

## **DIASPORA INVOLVEMENT IN INSURGENCIES: INSIGHTS FROM THE KHALISTAN AND TAMIL EELAM MOVEMENTS**

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*This article exposts and contrasts the roles of two diasporas in ethnic conflict waged in their homelands, namely the Sikh diaspora's involvement in the Punjab insurgency in north India and the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora's role in Sri Lanka's Tamil insurgency. It draws out the various similarities and distinctions between the two in their use of technology, means of mobilization and identity production, and the geographical and political reach of their institutional arrangements. The article argues that the varying means by which these diasporas came into being affected the ways in which they mobilized and the positions they espoused towards homeland politics. It finds that the abilities of the two diasporas to contribute to events "back home" differed in part because of the scope of their respective institutional arrangements.*

South Asia has been home to numerous ethno- and religious nationalist insurgencies since the region was decolonized with the departure of the British in 1947. Many of these insurgent movements have benefited from the activities of co-ethnics and co-religionists who have organized themselves as trans-national diasporas throughout the world. This article looks at two such insurgencies and the contributions of their kin diasporas: namely, the involvement of the Sikh diaspora in the Khalistan insurgency in India's northern state of the Punjab and of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the Tamil insurgency in the north of Sri Lanka.

Many of the diasporas that are currently associated with the modern states of South Asia are the products of the processes of colonization of the South Asian subcontinent when South Asians were moved—with varying degrees of willingness—throughout the British Empire (e.g., as soldiers and police officers within the security forces, indentured servants, laborers for the East African Railway). The Sikh diaspora in many ways emerged from these

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imperial processes. However, not all South Asian diasporas were so produced. For instance, the contemporary trans-national Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was formed when hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils fled to Europe, Asia and North America to escape the civil war waged by the Sri Lankan security forces and Tamil separatists.

Both the Sikh and Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas have been intimately involved in two of the most devastating insurgencies in South Asia, as suggested above. The Sikh diaspora was an important constituent in the Sikh separatist movement to establish an independent Sikh state, Khalistan. This insurgency shook India throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s and claimed several tens of thousands of lives. The Tamil diaspora has played an important role in the various twists and turns taken by the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka in its struggle to carve out an independent Tamil homeland (Tamil Eelam) from northern Sri Lanka.

It is the objective of this essay to exposit the involvement of the globalized Sikh and Tamil diasporas in the respective separatist movements for Khalistan and Tamil Eelam. The essay, building off of the well-established literature on diasporas, takes for granted that diasporas comprise an object of empirical study.<sup>1</sup> It also mobilizes the robust body of scholarship on the Sikh and Tamil diasporas.<sup>2</sup> Further, many of the empirical questions posed in this essay have been implicitly and explicitly informed by the ever-evolving literature that specifically examines the role of diasporas and conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing off of this theoretical and empirical foundation, the first section of the essay provides basic details about the Khalistan insurgency, the Sikh diaspora and the role that the diaspora played in the India-based conflict. The next section turns to the Tamil diaspora. This section lays out a basic history of the civil war waged by the Sri Lankan Tamils against the Sri Lankan state, provides information about the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and describes the myriad ways in which the diaspora's activities had impacts for the insurgency back home. The following section seeks to draw out lessons learned and policy implications that can be extracted from examining these two distinct case studies.

This analysis finds that while there are many similarities between the ways in which the globally dispersed Sikhs and Tamils have used technology and other means of mobilization and

organization to sustain and promote specific diasporan ethnic identities, they also differed substantially in the scope of the institutions that comprised the mainstay of their community structures. While the Sikh community tended to rely heavily upon the local institution of the gurdwara, this article argues that the Sri Lankan Tamils were able to mobilize using social structures that had greater scope. As a consequence, the abilities of the two diasporas to contribute to events in the homeland were very dissimilar, at least, in part because these institutional arrangements created varied kinds of political space within which they could affect events in the homeland. The article also contends that the different ways in which these two diasporas came into being likely had impacts upon the ways in which diasporans mobilized and the positions that were taken towards politics in the homeland.

### **The Sikh Diaspora and the Militant Demand for Khalistan**

#### *Background to The Khalistan Movement*<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a separate Sikh state first arose in the early 20th century with the rise of Sikh nationalism in British India. This movement should be understood within the context of other religious nationalist movements that were gaining traction in the same period among Hindus and Muslims, as well as among Sikhs. These religious nationalist movements emerged in response to British “divide and rule” administrative policies, the perceived success of Christian missionaries converting Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims, and a general belief that the solution to the downfall among India’s religious communities was a grassroots religious revival. This process inherently involved differentiating the various communities and establishing communal boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

As the Muslim League began asserting the “Two Nation Theory” (which argued that Hindus and Muslims comprised different nations and therefore require two distinct nation states) to lay the groundwork for a separate Muslim state, Sikhs began to ponder their own fate. As independence from the British neared and two states appeared increasingly likely, Sikhs questioned how their interests would be protected in an overwhelmingly Hindu, albeit democratic, state. Many Sikhs believed that they too should have been granted a separate state carved from the detritus of the Raj.<sup>6</sup>

This sense of entitlement was bolstered by, *inter alia*, the extensive military service by the Sikhs in the Royal Indian Army during the world wars.<sup>7</sup>

Despite roots in the early 20th century, Sikh separatism did not become a serious concern to the Indian state until the late 1970s and 1980s when strands of the Sikh nationalist struggle began to militarize. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale emerged as a high-profile leader of the Sikh militancy in the early 1980s when he and his militant cadres took refuge in the Sikh's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple, to avoid being arrested.

