

# A Case of Tigers and Talibans: The Applicability of the Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Model in Pakistan's Insurgent War

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***Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to ascertain whether it is practical for Pakistan to apply the Sri Lankan COIN (Counterinsurgency) Model against its primary insurgent group – Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Initially, the paper highlights the characteristics adopted in the Sri Lankan Model that was used successfully against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or Tamil Tigers. The paper then critically analyses whether Pakistan should reproduce the Sri Lankan Model by taking into consideration both countries', and especially Pakistan's, local, regional and global environment; kind of insurgency threat; and the politics and capability of the armed forces. After analysis it becomes evident that due to differences and intricacies in both countries' scenarios, environments and insurgencies, it is simplistic to state that Pakistan should completely copy the Sri Lankan modus operandi. However, the paper does suggest that there are some caveats and takeaways that need to be appreciated and applied from the Sri Lankan experience. It is concluded that Pakistan continue its successful Zarb e Azb Operation, learn the relevant lessons from the Sri Lankan example, and create a “Pakistani Model” that takes the country's own needs and environment into account.*

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## Introduction

*Does Pakistan need to replicate the Sri Lankan counterinsurgency model used successfully against the Tamil Tigers in its own war against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan?*

The paper puts forward the preceding question and subsequently argues that Pakistan does not need to fully adopt the Sri Lankan counterinsurgency model used to defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or the Tamil Tigers in its own fight against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Concurrently, however, there are certain characteristics and lessons from the model that can and should be utilized by Pakistan. This only becomes evident after a thorough analysis has been conducted - one that highlights not only the major facets of the Sri Lankan Model but also the environment in which it was applied. The paper then compares the applicability of the Model in Pakistan's distinctive environment and insurgent war point-by-point. After this analysis, it becomes evident that Pakistan is doing well with regards to certain aspects of the Model but can learn from other aspects that it might have shortcomings in. The main takeaway though is that a complete replication of the model cannot be applied or sustained due to nuances and intricacies in both countries' insurgencies, and environments. It must be mentioned, since Pakistan's current situation and war is being analyzed in the paper and Sri Lanka is only considered as a model for potential application in Pakistan, more time and detail is given to the Pakistani section.

The Sri Lankan Model and experience is captivating due to its distinct nature from Western COIN mainly because of a preference of military might over 'hearts and minds' (details later). It is further captivating because compared to Iraq and Afghanistan, where no grand victory can be claimed, Sri Lanka won using military strength and ended the LTTE insurgency in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, the Sri Lankan case is one of the few cases in history that resolved an insurgency by military means. The Sri Lankan Model refers to the main features adopted by the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and its armed forces in their final campaign, Eelam War IV (2006-2009), against the LTTE which led to the latter's demise militarily. The phrase "Sri Lanka Model" is not the author's own innovation but was used by Sri Lanka's then government and is sometimes called the "Rajapaksa Model" – referring to President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his strategy to defeat the LTTE. The official Sri Lankan Model (or Rajapaksa Model) has several characteristics, however, when this paper uses the term "Sri Lanka Model" (or some iteration thereof) it is discussing a "model" whose characteristics have been derived from not only the Rajapaksa Model itself but also from scholars in academia – hence this paper's "Sri Lanka Model" is different than the official version. There are 7 facets identified in the paper's Sri Lankan Model and the paper discusses their specificities in the contextual period of Eelam War IV (see 'The Sri Lankan Model' for details). They include the following:

- 1) Political Will
- 2) Adapting Armed Forces to the Threat
- 3) Regulate Media
- 4) Engage Internationally

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Layton, "How Sri Lanka Won the War." *The Diplomat*, (April 2015) <http://thediplomat.com>

- 5) No Negotiations or Ceasefires
- 6) Ignore International Pressure That May distract From the End Goal
- 7) Indiscriminate Violence

## Background of the Insurgencies

### *Sri Lanka*

The Sri Lankan conflict with the LTTE is one with a storied past. The roots of the conflict existed during and after British (colonial) departure from the tear shaped Island. The Tamil insurgency goes all the way back to ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority which climaxed following independence from the British in 1948.<sup>2</sup> During colonial reign, the British executed their infamous divide-and-rule policy in a multi-ethnic sphere. The minority Tamils enjoyed British partiality while simultaneously the Sinhalese suffered. The British promoted and trusted Tamils in the civil service, universities and other key positions in Ceylon (pre-independence name of the Island). This disenfranchised the majority Sinhalese who post-British departure, made the reverse true and self-promoted themselves to previously Tamil positions. The Sinhalese government initialized “nationalist and exclusionary” policies that marginalized the Tamils.<sup>3</sup> The societal crevices between both ethnicities were deepening as time moved forward. Policies such as the ‘Sinhala Only Official Languages Act’ which made Sinhala the national language of Sri Lanka, the 1972 Constitution that granted Buddhism (religion of most Sinhalese) special status, and other policies that slashed Tamil representation in universities and civil services<sup>4</sup> set the backdrop for a future climatic clash.

During the 1970s, due to these exclusionist policies, many Tamil separatist groups began to surface. Velupillai Prabhakaran (VP), then a Tamil teenager, took control of a group called the Tamil New Tigers in 1972.<sup>5</sup> The LTTE was subsequently formed in 1976 when VP renamed the group. The aim was to create a Tamil homeland in the north and east of the Sri Lankan island. The organization thus had a national-secessionist/ethno-national motivation rather than a religious one and it was the dream of a separate homeland – Tamil Eelam – that motivated the Tamil insurgency to its bitter end. Although, there were many different Tamil separatist groups before the LTTE, they were all either absorbed or destroyed by VP.<sup>6</sup> By the late 1980’s the LTTE had eradicated the competitor groups and became the dominant vehicle for Tamil desires.

The Sri Lankan civil war began in 1983 and drove the country into mass chaos and panic. Thousands of noncombatants and combatants alike died in the war – some in riots while others in the various insurgent-counterinsurgent battles. The Sri Lankan Army (SLA) was engaged in four grueling wars with the LTTE spanning almost three decades. The LTTE enjoyed a notorious reputation. It had been labeled as one of the deadliest terrorist or insurgent groups in the world.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmed M. Jalal, "Think Like a Guerilla: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Sri Lanka." *Harvard Kennedy School Review* 11 (2010) 181-188.

<sup>3</sup> Sameer P. Lalwani, “Size Still Matters: Explaining Sri Lanka’s Counterinsurgency Victory over the Tamil Tigers,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28:1 (February 2017): 119-165, DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2016.1263470

<sup>4</sup> Jon Lunn et al., War and peace in Sri Lanka. (United Kingdom: Parliament, House of Commons Library, June 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Lionel Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers: An MWI Contemporary Battlefield Assessment of the Counterinsurgency in Sri Lanka* (Modern War Institute at West Point, 2017)

<sup>6</sup> Christine C. Fair, “Urban Battle Fields of South Asia.” (2004) [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins." (2013) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhcpp>

The group's suicide unit, the Black Tigers, carried out more suicide attacks than any other insurgent or terrorist group from their inception until their demise (1983-2009).<sup>8</sup> The group became masters of using suicide terrorism – ironically better than the Islamist groups it is attributed to. Their support came not only from the Tamil population of Sri Lanka but the millions of people in the Tamil diaspora around the world (such as Canada). The LTTE's active membership fluctuated between 7,000-15,000 throughout the lifetime of the organization.<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that their annual revenue was an astonishing \$200 million. Initially, the LTTE enjoyed Indian support and financing but eventually due to India's IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) goal of keeping the peace between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and the subsequent assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi by the LTTE, India withdrew its support.<sup>10</sup> The Tigers were infamous for using child and women soldiers and were perhaps the only insurgent group in history to have a navy and a rudimentary air force. They were also known to use hybrid combating techniques that included a combination of guerilla tactics, terrorism, and conventional warfare.<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup> They amassed such support that they became the de facto government in LTTE controlled areas, providing governance structures such as police, banks and hospitals for the public. This formidable foe was finally crushed militarily by the Sri Lankans after a 26-year-old civil war in Eelam War IV.

