

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam LTTE

Analysis of Emblem

The flag of LTTE is red and has a jumping, roaring tiger in its centre. The tiger is armed with a round of ammunition and two bayonets.



LTTE has chosen to use a flag as its emblem to stress that it regards its organisation to be representing a nation, Tamil Eelam. The flag was adopted as the national flag of Tamil Eelam on the Second National Heroes Day (27.11.1990).

The colours of the flag are red, black and yellow. The red stands for LTTE's struggle for social changes in Sri Lanka: LTTE wants to wipe out the conflicts between casts, the oppression of women, and above all free the Tamils from their Sinhalese oppressor.

On its web site, LTTE writes that the black on the flag reflects the deaths and hardships that the Tamils have experienced in their struggle for an independent Tamil state.

LTTE considers the right to self-determination to be a basic political right of the Tamil people, and that is why it regards its struggle as a struggle for fairness and justice. According to LTTE, the yellow colour is thus supposed to reflect that its "struggle is based on humanity and human honesty". The colour yellow is not usually associated with these characteristics: in Asian cultures, yellow is a symbol of something sacred or imperial. In Western cultures, it symbolises joy and happiness, while in Arab societies it is used to signify captivity (occupation of territory).

A short notice on the concept of basic political rights; if a free Tamil state is seen to be a basic political right for the Tamils, one could argue that not being killed by political activists is *also* a basic political right. But if this is the case, then LTTE is breaching one basic political right, namely the right for innocent people to live in peace, in order to achieve another, and a rather controversial, political right, the right to live in a free Tamil state. This casts some doubt on LTTE's respect of basic political rights.

The tiger was drawn in 1977 by Nadarajan, a friend of the current LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran is often pictured beside images of tigers, which shows that the tiger is of great symbolic importance to the LTTE. The tiger symbolises aggression, which LTTE emphasises further by using a jumping, roaring animal. The tiger also provides the LTTE with a link to their ancestors, the Chola rulers of south India, who supposedly used a flag with a tiger during battle. Under the reign of the famous rulers Rajaraja I (r. 985-1014) and his son Rajendracola Deva I (r. 1014 – 1044), the Chola Kingdom reached its zenith. The former conquered the northern part of Ceylon in 993, and the latter completed the conquest of Ceylon in 1017. Ceylon was subsequently under Chola rule until 1070. LTTE use the link to the Chola rulers because it wants to state that Tamils have conquered Sri Lanka from the Sinhalese before, and therefore it will be possible for the Tamils to do it again.

The ammunition and bayonets show that LTTE's fight for an independent Tamil state is armed. On its web site, LTTE justifies the use of force by arguing that it is the only way by which it can reach its goal when it is up against a stronger opponent, namely the Sri Lankan Government.

Sources

- The web site of LTTE, <http://www.eelamweb.com>
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Profile

Description

Founded in 1976, the LTTE is the most powerful Tamil group in Sri Lanka and uses overt and illegal methods to raise funds, acquire weapons, and publicize its cause of establishing an independent Tamil state. The LTTE began its armed conflict with the Sri Lankan Government in 1983 and relies on a guerrilla strategy that includes the use of terrorist tactics.

Activities

The Tigers have integrated a battlefield insurgent strategy with a terrorist program that targets not only key personnel in the countryside but also senior Sri Lankan political and military leaders in Colombo and other urban centers. The Tigers are most notorious for their cadre of suicide bombers, the Black Tigers. Political assassinations and bombings are commonplace. The LTTE has refrained from targeting foreign diplomatic and commercial establishments.

Strength

Exact strength is unknown, but the LTTE is estimated to have 8,000 to 10,000 armed combatants in Sri Lanka, with a core of trained fighters of approximately 3,000 to 6,000. The LTTE also has a significant overseas support structure for fundraising, weapons procurement, and propaganda activities.

Location/Area of Operations

The Tigers control most of the northern and eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka but have conducted operations throughout the island. Headquartered in northern Sri Lanka, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has established an extensive network of checkpoints and informants to keep track of any outsiders who enter the group's area of control.

External Aid

The LTTE's overt organizations support Tamil separatism by lobbying foreign governments and the United Nations. The LTTE also uses its international contacts to procure weapons, communications, and any other equipment and supplies it needs. The LTTE exploits large Tamil communities in North America, Europe, and Asia to obtain funds and supplies for its fighters in Sri Lanka. Information obtained since the mid-1980s indicates that some Tamil communities in Europe are also involved in narcotics smuggling. Tamils historically have served as drug couriers moving narcotics into Europe.

Sources

This information is taken directly from the web site of the U.S. Department of State: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000/2450.htm>. External links from the web site of the U.S. Department of State to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

Further Study

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- Wilson, A. Jeyarathnam: *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947-197 a Political Biography*. University of Hawai'i Press 1994.