Bhindranwale did not rise to prominence solely by his own efforts. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi explicitly chose to buttress his political movement to split the Akali Dal, which was the most prominent Sikh political party in the Punjab and a formidable challenge to her Congress Party. In hindsight, this was a tremendous miscalculation as Bhindranwale and his separatist political objectives gained popularity within specific segments of the Sikh population, such as the traditional agricultural caste, the *Jats*. His vociferous and militant position illuminated the relatively moderate stance taken by the Akali Dal.<sup>8</sup>

In June of 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered the army into the temple complex to wrest it from the militants in an operation that was named *Operation Bluestar*.<sup>9</sup> Bhindranwale perished in this operation, but the militancy was not crushed. Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her in revenge, after which thousands of Sikhs perished in Hindu attacks upon them and their communities throughout India. *Operation Bluestar* and the ensuing massacres of Sikhs fostered a wider-spread militancy among the Sikhs in the Punjab by legitimizing the separatists' claims that India could not and would not protect Sikh interests. *Operation Bluestar* and the retaliatory Sikh massacres were important events that precipitated widespread galvanization of the Sikh diaspora to espouse this cause.

The involvement of the diaspora, as this article discusses below, was an important dimension of the Sikh insurgency. Not only was it a source of diplomatic and financial support, it was also a factor in enabling Pakistan to become involved in fueling the Sikh separatist efforts. Sikhs in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States played important roles in arranging for cadres to travel to Pakistan, where they received financial and military assistance. A number of Sikh groups in the diaspora declared

themselves to be the Khalistan government in exile following the attack on the Golden Temple.<sup>10</sup> There was a proliferation of Khalistani militant outfits throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including Babbar Khalsa, the Khalistan Commando Force, the Khalistan Liberation Force, Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan, the Khalistan Liberation Organization, and the International Sikh Youth Federation.<sup>11</sup>

*Evolution of a Globalized Sikh Community and Territorialization of the Sikh Imagination*

Recent estimates suggest that the globalized Sikh diaspora exceeds 17 million.<sup>12</sup> Prior to colonization by the British, most Sikhs lived in the Punjab, which was one of the last territories to succumb to the East India Company. While most overseas Sikhs migrated in the post-colonial era, the beginning of Sikh mass migration had its origins in the varied operations of the British Empire (e.g., as police and soldiers within the British security forces throughout the world, adventurers, students, laborers).<sup>13</sup> Presently, nearly one half of the Sikh population residing outside of India are settled in the United Kingdom (500,000), Canada (150,000) and the United States (125,000).<sup>14</sup>

Popular belief holds that the Punjab is *the* “Sikh homeland” of this Sikh community within and without India. However, this is a recent formulation according to the evidence marshaled by Harjot Oberoi. He argues that despite the historical linkages to the Punjab—for the majority of Sikh history—territory was not a substantial element of Sikh self-definition.<sup>15</sup> Oberoi, given this discordance between past and present depiction of territory and its salience to Sikh political identity, argues that this effective attachment with the Punjab among Sikhs is fairly recent and “does not date back to the early annals of the Sikh community, as some ideologues of ‘Khalistan’ would like to assert.”<sup>16</sup> Rather, he contends that this process of territorialization of the Sikh community did not begin in earnest until the late 1930s and early 1940s, when Sikh political and intellectual elites realized that a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India were imminent. To establish the case for a separate Sikh state within the Punjab, key Sikh leaders mobilized various signs and metacommentaries to argue that the Sikhs belonged to the Punjab and the Punjab belonged to the

Sikhs. Oberoi contends that this territorialization was formalized in March 1946 when the executive committee of the Sikh political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, passed a resolution proclaiming the natural association of the Punjab and the Sikh religious community.<sup>17</sup> After the emergence of the Indian and Pakistani states in 1947, some Sikhs in the Punjab episodically argued for the establishment of a “Sikh homeland” under the political leadership of the Akali Dal. While there were proponents of a Sikh state in the decades surrounding independence, political mobilization for this objective did not begin in earnest until the very late 1970s—at the earliest—and the early 1980s. For example, one of the first instances of such a demand occurred in 1971 when a diasporan Sikh visited Pakistan immediately preceding the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. I return to this incident below.

While in 1971 few took this call for Khalistan seriously. Over the course of that decade, the supposition became increasingly less exotic. In March 1981, a prominent Sikh diasporan, Ganga Singh Dillon, declared the Sikhs to be a nation and argued the case for a Sikh nation-state. By this time, many Sikhs throughout the world already understood the Punjab to be the logical and natural territory of this nation for reasons that I exposit below. This association was further advanced by Khalistani proponents from 1982 onwards and is exemplified by the following pronouncement of Kirpan Singh Sihra:

God gave the Sikhs their land, a rich and fertile land blessed with much sun and irrigation, the “land of the five rivers,” the Punjab. . . . Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the Sikhs their state, later handed in trust, first to the British then to the Hindu Raj—but the Sikhs never surrendered their ultimate sovereignty to any power other than their own. Today, after forty years of abuse of their trust, the Sikhs are ready to create again their independent, sovereign state.<sup>18</sup>

Thus after 1982 and after more than four centuries of Sikh history, a new symbol became ensconced within the ever-evolving inventory of Sikh ethnicity: the Punjab, *the* land and logical nation-state of the Sikhs.