### *Pakistan*

The Pakistani case compared to the Sri Lankan example carries a few similarities but also some major differences. Pakistan's current insurgency problem has an extensive history and has been exacerbated by events such as the Saudi-Iran proxy wars (post-Iranian revolution), the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the 9/11 attacks. But not everything can be blamed on exogenous factors, as the country in the past has been partial towards some militant groups. For example, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and America assisted seven significant Mujahedeen (Muslims who partake in Jihad or Holy War) groups to fight off the Soviet invasion in 1979-1989.<sup>13</sup> Although, this assistance can be cited as necessary during that time, the subsequent handling of these groups post-Soviet withdrawal is questionable by all three states.

One of the primary reasons for regional instability and militancy has been the unresolved Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India which in some ways had encouraged Pakistan to use non-state elements in support of the Kashmiris oppressed by Indian forces. Despite the clampdown on such elements in recent years by Pakistan, some of them continue regardless. Such groups could attack India with or without the author station or complicity of state authorities in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> The unsettled Kashmir dispute dilutes Pakistan's political will to fight

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Beehner et al., "The Taming of the Tigers".

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>12</sup> Lalwani, "Size Still Matters"

<sup>13</sup> Seth G. Jones, and Christine C. Fair. "*Counterinsurgency In Pakistan*" Santa Monica. RAND Corporation (2010).

<sup>14</sup> George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, "Not War, Not Peace?" *New Delhi: Oxford University Press.* (2016)

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/08/25/not-war-not-peace-motivating-pakistan-to-prevent-cross-border-terrorism-pub-64040>

such groups. Zia Ul Haq, Pakistan's then military dictator, supported these groups in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion and also in India<sup>15</sup> to free Kashmir.

But this patronage strategy would soon backfire. After 9/11 President Musharraf faced a stark choice when America presented essentially two options: help the U.S. or risk war with it.<sup>16</sup> Choosing to side with the Americans or else face a potential war with them, the country chose to fight previously supported groups and in turn faced massive blowback. According to scholars, Pakistan has been fighting a predominantly U.S. war which has led to negative spillovers and repercussions for its own internal security.<sup>17</sup> Due to this sudden pro-War-on-Terror policy change, many of these groups became anti-state (around 2004) and joined together to form the TTP insurgency in 2007 led by Baitullah Mehsud.<sup>18</sup> Currently, it is being led by Mullah Fazlullah who has been hiding in Afghanistan. In other words, the TTP is an umbrella organization consisting of various insurgent groups motivated by Islamic extremism. Although there are many different forms of terrorism and numerous insurgent groups in Pakistan, this paper focuses mainly on the dominant insurgent group, the TTP.

Most of the insurgent engagements with the TTP have been fought in the North-West region of Pakistan known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) which borders Afghanistan, while some battles and a major operation, Rah-e-Rast, was conducted in Swat (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province) to clear TTP and affiliated militants.

Although, the TTP and its associate groups are primarily made up of ethnic Pashtuns, the Punjabi Taliban (a significant but now defunct group) was mostly Punjabi in ethnicity. The Punjabi Taliban was also an umbrella organization that was primarily present in Southern Punjab.<sup>19</sup> They along with the TTP and Al-Qaeda had considerable links with each other and were known to work together from time to time. The Punjabi Taliban was sometimes directly and at times indirectly connected to the TTP. Furthermore the TTP and Al-Qaeda were known to contract out attacks to the Punjabi Taliban.<sup>20</sup> The affiliation of different umbrella groups with each other has made the insurgent threat even more nefarious to handle although the Punjabi Taliban is now non-operational. However, it must be noted that although the TTP has connections with Al-Qaeda, it is separate from the Taliban (Afghani Taliban) vis-a-vis their history, objectives and targets although both mostly consist of Pashtuns. The Afghan Taliban aims to drive out the coalition and Western forces from Afghanistan but refrains from engaging with Pakistani forces or its populace. The TTP however, mainly operates in Pakistan and frequently attacks innocent Pakistanis, state institutions, and security forces.

Most of these insurgent groups are different than the LTTE, in that they are religiously motivated and endeavor to install their brand of Sharia (religious law) in the country. Unlike the LTTE, the TTP and its partner groups do not possess their own navy or air force, but nevertheless are well armed, can potentially recruit many insurgents due to high population, are

<sup>15</sup> Frederic Grare, "Pakistan's foreign and security policies after the 2013 general election: the Judge, the Politician and the Military." *International Affairs* 89 (2013): 987-1001 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12055>

<sup>16</sup> Tankel, "Beyond FATA: Exploring the Punjabi Militant Threat to Pakistan."

<sup>17</sup> Umbreen Javaid and Mariam Shaukat Khan, "Complex Regional Dynamics: Pakistan's need for Political Paradigm Shift." *Journal of Political Studies* 22 (2015) 555-574. <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/6>.

<sup>18</sup> Christine C. Fair, "Pakistan in 2011: Ten Years of the "War on Terror" *Asian Survey* (2012) 100-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/as.2012.52.1.100>.

<sup>19</sup> Javaid and Khan, "Complex Regional Dynamics," 562-564.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Tankel, "Beyond FATA: Exploring the Punjabi Militant Threat to Pakistan." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28 (2014): 49-71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2013.879056>.

adequately funded and are proficient in the use of suicide terrorism. The TTP have even been involved in international attacks – most notably the attempted Time Square car bombing (which was thwarted). According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a total of 28,152 civilians and security personnel have been killed in terrorist violence from January 2003 to December 25th, 2016 in Pakistan.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Pakistan's current situation vis-à-vis terrorism has improved drastically since 9/11 and the new age of terrorism. Since the inception of the TTP, the areas of Swat in Pakistan have been cleared of all insurgents thanks to Operation Rah E Rast in 2009 while the situation in North and South Waziristan (considered the hub of terrorist bases) have been mostly cleared due to Operation Rah E Nijat (2009) and the recent Operation Zarb E Azb (2015-). This is not to say that the war has concluded but only to highlight that much of the insurgent threat has been neutralized through the large strides made by the armed forces, intelligence, paramilitary, police, rehabilitation organizations and NGO's of the country. The country has made innumerable sacrifices of man and material both.

### The Sri Lankan Model

The paper has derived a list that best describes the major facets in the Sri Lankan model using various sources and authors (Hashim<sup>22</sup>, Babar<sup>23</sup>, Layton<sup>24</sup> and Shashikumar<sup>25</sup>, Beehner et al.,<sup>26</sup>, Rajapaksa<sup>27</sup>). Before debating the 7 characteristics, it is important to discuss how the Sri Lankan Model is distinct from modern day Western/American COIN (counterinsurgency) methods. GoSL relied on the brute use of military might while Americans and the West prefer a population-centric approach which is aimed at winning over 'hearts and minds'.<sup>28</sup> America's COIN in Iraq and Afghanistan has consisted of avoiding as many civilian casualties in areas where civilians and insurgents are indistinguishable.<sup>29</sup> The Sri Lankans, conversely, executed a concerted COIN strategy which used indiscriminate force to overwhelm the LTTE completely.<sup>30</sup> This egregious use of force ended the LTTE insurgency but concurrently led to thousands of civilian deaths in the process. The humanitarian American COIN approach is based on Western ideals that can be cited in the Geneva Convention and Just War principles. This COIN is rooted in the beliefs that an insurgency cannot be overcome without winning the population's support and that military might alone will lead to hollow victories that are essentially counter-productive in the long run. In contrast, the Sri Lankan Model rests on 'strong and dynamic' military

<sup>21</sup> Institute for Conflict Management, "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2016." *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (2016). [www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/Pakistan/database/casualties.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/Pakistan/database/casualties.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>23</sup> Makhdoom Babar, "Can General Raheel enjoy what General Fonseka got to rout terror?", *Daily Mail News* (2015) <http://dailymailnews.com/2015/01/10/can-general-raheel-enjoy-what-general-fonseka-got-to-rout-terror/>

<sup>24</sup> Layton, "How Sri Lanka Won the War."

