured and non-injured, and battlefield (insurgent) and off the battlefield (terrorist) fighters. An ethno political conflict radicalized and militarized a generation of youth in Sri Lanka during the thirty years of initially sporadic and later sustained violence.

The impact of radicalization and the importance of rehabilitation in the transformation of thinking were articulated by a 16-year-old child soldier groomed by the Tamil Tigers;

*"As vultures that eat dead bodies and hands that stretch out to beg*

*Terrorism destroys communities and destroyed our wellbeing until the end.*

*Loosing and separating mother and child,*

*Communities bore the tears of the people,*

*They trapped us by giving false hopes saying*

*even death can become life, the tombstone*

*an Epic."*<sup>55</sup>

She refers to terrorism preying upon and thriving on the dead, and on the unsuspecting poor. The LTTE used powerful narratives of those that died while conducting acts of terror. Tales of heroism were concocted to motivate cadres and recruit by generating anger, hatred and lust for revenge. LTTE leaders also exploited the vulnerable poor who were more easily recruited and given significance, power and a means of livelihood to ensure unquestioning loyalty.

The impact of terrorism on communities has been devastating; splitting the family unit, the loss of the child groomed into death. The LTTE policy of recruiting one member of each household led families to give their under age children



*whilst the rehabilitation program is considered a success, the state has not been able to market its success effectively*

in marriage to older men for protection, or got them pregnant to prevent recruitment. Children were also turned against their family members to demonstrate their loyalty to the insurgency. The indoctrination of cadres with the perception that through suicide terrorism one achieves continued life as martyrs was prevalent. LTTE leaders promoted suicide terror by justifying and glorifying the act of mass murder by suicide attacks.

### Challenges of the Rehabilitation Program

Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program faced many challenges. First, the personnel assigned to staff the program had to be both formally and informally trained. While most of the staff was committed to the idea of rehabilitation, some needed convincing that this was the way forward. Second, the program lacked resources from its inception. This led to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation having to work with a range of state and private sector partners. These funding challenges however led to building a low cost program with greater participation from the community. Third, the criticisms aimed against the state initiatives were largely due to the restriction of international agency participation or access particularly to the ICRC, with the exception of IOM. This led to heavy criticism and undue suspicion by the international community. Fourth, had Sri Lankan diplomats improved their communication with the international community that would likely have led to greater understanding, reduced negativity<sup>56</sup> and improved funding for the programs. Finally, whilst the rehabilitation program is considered a success, the state has not been able to market its success effectively.

### Conclusion

Sri Lanka succeeded in rehabilitating the bulk of the leaders and members of one of the world's most dangerous terrorist and insurgent groups, the LTTE. When communities are radicalized into violence, individuals are transformed from within and the mindset is locked into a violence justifying ideology. The radicalizing ideology becomes a vehicle and the person wishes to live by it, promote it and die for it. Sri Lanka's rehabilitation efforts centered on reaching the hearts and minds of the beneficiaries through several activities that are transformative. Within rehabilitation, the radicalization process is reversed and the beneficiary is transformed from within by engaging in a range of salutary activities. The beneficiary re-engages with self, family and society, and the need for violence is delegitimized. The beneficiaries are supported to move away from violence towards peaceful co-existence.

Some of the essential components identified in the success of Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program are the political will and the confidence of the leadership that rehabilitation was the right way forward. The Presidential Amnesty<sup>57</sup> provided the hope and opportunity for beneficiaries to engage in the civilian process. The Presidential message was to "treat them as your own children."<sup>58</sup>

It was essential that parallel to the process of rehabilitation, a clear message be given that terrorism is a grave offence and punishable by law. This was demonstrated through the indictments and required prosecutions of the most criminally culpable LTTE cadres.

Sound leadership provided at every level is vital to maintaining standards and the security of each facility. The ethos of the rehabilitation centers was similar to a residential training center where individuals engage in a series of life



skills to develop self and promote peace and harmony. The beneficiary gradually begins to see the “other” as non-threatening, observing in the “other” behavior and values to emulate, thereby invalidating the distorted images propagated and maintained of the “other” by the propaganda.