### *Globalization and Narratives of Nationhood*

The forms of Sikh nationalism that have emerged in recent decades are very much products of globalization, which has facilitated the

internationally dispersed Sikhs to participate in collective imaginaries, forging a sense of collective identity in diaspora and enabling a new kind of Sikh “imagined political community.”<sup>19</sup>

The ability to maintain association with India and the Punjab means that Sikhs have been able to reproduce elements of their “culture” in their new environments. Tatla describes this process in the following way:

Overseas Sikh communities have a complex web of exchanges with the Punjab in an ongoing process of mutual dependence. Sikhs have sought to reproduce many of their social norms, culture and religious values in their new homes and social networks in various cities of Britain and North America. This process has been facilitated by a strong attachment to the Punjab, cheaper travel, and the increasing availability of media and communication channels, resulting in many kinds of contacts and flows of information to and from the Punjab. The net result is a collective identity that, despite the local and national influences of each country, has strong Sikh and Punjabi elements embedded in it.<sup>20</sup>

Tatla, in the above passage, privileges the effects of the Punjab upon the diaspora and the desire of those in diaspora to retain a holistic relationship with the Punjab, which he considers to be the “center” of Sikh identity production. While globalization has enabled communities throughout the world to maintain considerable linkages with India and the Punjab, it has also permitted varied and dispersed communities beyond India to establish and maintain high degrees of inter-connectedness with each other—with or without reference to the Sikh homeland, however construed. There are now multiple centers of Sikh identity production that vie for legitimacy and authenticity. Further, globalization and its attendant processes and practices increasingly subject Sikhs in the “homeland” to the hybrid culture of their family, friends, and other associates who live abroad.

#### *Structuring the Sikh Diaspora: Key Cultural Institutions and Processes*

There are several critical institutions and cultural processes—both local and international—that are critical to both creating and recreating the Sikh diaspora and to expositing the ways in which the diaspora contributed to the Khalistan insurgency. One of these local institutions is the *gurdwara*, which is the physical space where

the *sangat* (congregation) convenes in the presence of the collection of Sikh scriptures (*The Guru Granth Sahib*). The gurdwara provides institutional and geographic coordination for a geographically organized Sikh community.<sup>21</sup> In the Sikh diaspora, it has been the most important forum for political organization among various Sikh political factions which have fought over control of the gurdwaras and their political and financial resources. Gurdwara politics have tended to be based upon and indeed reproduce the various political groupings back “home” in the Punjab.

The gurdwara was an important site of mobilization of the Sikh diaspora for the Khalistan movement both directly through the raising of funds, and indirectly, through promoting a highly stylized version of the conflict and of Sikh history. For example, halls and rooms of the gurdwaras typically display photos of recent “martyrs” from the Punjab conflict which are often placed alongside depictions of historical martyrs from the annals of Sikh history. This visually establishes a seamless line of Sikh oppression stemming from the 17th century to the modern period.<sup>22</sup> Gurdwaras also hosted various religious preachers and musical groups which extolled the virtues of the movement and encouraged support from amongst the diaspora. The issue of Khalistan was very divisive among Sikh diasporans within various gurdwaras. As pro and anti-Khalistan factions battled amongst each other over control of the gurdwaras there were numerous instances of violence and bloodshed through North America and Great Britain.<sup>23</sup>

Gurdwaras enable linkages between the diaspora and the Punjab through fundraising for humanitarian, political, and social causes within the Punjab. Some also supported militants and their organizations. Gurdwaras with Khalistani leadership and congregants could be counted on both to support pro-Khalistan personalities and institutions and to propagate this position in various public and private forums. Such gurdwaras allegedly collected funds and funneled them into a variety of organizations (diplomatic, political and/or military) in support of the Khalistan effort.<sup>24</sup>

Remittances are a second means by which Sikhs in diaspora to remain intimately connected to Sikhs in the Punjab. These remitted monies have been an important source of revenue within the Punjab, favorably affecting local economies within the Punjab. Notably, they have had positive impacts upon India’s national economic health as well.<sup>25</sup>



Third, the practice of making pilgrimages is another means of ensuring the connections among various Sikh communities in the diaspora as well as the linkages between the diaspora and the "homeland." Pilgrimages have also permitted diasporan Sikhs to meet with Khalistani proponents in third countries. One of the most important examples of this type of pilgrimage/Khalistan nexus is given by the multiple annual pilgrimages undertaken by tens of thousands of globally dispersed Sikhs to the several important Sikh historical gurdwaras in contemporary Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> Sikhs from the Indian Punjab and elsewhere flock to these important historical gurdwaras in Pakistan. During the pilgrims' stay in Pakistan, Sikhs are inundated with Khalistani literature and paraphernalia from groups that are based in the diaspora and in Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> This kind of exposure to Khalistani material and cadres would not be possible in India in such an overt way.<sup>28</sup>