<sup>25</sup> VK. Shashikumar, "Lessons from Sri Lanka War." *Indian Defence Review*. (2009) <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/>

<sup>26</sup> Beehner et al., The Taming of the Tigers.

<sup>27</sup> Then President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, and Defense Secretary Gotoboya Rajapaksa (brother of the President)

<sup>28</sup> Lionel Beehner, "What Sri Lanka Can Teach Us about COIN." *Small Wars Journal* (2010) [www.smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/513-Beehner.pdf](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/513-Beehner.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Beehner et al., The Taming of the Tigers.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

operations under a determined political leadership.<sup>31</sup> The model's partialness to operational freedom implied that humanitarian contemplations took a backseat to military action.<sup>32</sup> The use of indiscriminate bombing by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces was a critical albeit controversial part of their COIN plan.<sup>33</sup> In summary, the American COIN promotes a population-centric approach while the Sri Lankan COIN endorses an enemy-centric approach; both run counter to each other.

The following is an explanation of the major features of the Sri Lankan Model:

#### *Political Will*

Although, the Sri Lankan Model highlights the importance of the armed forces, without political backing this has scant meaning. Rather than surrounding itself in ambiguity as it did in the past, the Rajapaksa government came out with a clear objective to eliminate the insurgency. Mahinda Rajapaksa's government took control in 2005 and was elected on an uncompromising nationalist platform – it was supported by the fundamentalist Buddhist clergy and extreme Sinhalese parties in Sri Lanka.<sup>34</sup> Rajapaksa also drew support from the Sinhalese public, his constituency, via his promise to eradicate the LTTE at any cost. With their (Sinhalese) support, there was no concern of being heavy handed against Tamil insurgents and civilians alike (as they were not his political base). Under Rajapaksa's capable leadership, the GoSL implemented economic, military, political and intelligence efforts through the Sri Lankan Model.<sup>35</sup> He surrounded himself with a passionate team that shared his distaste for the LTTE – this included his brother and Defense Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, and General Fonseka – the army chief. The brothers assured General Fonseka that the army had the complete support of the GoSL and to not worry about any political blowback. According to Shashikumar, President Rajapaksa backed the army to win the war and he assured them that he would handle any local and or international political pressures.<sup>36</sup> General Fonseka himself cites that it was the first time the military enjoyed this extent of political support and that it was the political leadership and military commitment that led the country to victory. Hashim notes that Gotabhaya Rajapaksa stated that destroying the LTTE was the main goal and the civil and military leadership were working close together.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Adapt Your Armed Forces to the Threat*

The defeat of the LTTE was a military one but to ensure this end, the Sri Lankan government needed to train, fund and reinvigorate its armed forces – this includes the SLA, air force and navy. According to interviews of senior SLA officials the army increased its numbers from 10,000 (before the war began) to 200,000 by the war's end in 2009.<sup>38</sup> There were several major changes made in the armed forces that led to the LTTE's defeat; a more flexible and innovative army, a budget increase to proliferate troop numbers, training soldiers in jungle and

<sup>31</sup> Azat Sajjad Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations during Eelam War IV: Comparative Analysis of Gulala and Rajapaksa Models to Determine Future Applicability", (Masters Thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2013)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>34</sup> Beehner, *The Taming of the Tigers*

<sup>35</sup> Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations"

<sup>36</sup> Shashikumar, "Lessons from the Sri Lanka War"

<sup>37</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>38</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

medical warfare to create a counter-guerilla force and many others.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, the SLA gave impetus to small-units that were skilled in various operations – for instance bunker busting, night operations and room clearing.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Sri Lankan army adopted the SIOT (Special Infantry Operations Team) concept – these soldiers were trained in jungle warfare and medical training amongst other operations.<sup>41</sup> The SLA entrusted the 8-man SIOT's to conduct long missions and gave commanders on ground accented authority<sup>42</sup> –their use was extensive and caught the LTTE heavily off guard<sup>43</sup>.

The Sri Lankan navy and air force also had an important role to play. Eelam War IV saw the simultaneous use of SLA, navy and air force – ground troops were supported by close air support and the navy was used to block LTTE access to arms and ammunition stockpiles.<sup>44</sup> The Sri Lankan navy also used large counter-horde fast action boats to defeat LTTE's own hordes of boats.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the number of naval personnel soared by 50% after 2000, while patrol and coastal combat forces increased by an overwhelming 233%.<sup>46</sup> The air force on the other hand, not only provided ground support for troops, but found their role accentuated when the LTTE began state building endeavors (formation of banks, schools, hospitals) which made them easy targets for aerial bombardment.<sup>47</sup> In the end, it was a joint and coordinated effort by the army, air force and navy in defeating the insurgency.

#### *Regulate Media*

Rajapaksa's government saw the media as a damaging force to the war, and controlled independent media from entering the battlefield,<sup>48</sup> the logic being that the media could bring about unwanted attention (especially international) that would increase pressure to stop the war effort. This in turn would be exploited by the LTTE, as it had done in the past. The Rajapaksa government created the Media Centre for National Security and Defense website to propagate the government's own narrative.<sup>49</sup> There was a single version of the war that the media could report – that of the Sri Lankan government.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the messaging by the official website of the Tamils, Tamilnet, could not be independently confirmed due to constricted access to the war-zone.<sup>51</sup> During the LTTE's last stand in the northern Vanni region of the island, there was

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<sup>39</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>40</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>41</sup> Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "Strategic Analysis of Sri Lankan Military's Counter- Insurgency Operations." (2010) <http://futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1266992558-FDIStrategicAnalysisPaper-12February2010.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>43</sup> Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "Strategic Analysis of Sri Lankan Military's Counter- Insurgency Operations." (2010) <http://futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1266992558-FDIStrategicAnalysisPaper-12February2010.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Lalwani, "Size Still Matters"

<sup>45</sup> Layton, "How Sri Lanka Won the War."

<sup>46</sup> Lalwani, "Size Still Matters"

<sup>47</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>48</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>49</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>50</sup> Shashikumar, "Lessons from the Sri Lanka War"

<sup>51</sup> Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations"

essentially a blackout for both the international media and monitors alike<sup>52</sup> – this is also the time when many civilians had been killed due to indiscriminate violence by security forces.

### *Engage Internationally*

The assistance from international actors, mainly states, that culminated in Sri Lanka achieving her objectives cannot be overstated. Sri Lanka was auspicious in the sense that it had the support of a powerful China and other major regional actors such as Pakistan and India. The Chinese provided both military and economic aid – \$1 billion in 2005 – annually to support the Sri Lankan government's war effort, and in return acquired key contracts with respect to seaports and other economic ventures.<sup>53</sup> According to interviews, during the time of Eelam IV, Sri Lankan operations and weapons were being funded by Beijing.<sup>54</sup> The Sri Lankans also received lines of credit for arms purchases and oil from Iran, Pakistan, Libya and Russia. Pakistan also aided Sri Lanka by providing twenty-two of their primary Al-Khaled battle tanks.<sup>55</sup>

The official Sri Lankan Model (or Rajapaksa Model) itself mentions the phrase “Keep your neighbor in the loop.” Paralleling this phrase in the paper, and with a dynamic foreign policy, the GoSL established cordial relations with India, which once used to train and fund the LTTE. India aided the Sri Lankan Navy by providing critical naval intelligence vis-à-vis the movements of the LTTE navy vessels that would sustain the LTTE insurgency. Relying on foreign navies and intelligence, the Sri Lankan Navy intercepted the LTTE maritime arm supplies.<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>

### *No Negotiations or Ceasefires*

The message was clear from the GoSL. There will be no negotiations or ceasefires because in the previous encounters the LTTE had used them to regroup, rearm, and consolidate themselves for future fights.<sup>58</sup> This is not to say that the Sri Lankans were not guilty themselves of using periods of non-fighting to regroup and redo their own strategies, but since ceasefires and negotiations never led to lasting peace, there seemed little point in following old ways. Ceasefires actually protracted violence by allowing both sides to rearm themselves, and more importantly, prevented a weaker LTTE from being annihilated in previous wars.<sup>59</sup> Negotiations can only work when both sides are willing to compromise with each other, but it was apparent early on that the GoSL found the dream of Tamil Eelam as an unacceptable reality.<sup>60</sup> Eelam War IV was not to be ceased until a decisive and final blow was struck to the LTTE. In the past, negotiations and ceasefires were not only used by the LTTE to regroup themselves, but also to propagate acts of terror and chaos. For example, the LTTE assassinated the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and attempted to kill the commander of the army during a ceasefire. The international

<sup>52</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>53</sup> Neil A. Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers." *Joint Force Quarterly* 59: (2010) 39- 44. [www.ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ](http://www.ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ)

<sup>54</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>55</sup> Layton, "How Sri Lanka Won the War."