Rehabilitation and community engagement is a counter-terrorism strategy that is long lasting and sustainable. Former combatants who are rehabilitated and have returned to their home communities remain vulnerable to recidivism. The community is the base from which terrorists are recruited. Therefore rehabilitation and the de-radicalization of former terrorists is an ongoing process. It is essential to continuously assess rehabilitation programs and the progress made by the former combatants. The aftercare process of the reintegrated beneficiary is a vital aspect to ensure smooth transition into community life. While within rehabilitation the beneficiaries are supported to de-radicalize and re-engage in community, it is essential to conduct ongoing Community Engagement Programs<sup>59</sup> to prevent re-radicalization of the reintegrated beneficiaries, as well as to build community resilience as a counter terrorism and counter insurgency strategy. PRISM

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam,” *Wikipedia*, available at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation\\_Tigers\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Elam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Tigers_of_Tamil_Elam)>.

<sup>2</sup> Tamil Tigers are among the most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world. For more than three decades, the group has launched a campaign of violence and bloodshed in Sri Lanka, the island republic off the southern coast of India<sup>1</sup> retrieved in November 2009. “Taming the Tamil Tigers: From Here in the US,” *The FBI website*, available at [http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil\\_tigers011008](http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008).

<sup>3</sup> Members of the LTTE are identified as the “Tamil Tiger Terrorists”.

<sup>4</sup> Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, “Defense Seminar,” April 2011 and August 2012, and “Workshop at the Lakshman Kadiragamar Center,” July 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, “The Battlefield of The Mind,” *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, 21 (October 2009). Professor Rohan Gunaratna is from the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research and is the advisor for global terrorism programs including Sri Lanka’s rehabilitation program.

<sup>6</sup> A.W. Kruglanski, M.J. Gelfand, and R. Gunaratna, *Aspects of De-radicalization*, in “Terrorist Rehabilitation,” ed. L. Rubin and R. Gunaratna (New York: Routledge, 2012). A.W. Kruglanski, M.J. Gelfand, and R. Gunaratna, *Terrorism as Means to an End: How Political Violence Bestows Significance*, in “Meaning, Mortality and Choice,” ed. P.R. Shaver and M. Mikulincer (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Rehabilitation that occurs within a Custodial or secure setting and within the community setting, upon reintegration.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Feisal Bin Mohamed Hassan (Associate Research Fellow, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research), interview by author, July 21, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> “1st Strategic Workshop on Rehabilitation & De-radicalization of Militants and Extremists,” *FATA Secretariat*, (FATA Capacity Building Project, May 18-19, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Brigadier Dharshana Hettiarachchi, *Terrorist Rehabilitation in Sri Lanka*, (National Workshop on Terrorist Rehabilitation, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, July 21, 2012). Brigadier Dharshana Hettiarachchi is Commissioner General of Rehabilitation.

<sup>11</sup> The retributive justice model involves punishment by sentencing. The restorative justice model promotes repentance and transformation.

<sup>12</sup> “The LTTE is responsible for forcibly removing, or ethnic cleansing of Sinhalese and Muslim inhabitants from areas under its control, and using violence against those who refuse to leave. The eviction of Muslim residents happened in the north in 1990, and the east in 1992.” “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam”, *Wikipedia*, available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation\\_Tigers\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Elam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Tigers_of_Tamil_Elam). Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. During the period of the entire conflict Tamil people have lived in the South of the country amongst the Sinhalese and Muslims. Prior to the conflict all ethnic groups have lived side by side for centuries and fought together to gain independence from British rule. Today the ethnic distribution of Colombo is equal due to increasing number of Tamil people settling in Colombo. The schools

in Colombo and the Sinhala and Tamil medium classes are testimony to this fact.

<sup>13</sup> There was no recorded evidence of those who participated in the rehabilitation program returning to violence.