A fourth means of facilitating communication and establishing organizational order among different groups of Sikhs in the diaspora is the convention of international meetings. One early meeting of this type was the "International Convention of Sikhs," which was held in New York in April 1981 and was attended by some 200 delegates. The Khalistan issue was addressed in the third convention that was held in Slough, Berkshire in April 1987. The objective of this meeting was to "build unity in the Khalistan movement."<sup>29</sup>

Fifth, there are several functional Sikh groups (e.g., the Khalistan Council) which provides organization, guidance and representation for the globalized Sikh community. There have also been numerous Sikh militant groups (e.g., Babar Khalsa, Khalistan Commando Force) that are internationally organized and attempt to coordinate military efforts in pursuit of Khalistan. The salience of these militant groups has receded, as they were more active during the height of the militancy in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>30</sup> While these groups are largely defunct in India, they still have a political presence throughout the diaspora, particularly where they are not proscribed by law, such as in Pakistan.<sup>31</sup>

Sikhs in diaspora have also mobilized print and electronic capital to propagate the notion of a Sikh homeland as Khalistan.<sup>32</sup> Sikhs have also been quick to find ways of controlling knowledge produced about their faith, culture, and language to ensure knowledge production that is sympathetic to the Khalistan movement.<sup>33</sup>

*The Sikh Diaspora's Role in the Demand for Khalistan*

There are at least two distinct—although not necessarily inconsonant—narratives about the origins of the call for Khalistan: one that privileges events within India and the other that privileges the role of the diaspora.<sup>34</sup> Proponents of both narratives include scholars of Sikh studies as well as particular Sikhs. (At times, the same individual may even appear to espouse elements of both narratives.) In these two narratives, both the form of governance posed for this state (e.g., theocracy vs. democracy) and its name (Sikhistan, Khalistan) vary. Similarly, in both accounts the precise geographical contours of the proposed state differ although it was generally imagined to be carved out from various historical constructions of the Punjab.

One such narrative variant of the origins of the Khalistan demand stresses the episodic demands for a separate state for the Sikhs. For example, the issue arose during the 1940s when the British were planning their exeuant from the subcontinent. Explicit demands were made in 1946, 1958, 1972, 1978, and 1984. This narrative generally emphasizes political actors and events *within* India. The demand for Khalistan is linked to the dissatisfaction of the Akali Dal leadership over the acquisition of the Punjabi Suba or the position (now a slight majority) within the new Punjab state. Between 1966 and the early 1980s, the Akalis continued to agitate against the center. The maximal position of the Akali demands was a Khalistan, and the minimalist position was at least a state within India with some degree of autonomy (or delegated powers from the center) where the “preservation of Sikh tradition and identity” would be enabled.<sup>35</sup> There were other actors within India who also made this demand. For example, the All India Sikh Students’ Federation demonstrated in August 1972 for a separate Sikh state within the Punjab.<sup>36</sup>

The second, counter version tends to dilate upon the role of actors *outside* of India. This narrative contends that particularly after 1971, Sikh men settled outside of India began popularizing the notion of a Khalistan as a sovereign, independent state among Sikhs in North America and Europe. One such account is provided by the Khalistan Council and has its moorings in West London. In this version, a fellow named Davinder Singh Parmar arrived in London in 1954 and immediately began asserting the demand for

an independent Sikh state, Khalistan.<sup>37</sup> When Parmar convened the first pro-Khalistan meeting at a gurdwara, fewer than 20 persons attended and by his own account, he was labeled a madman, securing the support of only *one* attendee. This suggests that at least in the early phase of the movement, Khalistan had few constituents among the United Kingdom-based Sikhs.

Parmar was not discouraged by this lack of support and continued to write and distribute pamphlets. In 1970 Parmar met the acquaintance of Dr. Jagjit Singh Chohan in London. This has become a historical meeting of sorts and is widely perceived to be the meeting of minds that launched the Khalistan movement in earnest.<sup>38</sup> The Khalistan movement was formally announced at a London press conference, opposite the Indian High Commission. It was Dr. Jagjit Chohan Singh who raised the Khalistani flag in Birmingham in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup>

While Parmar and Chohan had little if any support and were dismissed as fanatical fringe, their efforts slowly captured the attention of the international community as a result of Chohan's 1971 visit to Pakistan in the spin-up to 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. On this visit, Chohan toured several historical gurdwaras in Pakistan and took the opportunity to advocate the notion of an independent Khalistan in the Pakistani press. The extensive coverage of these remarks enabled people in India to hear this demand for "Khalistan" for the first time. Even though Khalistan still did not have popular support, this term became recognizable.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the efforts and resources invested by the globalized Sikh diaspora in pursuit of an independent and sovereign Khalistan, the struggle for this Sikh state remained nearly invisible on the global political scene until June 1984 when Indira Gandhi ordered the raid on the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar. The raid was conducted by the Indian Army along with the Border Security Force and other branches of India's security apparatus, including both paramilitary and police organizations. As there are numerous accounts of *Operation Bluestar*,<sup>41</sup> the details will not be recounted here. *Operation Woodrose* was the corresponding operation in the countryside of the Punjab to capture and detain suspected militants.<sup>42</sup>

The significance of *Operation Bluestar* and its sequelae for both narratives of the Khalistan movement cannot be overstated. These events comprised a "turning point in the relations between the