<sup>56</sup> Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations"

<sup>57</sup> Lalwani, "Size Still Matters"

<sup>58</sup> Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations"

<sup>59</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>60</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

pressure to start negotiations and ceasefires were blatantly ignored, as they were seen as counterproductive by the Rajapaksa government.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Ignore International Pressure that May Distract from the End Goal*

The official Sri Lankan Model (Rajapaksa Model) phrases this characteristic very crudely as “go to hell.” The premise of this is to ignore intentional pressure and criticism, as in the past they had led to a cessation of fighting and reinvigorated the LTTE, which ironically led to more casualties in the future. Rajapaksa’s government thought the previous governments had caved into the demands of the international community and allowed the LTTE to regroup,<sup>62</sup> hence, this government was resolute in not repeating past mistakes. The “go to hell” facet of the Rajapaksa Model was quite integral, as it resulted in the success of the GoSL.<sup>63</sup> This strategy was almost uncompromisable, as even the British and French foreign ministers were ignored when they suggested that the government negotiate with the LTTE during Eelam IV.<sup>64</sup> In February 2009, during Eelam War IV, human rights organizations, later followed by America, the United Kingdom, Japan and others raised concerns over civilian casualties and called for a temporary cessation of the conflict to allow humanitarian access to the battlefield,<sup>65</sup> but the GoSL ignored these calls all the way up until April 2009 as it knew it was close to annihilating the insurgency.

#### *Indiscriminate Violence*

By far the most controversial and morally egregious facet of the model, indiscriminate violence is nonetheless the one that dealt most damage to the group. The Rajapaksa government, however, is not the only one that committed to the “Indiscriminate Violence” doctrine. Past governments had done the same in previous wars and operations (mimicking their LTTE counterparts), but ironically, doing so only emboldened the insurgency rather than harming it. Due to past Sri Lankan governments using indiscriminate force, Tamils migrated to the north from the south of the Island – this demographic increase in Tamil ratios in the northern province led to more potential recruits for the LTTE.<sup>66</sup> During Eelam War IV, massive civilian deaths were reported in the final stages when the LTTE was cornered in northern Vanni. Although it is difficult to pinpoint an accurate number of the non-combatant casualties during Eelam IV, there are some estimates available from international organizations. Human Rights Watch stated that 30 indiscriminate aerial and artillery attacks on hospitals and medical facilities took place since December 2008 in northern Vanni.<sup>67</sup> In the final phase of Eelam IV, the United Nations (U.N.) estimates that 40,000 civilians died due to indiscriminate SLA shelling.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the U.N. estimates that 7,000 civilians were killed and over 13,000 were injured from January to May

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<sup>61</sup> Shashikumar, “Lessons from the Sri Lanka War”.

<sup>62</sup> Hashim, "When Counterinsurgency Wins."

<sup>63</sup> Khan, “Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations”

<sup>64</sup> Shashikumar, “Lessons from the Sri Lanka War”

<sup>65</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>66</sup> Nikolaos Biziouras, “Rebels, Soldiers, and Counterinsurgency Tactics: Drawing Policy Prescriptions from the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009),” (paper presented at Annual ISSS-ISAC 2014 Conference, Austin TX, November 14, 2014)

<sup>67</sup> “Sri Lanka: Repeated Shelling of Hospitals Evidence of War Crimes”, *Human Rights Watch*, May 8, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/08/sri-lanka-repeated-shelling-hospitals-evidence-war-crimes>

<sup>68</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

2009, while other estimates suggest 20,000 civilians were killed.<sup>69</sup> Albeit morally and legally repugnant, the strategy maximized LTTE combatant deaths, including Prabhakaran's, and ended the insurgency.

The LTTE itself should also carry the blame for civilian casualties, as they were infamous for using human shields and travelled in tight units with family members. Nonetheless, there is still a plethora of evidence that suggests deliberate targeting of civilians by GoSL.<sup>70</sup> The GoSL has denied any and all wrongdoing or humanitarian abuse in the war.

### **The Sri Lankan Environment**

The Model should not be looked as an isolated case, but instead should be appreciated with regards to its contextual and environmental settings – the model was operating not in a closed system, but was part of the regional and global environment. The Sri Lankan Model was a successful one which suited the environment in which it was applied.<sup>71</sup> It was a dialectic process between both, and hence they should be studied together.

In other words, the Sri Lankan victory was a combination of internal and external factors, and not just the employment of innovative tactics or a grand model. Internal defections from the LTTE (mainly that of Colonel Karuna), the 2004 floods that devastated LTTE areas, the new anti-terror global mindset after 9/11, and poor choices made by Prabhakaran played huge roles in the LTTE's defeat.<sup>72</sup> Sri Lankans took glorious advantage of the post 9/11 anti-terror environment, and by proactive diplomacy convinced 32 countries that the LTTE was a terror outfit, thus drastically depreciating its funding and legitimacy from abroad.<sup>73</sup> The 2004 floods in Sri Lanka struck a hefty blow to major LTTE areas, and killed many of their men and destroyed their equipment. It was concluded in a study (researching the Sri Lankan COIN model) that a non-expeditionary COIN that uses brute military force (like the Sri Lankan COIN) can be an effective strategy if one or more conditions are present (i.e. the presence of huge public support for a military resolution; the terrain being favorable for such type of a COIN (a peninsula or island); the ability to minimize the international community's influence).<sup>74</sup> The preceding reinforces the idea of how a country's environment, international pressure, local support, and even the terrain of a country plays an integral and almost decisive role in the type of COIN a state can apply or get away with.

Lastly, the Sri Lankans had support from their regional neighbors. It would have been a different story if China and its billions of dollars were not available, if Pakistan and its expertise on COIN and equipment were absent, or if India had continued, like in the past, to provide safe haven and other support to the LTTE.

In summary, a Sri Lankan scholar stated it best when he said that the war was not won by Sri Lanka and Rajapaksa alone, but by the specific configuration of domestic, regional and global conditions that made it possible for the Tamil Tigers to lose the war<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> "Sri Lanka: Government Proposal Won't Address War Crimes", *Human Rights Watch*, May 7, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/07/sri-lanka-government-proposal-wont-address-war-crimes>

<sup>70</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>71</sup> Khan, "Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations"

<sup>72</sup> Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers"

<sup>73</sup> Jalal, "Think Like a Guerilla: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Sri Lanka."

<sup>74</sup> Beehner et al., *The Taming of the Tigers*.

<sup>75</sup> Lalwani, "Size Still Matters"

## The Model's Applicability in Pakistan

This section entails a point-by-point analysis of the facets of the Sri Lankan Model with regards to its applicability in Pakistan – this is done in order to identify where Pakistan excels, lacks, and which part(s) of the Model it does not subscribe to. Since this is the main section of the paper, it will go into some historical detail as well.

### *Political Will*

In a report titled “Pakistan’s Delicate Civil-Military Balance,” it was highlighted that Pakistan has a past riddled with contentious civil-military relations that have resulted in recurring coups in the country.<sup>76</sup> This contentious history between the civil government and military is characterized by the fact that there have been three successful military coups in the country. In 1979, army dictator, Zia Ul Haq, put to death the then Prime Minister, Zulfiqar Bhutto, while later democratically elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif sacked two army chiefs – Jehangir Karamat and Musharraf, the latter of whom subsequently toppled Sharif’s government in 1999. The Pakistani army has an important say in the country’s national security and foreign policy issues, but certain academics claim that it has more say than the government. Frederic Grare, an expert on Southern Asia, argues that the army is the major decision maker with respect to defense and foreign policy, according to most analysts<sup>77</sup>.