<sup>14</sup> The author visited Ambepussa in June 2009 and interviewed staff and beneficiaries of the rehabilitation centers at Ambepussa all centers on the island including Thelippale, Jaffna.

<sup>15</sup> The staff working directly with the beneficiaries are primarily from the Army Cadet Corps – who are trained professional educators (school teachers).

<sup>16</sup> Sri Lanka's rehabilitation program costs from 01 January 2009-31 September 2012, BCGR.

<sup>17</sup> The Tamil tigers promoted a mono-ethnic separatist agenda that was weaved into a "single narrative" away from diversity, peace building, and community cohesion.

<sup>18</sup> Statistics provided by the Bureau for the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, 22 November 2012.

<sup>19</sup> BCGR statistics from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 were presented at the Sri Lankan Defense Seminar, Sri Lanka in April 2011 and 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Jason Burke, "Sri Lankan Tamils Tie the Knot in Mass Detention Center Wedding: 53 Couples Married in Detention Center as Government Tries to Rehabilitate Former Tamil Tigers," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/13/tamil-tigers-sri-lanka-mass-wedding>.

<sup>21</sup> Leading private companies and businesses both provided training within rehabilitation centers or provided residential training within their training centers in the community and offered employment to those who wished to return. See [www.bcgr.gov.lk](http://www.bcgr.gov.lk) to see the 40+ partnerships formed to conduct rehabilitation programs.

<sup>22</sup> "Norway Backs IOM Reintegration of Former Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka," *International Organization for Migration*, accessed at [http://www.iomsrilanka.org/iom/?page\\_id=1554](http://www.iomsrilanka.org/iom/?page_id=1554).

<sup>23</sup> BCGR, "Action Plan," (March 2010). This action plan provides the framework for the rehabilitation process based on DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Rehabilitation).

<sup>24</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski and Michele J. Gelfand, *Rehabilitation of Former LTTE Cadres in Sri Lanka: A Preliminary Report*, (University of Maryland, College Park, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> In December 2009, approximately ten to twenty-five percent of beneficiaries were taught to read and write in each rehabilitation center.

<sup>26</sup> Follow-up surveys indicated greater aspirations by beneficiaries to engage in vocational training and

self-employment. KAC Karunarathna, *Transformation in Thinking on Aspirations for Employment* (report, June 22, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> General Sudanatha Ranasinghe, "Defence Seminar 2012: Towards Lasting Peace and Stability," *Bureau of Commissioner General Of Rehabilitation*, August 8, 2012 Available at <http://www.bcgr.gov.lk/news.php?id=209>.

<sup>28</sup> Beneficiaries were found to have a greater sense of citizenship and developed a sense of belongingness and desire to contribute to the development of the country through employment. KAC Karunarathna, *Transformation in Thinking on Aspirations for Employment* (report, June 22, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Beneficiaries were reported to gradually express remorse for their own actions and express gratitude for the second chance in life through rehabilitation. KAC Karunarathna, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Mr Eswaran, a Tamil Business Entrepreneur (Eswaran Brothers), motivated and supported individuals to live their lives on a basis of ethical principals.

<sup>31</sup> "Former LTTE Child Combatants Turn Girl Guides & Boy Scouts," *Ministry of Defence and Urban Development of Sri Lanka*, December 12, 2010, available at [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100509\\_05](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100509_05).