Sikhs and the central government in India.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, *Operation Bluestar*’s impact was felt not only among the Sikhs within India, but the globally dispersed Sikh community as well.<sup>44</sup> Many Sikhs, both within and without India, came to believe that the creation of a Khalistan alone would enable Sikhs to attain their political objectives and security.<sup>45</sup> The notion of an independent homeland resonated with the trans-national Sikh community because it offered the promise of a greater sense of security for their co-religionists in the “homeland” and a safe haven for the conduct of religious practice. This response may have been most intense among those who have most recently migrated because such persons, as argued by Goulbourne, are likely to be “still committed to the welfare of the country from which they came.”<sup>46</sup>

Another major event that affected the demand for Khalistan and its imaginers was Indira Gandhi’s assassination by her Sikh bodyguards. This execution was carried out in revenge for the attack on the Golden Temple. In the aftermath of her assassination, India was seized with gruesome anti-Sikh riots in October and November of 1984. Despite efforts to depict this violence as random and arbitrary, there is significant evidence that this violence was well staged and organized through the political patronage of criminal elements and individuals who killed for remuneration. Several members of the Congress Party, for example, were implicated in these pogroms. Throughout the 1980s, extreme violence took hold in the Punjab (including New Delhi) and claimed the lives of many tens of thousands.<sup>47</sup>

*Operation Bluestar* and its violent and sanguineous consequences catalyzed and animated the demand for Khalistan among many globally dispersed Sikhs. These events were catalytic in another sense: Increasingly, the members of the globalized Sikh community began to understand themselves to be a “nation” or a “kaum”<sup>48</sup> and were understood by others in such terms.<sup>49</sup> The empirical question that arises is how did this happen and by what processes?<sup>50</sup> While a full exploration of this question is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note the wide-ranging consensus among analysts of the Sikh diaspora that it was the events of *Operation Bluestar* and its communalizing consequences that galvanized Sikhs throughout the world. These horrific events and their related media images animated the imagination of a globalized, trans-national Sikh community.

What emerged from this new consciousness were the various networks of mobilization, described above, that in turn further cemented the emerging nationalism among Sikhs. Sikh individuals and organizations launched massive fund-raising efforts that were used for a number of purposes. One of the post-1984 objectives was the promotion of their version of their ethno-national history and their relationship with the Indian state. The diasporan Sikhs also stepped up their efforts to build institutions for the maintenance and propagation of their ethno-national heritage. One important objective of these educational efforts was the desire to communicate a different face to the non-Sikh international publics who came to understand the Sikhs as “terrorists.”

### **The Demand for Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora**

#### *Background to the Tamil Militancy*

The Tamil insurgency is overwhelmingly an ethno-nationalist conflict rooted to Sri Lanka’s history of colonization and decolonization. This substantially distinguishes the Tamil uprising from other internal security challenges in South Asia, where militancy has tended to be intertwined with communal (e.g., religious) and sectarian differences. Dating the origin of conflict is difficult: Both scholars of Sri Lankan history and the residents of the island nation themselves tend to disagree on the nascence of the ethnic conflict. What is clear is that the island nation had never before comprised a unified political entity before the arrival of the British.<sup>51</sup>

Under British governance, South Indians were brought to Sri Lanka as bonded laborers for the coffee plantations and tea estates. While most of these individuals were ethnic Tamils from what is the present-day state of Tamilnadu in India, others came from the modern-day Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. In 1833, the British consolidated the entire island within a unified administrative structure, which marked the establishment of Sri Lanka as a modern state. British development efforts focused on the central and western areas of the island, thereby leaving out the Tamils, who were concentrated in the north and eastern parts of the island. In response to this exclusion, the Tamils pursued

education in American and British missionary schools, which enabled the English-educated Tamils to participate in the offices of government administration. Thus, at the time of Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the Tamils enjoyed substantial representation in the apparatus of state despite their minority status.<sup>52</sup>

Upon independence, Sri Lanka adopted a unitary constitutional structure. Many Tamil parties worried that this constitutional arrangement would not provide minority communities protection against dominance by the majoritarian Sinhalese. By the mid-1950s, the parliamentary system (dominated by two nationalist parties and overwhelmingly representing Sinhalese interests) appeared unable to address Tamil needs and equities. Concurrent with the rise of ethnic Tamil concerns, a Sinhalese Buddhist revival gained newfound momentum and brought to the fore a number of policies that aimed to disadvantage the Tamil-speaking communities. Colombo pursued policies that were aimed at bolstering the relative position and strength of the Sinhalese majority throughout the 1970s. While interests in greater Tamil autonomy and even independence began to percolate in the 1950s and 1960s, the militant aspects did not fully begin to materialize until the late 1970s and early 1980s. As late as the 1970s there were still efforts to resolve the issue politically. In 1976, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was established. TULF subsequently won a landmark victory in the Tamil areas of the north and east in the general elections. TULF unsuccessfully tried to achieve Tamil independence through the parliamentary process.<sup>53</sup>

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a coherent militarized Tamil insurgency that involved several insurgent organizations took form. These groups included the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the People's Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). (The LTTE's commander, Velupillai Prabhakaran, founded the Tamil New Tigers in the mid-1970s, which later became the LTTE.<sup>54</sup>) The LTTE secured dominance among these groups through massive violence and coercion. While some groups still exist at various levels, the LTTE has established itself as the principal and most lethal voice of militant Tamil aspirations.<sup>55</sup>