While this might have been true in the past, recent trends show the army is shifting away from the political realm, or is at least not enjoying the same power it once had in political affairs. For example, Nawaz Sharif’s election in 2013 was the first successful handover between two democratically elected governments in the country’s history.<sup>78</sup> While there is a significant improvement compared to past divisions between civil-military leaderships, the mutual trust between both is still far from flawless. The civilian government and military leadership must work together in their respective spaces and not meddle in each other’s affairs, or otherwise eradicating insurgents will be impossible. The Sri Lankan Model saw that the civil-military relationship was based on complete mutual trust.

Another factor that hinders the political will and process is that a few Pakistani religious-political parties sympathize with the Taliban and its affiliated groups. For example, the TTP has a support base with some Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) politicians.<sup>79</sup> Most of Pakistan’s militant groups are members of the Deobandi sect, a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam, and the earlier discussed Punjabi terrorist groups that were connected to the Deobandi JUI, and to the network of madrassas (religious schools) tied with it.<sup>80</sup> A political support base not only legitimizes the insurgents cause, but further sows disunity between political parties vis-a-vis the eradication of TTP and other groups.

That being said, credit must be given to both the military and civilian leadership of Raheel Sharif (military chief who retired in November 2016) and Nawaz Sharif (no relation)

<sup>76</sup> "Pakistan's Delicate Civil-Military Balance." *Strategic Comments* 20 (2014)  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13567882.2014.899743>

<sup>77</sup> Grare, "Pakistan's foreign and security policies after the 2013 general election: the Judge, the Politician and the Military."

<sup>78</sup> "Pakistan's Delicate Civil-Military Balance."

<sup>79</sup> Fair, "Pakistan in 2011: Ten Years of the "War on Terror"

<sup>80</sup> Tankel, "Beyond FATA: Exploring the Punjabi Militant Threat to Pakistan."

respectively for coming together in what is being hailed as the most successful counterinsurgent operation in the country's history – ZARB E AZB. The need for the operation arose in 2014 when the TTP attacked the Karachi airport, killing 26 and injuring 18. This resulted in a convergence of opinions between the army, most mainstream political parties, and the government with regards to the destruction of the TTP. The attack on the airport was tragic, but what really enraged the country was the attack on Army Public School Peshawar in December 2014, which saw terrorists kill innocent children. This brought the nation together, giving even greater impetus to the operation. The main target of the Zarb E Azb operation has been the TTP in the North Waziristan agency, an agency in FATA, but other groups operating in the same locale have also been targeted. The operation has been extremely successful and has effectively broken the backbone of the terrorist network.<sup>81</sup> According to a report by PICSS (Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Peace Studies), there has been a fifty percent reduction in deaths in February 2016 compared to January 2016.<sup>82</sup>

Ironically, though unlike President Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka, Nawaz Sharif was not really seen as the hero of the continuing operation, but rather, it was Raheel Sharif. This emphasizes the schism that ordinary citizens still perceive between the military and civilian leaderships due to their uneasy past. This divide, both perceptions and realities, must be redressed so the military and government can continue working together, and should not be limited to solely COIN operations.

Lastly, the political will is deficient in terms of post-military operation activities. Whilst the Pakistan Armed Forces (PAF) have mostly been successful in clearing and holding areas that were previously in the control of the TTP, the civil administration has failed in terms of providing rehabilitation, economic opportunities, and infrastructural links to the local people. This mismatch in terms of capabilities between the PAF and government is a deterrent towards achieving full COIN victories in the long term.

#### *Adapt Armed Forces*

The PAF is the major strength of the country. The PAF, comprising of the army, air force, and navy, along with paramilitary organizations, are the 6th largest armed forces globally and are the largest in the Muslim world. They possess nuclear and second-strike capabilities and have been engaged in four major wars with their arch-rival India. Moreover, they continue to fight a non-conventional guerilla war with insurgents. This implies that the PAF are an active and experienced fighting force in both conventional and asymmetric warfare – not many other armed forces in the world can say the same.

With respect to insurgent operations, there have been some failures in the past, such as in South Waziristan Agency (FATA) in 2004, 2005 and 2008, as the army did not adapt its forces to the guerrilla threat, and suffered heavy loss of life. Eventually, however, it did find its stride – much like the Sri Lankans. Successful operations include Operation Sher Dil (2008-2009) in Bajaur Agency and Operation Rah E Rast (2009) in Swat Valley. Another success story was the South Waziristan operation Rah E Nijat (Path to Salvation) in 2009. Operation Rah E Nijat saw

<sup>81</sup> Umbreen Javaid, "Operation Zarb-e-Azb: A Successful Initiative to Curtail Terrorism South Asian Studies (2015)." *A research journal of South Asian Studies* 30 (2015) 43-58. <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal9>

<sup>82</sup> "Significant Decline in Deaths in Militant Attacks." *Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Peace Studies*. (2016) <https://www.picss.net/archives/4748>

the army using its forces on multiple axes, similar to the Sri Lankans, and grabbing the higher ground to control the valleys.<sup>83</sup> Before and during Operation Rah E Nijat, the army learned from past lessons and melted the TTP resistance in the area, and the Pakistani public heavily supported this operation in South Waziristan.<sup>84</sup> The operation used around 30,000 troops and successfully cleared TTP strongholds like Maken, Kotkai, and Laddah, among many others.<sup>85</sup>

There was much anticipation after Rah E Nijat concluded that another operation should start in the neighboring North Waziristan Agency. This came in 2014 in the highly successful Zarb E Azb, an operation not based solely on kinetic force, as it includes madrasa reforms and the mainstreaming of FATA, since it has lacked development and reforms. The destruction of TTP strongholds, the elimination of public support among FATA residents, and the removal of the bomb creation and munitions factories have been the highlights of this operation.<sup>86</sup> Due to this major endeavor against the TTP and other outfits, terrorist assaults have declined in the country and terrorist infrastructure in the region has been neutralized.<sup>87</sup> There has been a huge learning curve for the PAF compared to earlier operations, which now include strategic knowledge about the terrain and the use of precision weapons.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the Pakistan Army has adapted by learning how to fight in small groups, how to conduct surprise offensive actions, and has even begun using such measures as bird calls to signal approaching terrorists.<sup>89</sup> The Institute for Economics & Peace highlighted some key findings from a study they conducted. Firstly, in 2015 Pakistan had a 38% decline in terrorist-related deaths compared to 2014. Secondly, Operation Zarb E Azb was responsible in part for the decline of terrorism, combined with the infighting within TTP. Thirdly, Pakistan had the third largest reduction in deaths from terrorism for 2015, thus experiencing the lowest number of deaths since 2008. And lastly, the country also experienced a 45% drop in terrorist activity compared to 2014.<sup>90</sup>

The army faces quite a challenging and rugged terrain vis-à-vis FATA, where the porous mountainous border allows militants to hide and or to escape to Afghanistan. The Afghan forces, despite U.S. and NATO military support, are not on par with Pakistani forces, thus making the capture and killing of escaped militants even more difficult. This has soured Pak-Afghan relations, which make achievement of success even more taxing. Sustained peace is not

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<sup>83</sup> Sameer Lalwani, "The Pakistan Military's Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in 2009." *CTC Sentinel* 3 (2010): 9-13. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/publications/sentinel>.

<sup>84</sup> Reza Jan and Charlie Szrom, "The War in Waziristan: Analysis of Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Deliverance)." *Critical Threats*, (2009) [http://www.criticalthreats.org/sites/default/files/pdf\\_upload/analysis/Operation\\_Rah-e-Nijat\\_Phase\\_One\\_High\\_Quality.pdf](http://www.criticalthreats.org/sites/default/files/pdf_upload/analysis/Operation_Rah-e-Nijat_Phase_One_High_Quality.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Imtiaz Ali, "Military Victory in South Waziristan or Beginning of a Long War?" *Terrorism Monitor*, 7 (2009), 6-8 <https://jamestown.org/programs/tm>.