<sup>32</sup> Shamindra Ferdinando *From Vanni to Cinnamon Grand: Ex-fighters display dancing skills at IOM reception* (The Island, Sri Lanka, May 24, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with former LTTE cadres revealed that a "good cadre" was one that would not go home and would not maintain family ties. The aim was to maintain the person within the group and even married to members of the terrorist group, to keep the loyalty within group.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a beneficiary, January 1, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Some of the Terrorist cadres that entered rehabilitation did not disclose their involvement within the LTTE. "Master of Deception—Colombo's Praba' Exposed," *Tamil Tigers Activities Exposed*, available at <http://tamiltigeractivities.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/masters-of-deception-colombos-praba-caught/>.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with rehabilitation officials, May 15, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a beneficiary, January 1, 2010

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with rehabilitation officials, May 15, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> IDPs identifying LTTE cadres in Lanka refugee camps: Army, ANI, May 25, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> "In Pictures, Inside Sri Lanka's Vast Refugee Camps," *BBC News*, October 8, 2009, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8297760.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8297760.stm).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with a IDP, July 12, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> "Rehabilitation of the Tamil tigers," assessment conducted by Prof. A. Kruglanski. This study is ongoing since 2009. Perception of being treated fairly, with dignity, staff level of helpfulness, staff level of understanding of their problems and ability to trust staff.

<sup>45</sup> Perception of whether rehabilitation is helpful, if they feel there is an improvement in their situation, and rating on the conditions of the center.

<sup>46</sup> Perception of whether guards are respectful and treat beneficiaries with dignity.

<sup>47</sup> "Remarks for the July 4th Celebration by Ambassador Butenis," *United States Embassy in Sri Lanka and Maldives*, July 4, 2012, available at <<http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/sp-4july12.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> Shanika Sriyananda, "Ex-LTTEer Reborn in Selvam: Gokulan Takes to Acting," *Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka*, December 4, 2011 available at <<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011/12/04/fea10.asp>>.

<sup>49</sup> "Abhina drama for Trauma Therapy," accessed at <http://www.abhina.com/events.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews, Rehabilitation Centre, Vavuniya, April 12, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Personal observations of the author on studying the global programs and observing the manner in which the staff works on the Sri Lankan program.

<sup>54</sup> Cadres are likely to disengage but not deradicalize.

<sup>55</sup> Extract from a booklet written by an 16year old former female LTTE child soldier during her period of rehabilitation, entitled: *New life in a rehabilitation centre* (unpublished).

<sup>56</sup> Shenali Waduge, "Sri Lanka International Defense Seminar 2012 – An Impressive show of Achievements," *Asian Tribune*, August 12, 2012, available at <<http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2012/08/11/sri-lanka-international-defense-seminar-2012-%E2%80%93-impressive-show-achievements>>.

<sup>57</sup> A Presidential Amnesty was provided to the Tamil tigers that entered rehabilitation, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Presidential briefing on how to conduct rehabilitation to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, May 2009.

<sup>59</sup> International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore, held its first International Conference on Community Engagement (ICCE), September 21, 2011.

In October 2011, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a call to “make sure we actually learn the lessons from the last decade of war.”<sup>1</sup> In response, the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA) division of the Joint Staff J7 undertook its Decade of War study, reviewing the 46 lessons learned studies it had conducted from its inception in 2003 through early 2012. More than a “decade of war,” the 46 JCOA studies covered a wide variety of military operations—including major combat operations in Iraq, counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and the Philippines, and humanitarian assistance in the United States, Pakistan, and Haiti—as well as studies of emerging regional and global threats. The synthesis of these studies’ 400 findings, observations, and best practices yielded 11 strategic themes or categories of enduring joint lessons.

JCOA’s analysis was further refined by subject matter experts from across the Department of Defense during a weeklong Joint Staff–sponsored Decade of War Working Group in May 2012. The final Decade of War study represents the culmination of those efforts, and while significant, is only the initial step in turning these critical observations into “learned lessons.” The work of integrating the findings and recommendations into a continuous joint force development cycle will serve to build a more responsive, versatile, and affordable force.

Lieutenant General George Flynn, Director for Joint Force Development, Joint Staff J7, for release and dissemination without caveat. Lieutenant General Flynn has also endorsed the summary of this important effort for the readers of PRISM.

—Lieutenant General George Flynn, USMC  
Joint Staff J7  
Director for Joint Force Development

<sup>1</sup> General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Lieutenant General George Flynn, “Chairman Direction to J7,” official letter, October 6, 2011.