*The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora*

As has been noted, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has been a fundamental component of the Tamil insurgency. It has been the backbone of the LTTE's global operations and has been a financial lifeline of the militancy. This section details what is known empirically about the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and the organizations that it has established.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, in contrast to the Sikh diaspora, is largely comprised of refugees and former refugees, the majority of whom left Sri Lanka within the past 15 to 20 years.<sup>56</sup> Somewhat recent estimates suggest that the Sri Lankan Tamils in diaspora number between 700,000 and 800,000 and are settled across Canada, Europe, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>57</sup> Other analysts suggest that nearly one fourth of the total Sri Lanka Tamil population lives in diaspora, including about 100,000 in the United Kingdom, 250,000 in Australia, and about 10,000 in the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Because most of the members of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora still have family members in Sri Lanka and because most have at least one family member (however near or remote) killed, raped, or tortured in the war, the diasporan Tamils have a strong distrust of Colombo. As with diasporan Sikh supporters of the Khalistan movement, Tamil proponents of the LTTE are very willing to speak out against Colombo and express their support for Tamil autonomy because they have tended to settle in countries that protect freedom of speech. Sri Lankan Tamils abroad have established various organizations that promote Tamil equities in Sri Lanka. They have also made extensive use of the World Wide Web to establish cyber communities, chat rooms and users' groups.<sup>59</sup>

As is often the case with ethno-national expatriate communities, individuals can elect to participate in multiple diasporas. This is true for Sri Lanka Tamils who may see themselves as a part of a more general Tamil diaspora that includes Tamils whose putative homeland is Tamilnadu in the south of India as well as Sri Lanka. This greater trans-national Tamil identity is facilitated by numerous cultural organizations in the countries of settlement that host Tamil language, cultural and religious events. However, Sri Lankan Tamils also see themselves as belonging to a sub-set of Tamils whose histories are tied to Sri Lanka and the ongoing war there. In this

vein, Sri Lankan Tamils have also established organizations in their countries of settlement that cater to this specific diasporan identity. Some of these specific organizations include diasporan affiliates of the Sri Lanka-based Tamil Relief Organization (e.g., Tamil Relief Organization USA); Ilankai Tamil Sangam (Association of Tamils from Eelam and Sri Lanka in the United States). Other organizations are based in cyber-space such as Tamilnation.org which seeks to forge a trans-national Tamil nationalist identity and which emphasizes the troubles confronting Sri Lanka's Tamils. As the next section details, many Tamil diasporan organizations have explicitly been set up to enable LTTE activities.

### *The Tamil Diaspora and the LTTE's Global Operations*

One of the most notorious features of the LTTE is the global scale on which it operates. Since the early 1980s, the LTTE has established a global network of offices and cells that spans at least 40 countries and is unrivaled by any other insurgent organization worldwide.<sup>60</sup> Its global infrastructure, based to a great extent upon its diaspora, serves numerous purposes. For instance, LTTE leaders operating in Europe have leveraged the Tamil diaspora to raise funds. In fact, some 80 percent of the LTTE's \$82 million annual income comes from such fundraising.<sup>61</sup> In countries where the LTTE has been outlawed, it has operated under organizations such as *inter alia*, the United Tamil Organization, the World Tamil Movement, and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization.<sup>62</sup> However, the LTTE uses this infrastructure to raise and divert funds, to manage the public perception management campaign about the plight of the Tamils and to legitimize the role of the Tamil Tigers as the interlocutor for global Sri Lankan Tamil interests.

#### LITTE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY WORLDWIDE

The LTTE has been adept at mobilizing the massive Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora as the "economic backbone of the militant campaign" through coerced and willing contributions.<sup>63</sup> Funds come from the countries where there are large Tamil diasporan communities: Switzerland, Canada, Australia, the UK, the United States, and the Scandinavian countries.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes these monies are given willingly out of belief that the efforts of the LTTE are the only way to achieve autonomy and security for the Sri Lankan



Tamil diaspora. In the United States, there are key wealthy Tamils who gave extensively to the LTTE prior to the organization's designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the United States. One individual in particular, a California-based physician, has given as much as \$100,000 at a time and is considered to be a "god" in the LTTE because he gives whatever they request.<sup>65</sup> In other cases, "donations" are collected like a tax by force, by the threat of force or through the exploitation of individuals who may be in a given country illegally and are seeking protection or assistance from the LTTE.<sup>66</sup>

It is worth noting that the amounts that flow into the coffers of the LTTE from the diaspora fluctuate with military developments on the ground in Sri Lanka. After military setbacks and defeats, donations typically decline. Conversely, when the LTTE were militarily successful, willing donations increased. As I discuss later, after the events of 2001, the diaspora again pulled back funding in an effort to motivate the LTTE to pursue peace with Colombo.<sup>67</sup>

The LTTE also generates income by acting as a "proxy lender" whereby the LTTE puts up the initial investment in Tamil-run small businesses and the profits are split between the LTTE and the ostensible owner. If evidence from the mid to late 1990s are still valid, these revenue streams are impressive: In Switzerland they are thought to raise some US \$650,000 per month; in Canada they are thought to bring in C \$1,000,000; in the UK they raise an estimated US \$385,00 monthly. The LTTE also has other revenue sources such as gem trade, human trafficking and possibly narcotics.<sup>68</sup>

