

Sri Lanka: LTTE exile group announces “transnational government”

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In the aftermath of its military defeat in Sri Lanka in May, an exile faction of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) announced a grandiose plan last month to form “a provisional transnational government of Tamil Eelam”. Selvarasa Pathmanathan, head of the LTTE’s international relations, issued a press release on June 16 following an editorial the previous day on the pro-LTTE Tamilnet website.

All the top LTTE leaders in Sri Lanka, including LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran, were killed in the final days of the Sri Lankan army’s final offensive in May. Thousands of civilians were killed and tens of thousand injured in the military’s attacks. Nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians who fled the war zone have been incarcerated in detention camps.

The Tamilnet statement drew no political lessons from the LTTE’s military collapse after 26 years of civil war and declared that the new “transnational government” would continue a political struggle for a separate capitalist state of Tamil Eelam in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Yet it was precisely this perspective that proved to be such a deadly trap for the country’s Tamil minority.

The LTTE’s program represented the response of sections of the Tamil bourgeoisie to decades of anti-Tamil discrimination by successive Colombo governments. By blaming the Sinhalese people as a whole for the oppression of Tamils and carrying out attacks on civilians, the LTTE deepened the communal divide among working people. Having rejected a socialist perspective based on the working class, the LTTE appealed to the various major and regional powers, particularly India, for support in establishing a capitalist Tamil Eelam.

Pathmanathan was involved in all the LTTE’s diplomatic manoeuvring, as well as its international financing and arms purchases. As the Sri Lanka army closed in on the final patches of LTTE-held territory, Prabhakaran put Pathmanathan in charge of a new international division. In the final months, Pathmanathan issued scores of appeals to the US, EU and India, seeking their support to end the war, despite their obvious backing for the Colombo government.

Pathmanathan announced his “transnational government” to continue to wheel and deal with the major powers. In a bid to curry favour with the US, Europe and India, he tentatively indicated that the LTTE would abandon the armed struggle in favour of negotiations for “a political solution” to its demands. The US and India have been pressing for a “political solution”—a deal between the island’s Sinhala and Tamil elites—as a means of exerting their influence in Colombo at the expense of rival powers, particularly China.

In an interview with *India Today* on June 25, Pathmanathan declared: “The decision of silencing our guns was taken by our leader before his death. We are now moving forward towards a new path... [A]ny political solution for the Tamil national question should be based on the ... recognition of Tamils as a nation... We will continue our fight through political means until these aspirations of the Tamil people are realised.”

Making clear his orientation, Pathmanathan continued: “We hope that the international community, especially India and the West, would welcome our new path and reward it by removing the ban on our organisation to open the door for political engagement.” Appealing directly to New Delhi, he added: “We consider Tamil people would be the true and reliable friends of India in its own geo-

political struggle with other countries, especially with China. We firmly believe India would realise this one day in the future and support Eelam Tamils' struggle for self-determination."

Pathmanathan clearly calculates that by offering the LTTE's services to India, he may receive a few political crumbs in return. India, however, has already rejected any support for a separate Tamil Eelam, fearing it would only encourage separatist movements at home, particularly in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. All this sordid manoeuvring for a "political solution" is aimed at securing a better bargaining position for the Tamil elites, not at alleviating the oppressive conditions facing ordinary Tamils.

The main purpose of Pathmanathan's "transnational government" appears to be to draw together the remnants of the LTTE's shattered organisation under the control of his faction. Amid great fanfare, he appointed a group of academics headed by the LTTE's legal adviser, Rudhrakumaran Visuvanathan, to draw up the "process" for establishing this government in exile. At this stage, however, it is not even clear that he has the support of the majority of the remaining LTTE leaders in exile.

An *Asia Times* article on June 9 noted that hard-line LTTE elements associated with the organisation's intelligence network were hostile to Pathmanathan's tentative announcement that the LTTE would abandon the armed struggle. The website pointed out that Pathmanathan announced the death of LTTE chief Prabhakaran even as the LTTE's intelligence wing was continuing to maintain that he had survived the army's final onslaught.

The article cited a Toronto-based analyst, D.B.S. Jeyaraj, who claimed that Pathmanathan's opponents had started a "vicious campaign maligning him as a traitor and being in the pay of RAW [Indian intelligence] or the CIA or the Sri Lankan government. He is accused of having even betrayed Prabhakaran." All this points to a bitter faction fight within the exile LTTE organisation.

In its statement, the "transnational government" claimed to be "working in partnership with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)"—a pro-LTTE parliamentary grouping in Sri Lanka. The TNA is a coalition of bourgeois Tamil parties formed in 2001, just before the

2002 ceasefire agreement, on the basis of recognising the LTTE as the "sole representative of the Tamil people".

Since the LTTE's military defeat, however, the TNA has sought to accommodate to the Colombo government and establish its own relations with India. MP Srikantha told the media that the TNA did not agree with forming an exile government, saying, "the TNA has no involvement in it... Our struggle will continue until we achieve a political solution within the unitary state of Sri Lanka."

Sri Lankan Media Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa dismissed Pathmanathan's announcement, saying: "The LTTE no longer exists now, and therefore the government cannot take seriously its claim of setting up of a so-called 'provisional transnational' government. The LTTE is no longer a factor." The Colombo government has been pushing for international support in suppressing the remains of the LTTE's international network, including the arrest of Pathmanathan and other exile leaders.

In the wake of the LTTE's defeat, neither Pathmanathan nor any other LTTE leader has offered any political explanation, let alone a program to defend the rights and living standards of ordinary Tamils. The entire experience of a quarter century of war demonstrates the political bankruptcy of the LTTE's communal politics. The only way out of the political blind alley is to reject all forms of nationalism and turn to the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective to unify workers around their own common class interests.



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