<sup>86</sup> Javaid and Khan, "Complex Regional Dynamics: Pakistan's need for Political Paradigm Shift."

<sup>87</sup> Javaid, "Operation Zarb-e-Azb: A Successful Initiative to Curtail Terrorism" *South Asian Studies* 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Mariam Shah, "Comparing Pakistan's Past Military Operation with Operation Zarb-e-Azb." Aug. 16, 2014. <http://www.pakistankakhudahafiz.com/news/national/comparing-pakistans-past-military-operations-operation-zarb-e-azb/>

<sup>89</sup> Tim Craig, "To Fight the Taliban, Pakistani military turns to unorthodox but simple tactics." *Washington Post* 2015 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/to-fight-the-taliban-pakistani-military-turns-to-unorthodox-but-simple-tactics/2015/04/15/eac5b088-e1ee-11e4-ae0f-f8c46aa8c3a4\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ca8b8ebe603f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/to-fight-the-taliban-pakistani-military-turns-to-unorthodox-but-simple-tactics/2015/04/15/eac5b088-e1ee-11e4-ae0f-f8c46aa8c3a4_story.html?utm_term=.ca8b8ebe603f)

<sup>90</sup> "Global Terrorism Index" *Institute for Economics & Peace*. <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>

attainable without simultaneous and effective counterterrorism efforts on both sides of the border.

Nonetheless, the PAF have played their part in clearing and holding areas, but the socio-economic grievances of the people in FATA and other underdeveloped areas must also be addressed. This being the government's job, it should be prioritized so the battles can be won in the long-term politically rather than just militarily. The general trend is that after the military succeeds in taking back areas under insurgent control, the local grievances remain unanswered by the government.

The air force has also played a pivotal role, and this too must be highlighted. I had the opportunity to interview a retired, three-star Lieutenant General of the Pakistan Army,<sup>91</sup> who informed me that due to the air force's role in ground support, many lives were saved in Operation Zarb E Azb and the operations in Swat. He added that the air force also took part in precision strikes when intelligence agencies had confirmed insurgent hideouts, stockpiles, or training facilities to them. Furthermore, he mentioned the pivotal role of reconnaissance conducted by the air force in rough, jagged, and mountainous terrains. It was a joint and heavily coordinated endeavor between both the army and air force. Pakistan's Armed Forces, after a shaky start, have shown that they are more than capable of defeating insurgents.

#### *Regulate Media*

Pakistan's private electronic independent media saw a boom during President Musharraf's tenure. The proliferation of news channels has been astounding in the past ten years. Unfortunately, Pakistani media has a history of being quite sensationalist, and even immature, due to the greed of ratings and money. For example, during the Karachi Airport Operation in 2014, the media, instead of censoring certain sensitive information, provided terrorists with key intel through their live feed of the operation.<sup>92</sup> The media has also provided space and time to terrorists in both print and electronic sources<sup>93</sup> – this unregulated free coverage not only propagates their beliefs but also spreads the terror that they want to instill in the public.

Nonetheless, with regards to Operation Zarb E Azb, the media was regulated and reserved, and so its positive role must be commended. The media did not conduct irresponsible reporting and did not provide terrorist space to broadcast their views.<sup>94</sup> This was achieved through government regulation and a coordinated effort with the media outlets – it was clear that the operation was for the country, and that all actors must play their part. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the news disseminating body of the PAF, has been the primary and sole source of news regarding Zarb E Azb. From all the soldiers martyred and areas cleared, to the munitions factories destroyed and terrorists killed, everything was reported by ISPR through tweets or press conferences. This allowed for limited disparaging reports that could lessen public support. Furthermore, the military was smart in letting select groups of media outlets visit insurgent training sites and bomb factories because it led to greater public support for offensive

<sup>91</sup> Retired Lieutenant General in the Pakistan Army, in discussion with the author, October 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Shaukat, "War on Terror: Media Should Behave Maturely." Jan. 23, 2015. [http://readersupportednews.org/pm-section/86-86/28198-war-on-terror-media-should-behave-maturely\\_4](http://readersupportednews.org/pm-section/86-86/28198-war-on-terror-media-should-behave-maturely_4)

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Ashraf Javed, "Media Maturity in Zarb-e-Azb." *The Nation*, Aug. 2014. <http://nation.com.pk/national/13-Aug-2014/media-maturity-in-zarb-e-azb>

action.<sup>95</sup> International media was also reporting the same story as the local media due to their preliminary source, ISPR, being the same.

This handling of the narrative was extremely important for Sri Lanka, and has helped Pakistan immensely as well, but there are major differences between both approaches. Where the Sri Lankans completely blocked local and international media coverage, Pakistan only regulated it. Furthermore, when the Sri Lankan did report on Eelam War IV via state-run news, they had a propagandist motivation as they had used indiscriminate violence. This, however, was not the case when ISPR was dispelling news as PAF had nothing to hide since the COIN engagement was strictly following humanitarian laws. Although collateral damage and loss of life is unavoidable in conflicts, the PAF has handled these caveats exceptionally well.

### *Engage Internationally*

A congressional report cites that Pakistan has received \$25.91 billion in military and economic aid since 2001.<sup>96</sup> Although military and developmental aid have been provided yearly by America, China, and other states, the author of this article that the plethora of actors, states, and sub-states, both allies and enemies, is so immensely engrossed in the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan, that it becomes exceedingly difficult to obtain long-term strategic objectives. The Sri Lankan and LTTE experience, by contrast, was extremely isolated compared to Pakistan. Although Pakistan has enjoyed a lot of aid, the direct involvement of actors (Saudi Arabia, Iran, America, NATO, Afghanistan, China and India), and their differing policies on how to take action has been counterproductive in tackling insurgency.

America has, no doubt, been Pakistan's main ally in the war on terror, but there have been many instances which have led to deep distrust between both countries. For example, due to an incursion by NATO on Pakistani soil, which led to the martyrdom of 24 Pakistani soldiers and injury 14, Pakistan closed NATO's supply routes, demanded an American apology, and told America to vacate Shamsi Air Base.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the unilateral action undertaken by U.S. Navy Seals, which led to the death of Osama Bin Laden, produced even more strenuous relations between both countries.<sup>98</sup> It hardly paints an idyllic picture when you and your key allies are not on the same page.

The Pakistanis also feared that the Americans would eventually leave Afghanistan like they did after fending off the Soviets and Pakistanis, and thus they would inherit a potentially chaotic situation – this has since become true, as most American troops have left Afghanistan. It also does not help that, since 9/11, most Pakistanis have had a negative view of America and its War on Terror. According to a study conducted, Pakistani informants were against the War on Terror and saw it having negative repercussions on Muslims and Pakistan.<sup>99</sup> This view seems to

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<sup>95</sup> S. M. Hali, "The Media and Zarb-e-Azb." *Daily Times*, August 11, 2014.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/12-Aug-2014/the-media-and-Zarb-e-Azb>

<sup>96</sup> Mubashir Hassan, "Pakistan 'Received \$25.91b' from US since 9/11." *The Nation*, June 27, 2013.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/27-Jun-2013/pakistan-received-25-91b-from-us-since-9-11>

<sup>97</sup> Ahmad Rashid Malik, "The Salala Incident: Implications for the Pakistan-United States Ties." *Strategic Studies* 32 (2012): 45-60. <http://www.issi.org.pk/category/iss-publications/strategic-studies/>

<sup>98</sup> "US and Pakistan: A Troubled Relationship." *Boulevard Exerieur* 18 (2012): 1-3.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2012.671054>

<sup>99</sup> Aasima Safdar, Adrian Budiman, and Norsiah Abdul Hamid, "War Against Terrorism: Perception of Pakistani Informant." *Pakistan Vision* 17 (2001): 1-24. <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/12>

be justified, especially since the effects of the American war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria has divided the Muslims in the Middle East and the Subcontinent.