Whether or not the LTTE funds itself through narcotics trafficking has been hotly debated in recent years. In March 2001, both the United States Department of State and Narcotics Bureau of the Sri Lankan government denied that it had any evidence that the LTTE was funding its activities through narcotics.<sup>69</sup> The Intelligence Chief of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Steven W. Casteel, on 20 May 2003 contradicted this earlier assertion. Casteel testified that according to DEA intelligence, the LTTE does in fact finance their insurgent activities through drug trafficking. He further elaborated that: "Information obtained since the mid-1980s indicates that some Tamil Tiger communities in Europe are also involved in narcotics smuggling, having historically served as drug couriers moving narcotics into Europe."<sup>70</sup>

The LTTE exploits non-profit organizations that allegedly provide social, medical and rehabilitation assistance in Sri Lanka. The LTTE can deftly siphon funds from such organizations—or even establish front organizations to raise funds—because of the difficulty in establishing proof that such improprieties are occurring.<sup>71</sup> In addition to licit means of fundraising, the LTTE leverages numerous legitimate economic activity among its extensive and sophisticated diaspora. For example, the LTTE invests in stocks, money markets, and real estate. The LTTE also owns numerous restaurants and shops throughout the world and has invested in farms, finance companies, and other ventures that have had high profit margins.<sup>72</sup> Such financial maneuvering is advantageous because they are difficult to track and prosecute.<sup>73</sup>

#### GLOBAL POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES

The LTTE uses its global infrastructure to develop and maintain political and diplomatic support within host countries. To this end, Balasingham and Gopalarathinam head the LTTE's semi-diplomatic organization that is comprised of sympathetic pressure groups, media teams, charities, and benevolent NGOs. Even though their activities take place in over 54 countries, they tend to focus efforts of the Western states that have large numbers of Tamils (e.g., U.K., Canada, Australia, France, Switzerland).<sup>74</sup>

LTTE lobbying efforts have been tremendously successful in cultivating state support for their movements in state capitals throughout the world during the 1980s and 1990s. Until circa 2001, the LTTE was able to develop political sympathy for their cause by mobilizing media and “grass-roots” and other political organizations over the issue of Tamil rights and the abuse of those rights by the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE effectively coordinates these efforts through a number of “umbrella organizations” established in key countries:

- The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations
- The Swiss Federation of Tamil Associations
- The French Federation of Tamil Associations
- The Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils
- The Illankai Tamil Sangam (based in the United States)
- The Tamil Coordinating Committee in Norway
- The International Federation of Tamils (in the UK)<sup>75</sup>

The objectives of these efforts are to assail Colombo while advancing the political support for the LTTE cause. This is done by consistently propagating a three-fold message:

- That Tamils in Sri Lanka are innocent victims of military repression by Sri Lanka's security forces and of Sinhalese anti-Tamil discrimination.
- That the LTTE is the only legitimate voice of the Tamils and is the only vehicle capable of defending and promoting Tamil interests in Sri Lanka.
- There can be no peace until Tamils achieve their own independent state under the LTTE's leadership.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, the LTTE has aptly exploited the ethos of the liberal democracies in which they have located. Before being proscribed a terrorist organization in many countries, they were able to found offices that openly espoused the LTTE cause.

The target audience of LTTE political and diplomatic activities are two-fold. On the one hand, they aim to influence the diasporan Tamilians to win their support (which has financial pay-offs). The second target is their host government to encourage it to take stances that are friendly towards the LTTE and critical of Colombo. In the aftermath of 9-11, the LTTE has faced many challenges on both counts—as I discuss below. Key tools of these efforts include dissemination of propaganda through electronic mail, the World Wide Web, through dedicated telephone hotlines and radio broadcasts. They also use political, cultural, and social gatherings as well to promote these messages. Many of these events are set to coincide with significant dates on the LTTE calendar such as Heroes Day (also translated incorrectly as “Martyr’s Day”).<sup>77</sup>

#### MILITARY OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE LTTE'S GLOBAL STRUCTURE

This extensive diasporic network is one of the most fascinating features of the LTTE. Apart from the utility of the Tamil diaspora in raising funds and generating political and diplomatic support, the diaspora has also expanded the LTTE's range of contacts for weapons procurement. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the diaspora network is that it has also brought them into closer contact with other insurgent groups. For example, the LTTE has

established ideological, financial and technologies linkages with the various Khalistani-oriented Sikhs, the Kashmiri separatists, and other militant organizations based in the Middle East.<sup>78</sup>

These groups, according to Gunaratna, exchange and purchase arms from diverse sources that allow them to circumvent various international arms control conventions. This vast diasporan network has also allowed the LTTE and other groups to raise funds in one location, operate from another and fight in an altogether different place. This enables groups like the LTTE to exploit fissures among law enforcement authorities and the failure of government agencies to cooperate.<sup>79</sup> The Sri Lankan government has been helpless in the face of the expanding and increasingly effective LTTE diasporan network and has yet to develop means to vitiate the political and diplomatic strength of the organization's trans-national backbone. Colombo has also not promulgated an effective media management strategy to counter that of the LTTE.<sup>80</sup>