The controversial use of drones must also be emphasized. America uses CIA and military drones to conduct strikes on insurgents in the country's border areas, and it has been cited that the collateral damage in these drone strikes can lead to the further radicalization of people. Although short-term results might be achieved by drones through killing extremists, it still leads to an "exacerbation of deep-rooted societal issues" which can lead to increased militancy of people in the country.<sup>100</sup> The drone controversy is a contentious issue in Pakistan, as it receives almost exclusively negative feedback from Pakistani citizens –especially in FATA – and news outlets. The use of drones, however, has decreased substantially over the last few years.

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been one marked with vicissitudes – cooperative sometimes, uncooperative at others. Due to the mountainous, yet porous, Afghan-Pak border stretching to an estimated 2,430 kilometers, cross-border terrorist movement has been high. Due to this cross-border terrorism, the two countries have embarked on a mutual blame game with each other.<sup>101</sup> Battling various sub-state insurgent groups with communication gaps and blame games will only lead to further complications than already exists. To make matters worse, India, the regional rival of Pakistan, has been trying to negate Pakistan's influence vis-à-vis Afghanistan, and has invested a lot in Afghanistan's development, much to the disarray of Pakistan. India, since the fall of the Taliban regime in Kabul, has adopted a proactive Afghan policy, which includes cultural, economic, social and political assistance.<sup>102</sup> India thus sees a potential comrade in Afghanistan to counter Pakistan, and is spending money in various Afghan sectors to do so.<sup>103</sup>

Not so shockingly, there is also growing evidence of Indian involvement in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. A video released by Dawn News shows that in 2016, Pakistan captured an Indian spy, Kulbushan Jadhav, who has confessed on video that he assisted anti-state Baloch groups on behest of Indian spy agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).<sup>104</sup> It is becoming apparent that India, and possibly other actors, are trying to malign and destabilize Pakistan while the country is battling insurgents and dealing with other domestic issues.

Lastly, the Saudi-Iran proxy war in Pakistan must also be emphasized. Iran and Saudi Arabia have been indirectly fighting in Pakistan since the Soviet invasion and Iranian revolution – both in 1979. Riyadh funds Sunni madrassas, while Tehran counters by funding Shia madrassas. An article by the Economist states that Pakistan is entrenched with madrassas either getting finances from the Saudis or the Iranians, and that the country believes foreign funding, even from allies, is causative of the militant dilemma.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Faiqa Mahmood, "The Efficacy of US Drone Strikes in Pakistan: The Long View." *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 11 (2016) 32. <http://yalejournal.org/>.

<sup>101</sup> Javaid, "Operation Zarb-e-Azb: A Successful Initiative to Curtail Terrorism South Asian Studies 2015."

<sup>102</sup> Tabassum Firdous, Tajalley Nazir, and Ashfaq M. Ali, "India's Afghan Policy: Pakistan Perspective and China Factor." *The Journal of Central Asian Studies* 22 (2015) 209-220. <https://www.cfplist.com/default.aspx>

<sup>103</sup> Ahmed Ali Naqvi, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations Post 2014: Impacts on Pakistan's Security." *Journal of Political Studies* 22 (2015): 197-214. <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/6>

<sup>104</sup> "Govt. airs video of Indian spy admitting involvement in Balochistan insurgency." *Dawn*, March 31, 2016. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1248669>

<sup>105</sup> "Saudi-Iran Rivalry Puts Pakistan in a Bind." *The Economist*. February 23, 2016 <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1673967151&Country=Pakistan&topic=Politics>

The region of South Asia is fighting a war on terror where many international players are trying to do what is best for only them. Unfortunately, even allies are distrustful of each other. The Syrian Civil War and its myriad of actors and policies should act as a lesson for South Asia and other actors to not engage in similar behavior. International engagement in Pakistan is present in the midst of an insurgent war, but so far, seems to be counter-productive.

#### *No negotiations or ceasefires*

Negotiations have been conducted in the past with insurgents but have proven to be counterproductive for the government (which has also been the case with Sri Lanka). The military had some calamitous operations in 2004-2007, which led to three rounds of negotiations with the Taliban in 2004, 2005, 2006; this move actually brought the insurgency more legitimacy and strength.<sup>106</sup> The three major negotiations or peace deals that have taken place with the insurgents include: The Shakai Peace Agreement (2004), Srarogha Peace Agreement (2005), and the highly infamous Swat Agreement (2008), which allowed insurgents to impose Sharia law in Swat valley. All of these negotiations failed due to the insurgents not keeping their end of the bargain and so military action had to be re-initiated.

A study, while reviewing these three major negotiations and other unwritten ones, concluded that all of them were signed from a position of government weakness and hence allowed the militants to attain noteworthy concessions which included money and legitimacy.<sup>107</sup> As the LTTE used ceasefires and peace talks to regroup, so did the TTP and its affiliates. It must be added here that America has frowned upon the Pakistani initiative towards negotiations and there was little to no pressure from them on the Pakistani government to initiate them. Pakistan, instead, has found better success in negotiating from a stronger position such as in conclusion of Operation Sherdil (2009) in Bajaur Agency.

Presently, the government is in a position of power due to Operation Zarb E Azb, and is in no mood to start negotiations or initiate ceasefires anytime soon. It would be wise to follow the Sri Lankan route and keep fighting as there is no international pressure to stop and there exists huge public support for the operation itself. However, only necessary and discriminate force should be applied unlike the Sri-Lankan Model.

#### *Ignore international pressure that may distract from the goal*

Pakistan was born in 1947. Finding itself feeling the precarious pull of two superpowers during the Cold War, it had a decision to make. Although Pakistan wanted a non-aligned foreign policy, it became more reliant on the Americans. This policy of reliance has continued until the present day, albeit with some ups and downs in the progress. The reality is that, instead of facing similar pressure like the Sri Lankan's faced i.e. to stop Eelam War IV due to their gun blazing COIN strategy, America, and the West have instead pressurized Pakistan to initiate counterinsurgent operations or to do better in the wake of failed operations. This is mainly because the Americans understand that Pakistan uses force as described by Western COIN and not indiscriminately like the Sri Lankan's. Although, America and the West can exert considerable amount of pressure on Pakistan, Pakistan does not submit to America's will on many occasions, thus leading to troubled relations from time to time.

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<sup>106</sup> Lalwani, "The Pakistan Military's Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in 2009."

<sup>107</sup> Daud Khattak, "Reviewing Pakistan's Peace Deals with the Taliban", September 26, 2012.

<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/post/reviewing-Pakistans-peace-deals-with-the-taliban>

Pakistan has come under immense pressure from Britain and America to play a greater role, especially after attacks in the West in which the terrorists were Pakistani born. Al Jazeera reported that Pakistan was under pressure to act against militants after the London Bombings, since it was revealed that three of the bombers were British-Pakistani and had recently visited Pakistan.<sup>108</sup> It seems Pakistan has a ‘reverse pressure’ scenario compared to the Sri-Lankans where Pakistan is asked to take offensive initiative (or do better) rather than curtailing it. This is also due to the importance of defeating Al Qaeda, Taliban, and its affiliates for America and its allies. If this was not also America’s war, the pressure would be significantly less.

Previously discussed Operation Rah E Nijat in South Waziristan was commanded by Pakistan’s western allies, who in the past had been very critical of the country’s military endeavors.<sup>109</sup> The Pakistani’s were urged by the Americans years before Operation Zarb E Azb to initiate an operation in the North Waziristan agency to clear out the TTP, Haqqani network, Uzbek and other fighter strongholds.<sup>110</sup> Thus, if Pakistan continues with vast operations (when required) like Zarb E Azb, it bodes well for the country, as similar successful operations have received critical acclaim at home and abroad. Prominent nations that have a degree of influence on Pakistan such as China and America will almost always welcome operations against insurgency. The former because of its heavy investment in the country’s energy sector via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which is the star project of China’s massive Belt and Road Initiative,<sup>111</sup> while the latter views it as a deterrent for a doomsday scenario that they themselves propagate, i.e. insurgents getting their hands on Pakistani nukes.

#### *Indiscriminate Violence*

The retired Army General<sup>112</sup> that I interviewed informed me about the stance of the army and government on indiscriminate violence. He stated that there has been no COIN operation in the country which put civilians and insurgents in the same basket. The Pakistan Army, he said, has a COIN manual which focuses on “hearts and minds” rather than blunt force. He gave me an example of what the operational procedures in COIN endeavors are in the country: firstly, the army begins by cordoning off an insurgent-ridden area and then sends notice to the people in the villages and towns to clear out. After this, a screening process of the departing people takes place which is conducted by the army, village elders and the local government – they screen the people exiting the areas to make sure that no insurgents can escape under the guise of civilians. These people are then housed and taken care of in IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps until the battle is over. The army and air force then proceed to fight the insurgents only when all civilians have left. It can be a tedious process he says but one that is necessary.

Other than this, Pakistan simply cannot use indiscriminate violence and there are many factors for this. For example, if the country deliberately targets Pashtun (second largest ethnicity in the country) civilians and insurgents indiscriminately, it would lead to mass hysteria and immense public outcry from not only the millions of Pashtuns but from all Pakistani’s alike. It

<sup>108</sup> "Pakistan in Post-London Crackdown.", *Al Jazeera*, (2005)

<http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2005/07/2008410103438817571.html>

<sup>109</sup> Ali, "Military Victory in South Waziristan or Beginning of a Long War?"

<sup>110</sup> Steve Coll, "Pakistan's Offensive, America's Withdrawal." June 19, 2014.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/pakistans-offensive-americas-withdrawal>

<sup>111</sup> Robin Mills et al., China’s Road to the Gulf: Opportunities for the GCC in the Belt and Road initiative (Dubai: Emerge Eighty-Five, October 2017)

<sup>112</sup> Former Lieutenant General in the Pakistan Army, in discussion with the author, October 2017.

would also alienate the supporters of the army and government and would add impetus to anti-state rhetoric – this would in turn help anti-state actors such as India. Secondly, doing so will benefit the insurgents as fence-sitters and ex-state supporters will give their backing to the insurgents (and hence insurgent numbers will proliferate) or in the least not support the government. The Sri-Lankan government made the mistake of indiscriminate violence in earlier campaigns before Eelam IV and this move, at that time, increased LTTE's legitimacy and numbers. Thirdly, the international outcry would also be immense (both from state and non-state actors). This is because the country, due to its pivotal role in the war on terror with America, is usually in the media's spotlight. Hence, the Pakistani state and security administration does not and will not engage in any kind of indiscriminate violence – it has been free from this menacing blame by domestic and foreign actors and plans to keep the same true in the future. In the country's view, the war is truly won by winning over hearts and minds.

## Pakistan's Environment

“No insurgency will pose the single kind of threat, environment, and condition to apply a universally approved solution to the problem”<sup>113</sup> – a quote that resonates with the spirit of this paper. There are many differences (and some similarities) between both the Sri Lankan and Pakistani scenario/environment which might undermine Pakistan copying the Sri Lankan model in full. For example, the LTTE was motivated by ethno-nationalism, while the TTP and others are motivated by religion; where Sri Lanka faced one primary insurgent, Pakistan faces multiple groups under the TTP umbrella and moreover, the fact that the relationship between military and civilian leaderships is different in both countries. Furthermore, where the Sri Lankan Model was applied on an island (specifically on the northern and eastern portions) with a population of only 20 million people (and this was vital for their success), Pakistan's endeavors have direct and indirect implications for over 180 million people. Moreover, Pakistan cannot get away with indiscriminate violence and an overwhelming brute force military strategy (not that the country wants to) for many reasons as earlier entailed in the “Indiscriminate Violence” subsection of Pakistan.

Although, the previous subsections have described Pakistan's internal and external environments in detail, a summary is still presented here. Pakistan is in a strategic location where multiple actors, state and non-state, exist and the complex situation is characterized by self-interest, trust deficits, negative rhetoric, power politics, and huge communication gaps. The country is a battleground for the Saudi Arabia and Iran proxy war since over many decades – both countries support their own sect of Islam and in times enable sectarian extremist groups. Indian involvement has been rumored and proven by the confession of the recently caught spy who was conducting anti-state activities in Balochistan. Due to external involvement and funding of insurgents, it is extremely difficult to sever the sustenance of extremism. The country is currently in a situation where most U.S. troops have departed from Afghanistan and have left a potential time bomb situation in the hands of the Pakistanis. It is also in an environment where ISIS is trying to establish a foothold in the country, albeit with scant success so far. While the country has some key allies like China and America, and has received a lot of developmental aid – mainly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,<sup>114</sup> – and military aid (for the procurement of F-

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<sup>113</sup> Khan, “Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Operations”

<sup>114</sup> Mills et al., China's Road to the Gulf

16's, attack helicopters, and other arms and equipment), many negatives still exist in its environment.

In the domestic sphere, issues include the economy, which is not living up to its full potential as unemployment and inflation is high. Furthermore, the country is deeply divided on ethnic and religious lines (Pakistan has several major ethnicities compared to Sri Lanka's two) and there are several sectarian extremist groups present. Political corruption has been rampant for many years and political parties themselves have been relegated to being the voices of only a particular ethnicity (lack of a "Pakistani" party). Furthermore, a mismatch of capabilities is present between the government and the Armed Forces. Whilst the PAF have mostly been successful in clearing and holding areas that were previously in the control of the TTP, the government has been lacking with regards to administrative tasks such as rehabilitation, developing the local economy, and creating infrastructure like roads and railway lines. In other words, due to the government's inefficient use of already limited resources, there has been little done to address local grievances after military operations.

With all of this being stated, it becomes increasingly reinforced how different Pakistan and Sri Lanka's environments are. The General<sup>115</sup> I interviewed gave his invaluable expertise regarding how integral the environment is in establishing a COIN model. He mentioned that every COIN battle is idiosyncratic and that even if an army faces the same insurgent in the same country in similar circumstances, a reassessing of the environment is a must in creating an effective COIN engagement plan. This means that no COIN model should be or is universal. There might be some facets that could be applied from one COIN model to another but there will invariably be numerous changes to it due to environmental considerations. This reifies the paper's argument that a complete replication of the Sri Lankan Model would not work in Pakistan.

## Conclusion

As there are many variances between the two countries and their insurgencies, it is important not to treat the Sri Lankan model as monolithic (this is not just limited to the Sri Lankan Model but extends to all others). In other words, Pakistan must not completely replicate the Sri Lankan Model in its war against the TTP. Although, in everyday rhetoric, it is simplistic to say that Pakistan should follow the Sri Lankan Model to defeat insurgents, this type of thinking excludes the distinct characteristics of each country and their local, regional and global environments. The Sri Lankan Model seems effective, but it will never have the same end effect in Pakistan which is a profoundly dissimilar country with a distinct insurgency threat. Furthermore, there is no possible way that Pakistan would ever pursue a policy of indiscriminate violence like the Sri Lankan's did.

That being said, there are certain takeaways that the government and military of Pakistan should learn from the Sri Lankan Model. For example, Pakistan should develop a strong political will – the civil-military divide and also the political absence when the military clears insurgent territories must be addressed in the future. Pakistan also faces a complex web of actors in its war (United States, China, Afghanistan and NATO) and this can prove counterproductive. This is a little out of Pakistan's control but it should nonetheless try to bridge gaps, so all allies are on the same page.

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<sup>115</sup> Retired Lieutenant General in the Pakistan Army, in discussion with the author, October 2017.

Concurrently, there are also facets that Pakistan is excelling at: The PAF have adapted to the threat well and have played its part excellently while the country has also done well to regulate the media and ignore negotiations and ceasefires with respect to the current operation.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ COIN model. Pakistan should learn from both the Sri Lankan Model and its own experience and create a suitable “Pakistan Model”. This Model in other words should focus on the country’s own peculiar requirements, capabilities, and shortcomings while also keeping the local, regional, and global environment in mind. This has been done with regards to Operation Zarb-e-Azb and should be continued in all future engagements.

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