The United States designated the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) as early as 1997. Ottawa followed in 1999. Later in 2001, Britain and Australia similarly designated the group. It is believed that as a result of these designations, overseas Tamils have been discouraged from contributing to the LTTE. Interlocutors in Colombo also explained that diasporan Tamils who were coerced into giving donations were able to exploit the greater global enforcement and monitoring of anti-terrorism measures since September 11, 2001 to avoid paying the LTTE-imposed taxes. It is believed that these collective efforts have seriously retarded the ability of the LTTE to raise revenue from its large Tamil diaspora in North America, Europe, and Asia. Moreover, the LTTE's ability to maintain its linkages with terrorist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere has also been seriously degraded.<sup>81</sup>

#### *The Changed Global Environment after 9-11*

According to interlocutors at the United States Embassy in Colombo, many overseas Tamils who supported the LTTE were dismayed at being cast as a terrorist group. While they insisted that they were an insurgent organization, the global community was no longer interested in entertaining such distinctions. During fieldwork in Sri Lanka in November 2002, this author

interviewed a number of persons who attributed the willingness of the LTTE to enter into a ceasefire with Colombo in great measure to the diaspora. Such persons argued that diasporan Tamils sought out LTTE representatives and encouraged them to abandon the military struggle, pursue a diplomatic solution and restore the legitimacy of Tamil demands for an independent homeland and credibility of Sri Lankan Tamil recriminations against Colombo. The changed global environment after 9-11 also empowered the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora to resist paying the various “taxes” to the Tigers. Many persons noted that even though the LTTE had been proscribed before 9-11 in many countries, the various proscriptions were not enforced. After 9-11, this dramatically changed. Sri Lankan Tamils could increasingly decline to make payments to the LTTE citing enhanced surveillance of such activities and willingness to prosecute. As such, Sri Lankan Tamils were in a better position to cut-off the revenue stream to the LTTE. The combination of positive suasion to pursue a political solution in combination with the greater capacity to cut off the diasporan financial lifeline to the LTTE has led a number of analysts to conclude that the Tamil diaspora had a positive role to play in bringing the LTTE to the negotiating table with Colombo.<sup>82</sup>

What is notable about the choice of the LTTE to pursue a political solution was the timing. By the summer’s end of 2001, militarily the LTTE was in some sense at an apex. It had just successfully crippled Sri Lanka’s economy through its successful assault on Sri Lanka’s only international airport in Colombo during the summer of 2001. The assault on the Colombo Airport brought the war home to many Sri Lankans who were content to view the insurgency as a problem that was confined to the mostly Tamil areas of the north. This military victory translated into a serious position of strategic superiority before the events of 9-11.

So why did the LTTE declare a unilateral ceasefire in December 2001? This article argues this arose principally because of a confluence of three issues. First, the Sri Lankan general election on 5 December 2001 brought a change of government. After seven years in opposition, the United National Party (UNP) returned to power with a slim majority. Notably, the UNP ran on a platform of conciliation with the LTTE. Thus many Tamils within and without Sri Lanka saw a window of opportunity for a political solution. Second, the Colombo airport attack allowed the LTTE to enter

negotiations from a position of strength. Third, the diaspora was in an increasingly important place to encourage the LTTE to abandon their efforts to redraw the map in blood.

Following the LTTE's unilateral offer of a ceasefire, the Sri Lankan government soon followed suit. This unofficial cessation of hostilities was preceded by a Permanent Ceasefire Agreement that was signed on 22 February 2001. This agreement enshrined several commitments by both sides which included the vacating places of worship, schools and other public buildings by either the armed forces of Sri Lanka or the Tamils. It also permitted the increased movement of goods and people which brought to the troubled area of the North a reprieve from violence and the opportunity to re-establish a semblance of normal life and regain positive economic activity. Most importantly for the LTTE and its global supporters, this process enabled it to recuperate its lost credibility both because it was de-proscribed in Sri Lanka (although not elsewhere) and because it became a co-participant (with varying degrees of equality) in multi-lateral forums alongside the Sri Lankan government. However, the LTTE's ample media management assets certainly depicted them as fully equal participants. This restored the legitimacy that the LTTE craved in international circles and acted to restore the perception that they are in fact an insurgent organization. It also worth noting that in the initial phases of the ceasefire, the LTTE in many ways gained more than Colombo. For instance, it was allowed to continue recruiting and arming and all efforts of interdiction of LTTE efforts were stopped. This permitted the LTTE to set up cells in places that were previously difficult to do—such as in Colombo.<sup>83</sup>

While this author argues that much of development of the peace process of 2001–2002 was attributed to the events of 9-11 and the changed views of the diasporan Sri Lankan Tamils, there is evidence that this change was observable earlier. For instance, some analysts noted that even before the events of 9-11, the diaspora had become increasingly “jittery” about the activities of the LTTE. For example, the forcible recruitment of children and the tactic of suicide bombing compelled some supporters to question the LTTE's operations.<sup>84</sup> What the pre- and post-9-11 evidence suggests is that the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora had a substantial amount of influence over the activities of the LTTE. Arguably, this was so because the LTTE was from its inception thoroughly

rooted to the diaspora and its various institutions and therefore dependent upon the structure afforded by the diaspora for revenue raising, public diplomacy, perception management and so forth.

### **Synthesis: Lessons Learned from the Cases**

The two cases here suggest many similarities in the ways in which diasporas mobilized financial, diplomatic, social, cultural and religious capital in the service of conflicts in the ostensible homeland. Both exploited the liberal democratic environments of the adopted host states. Both have been able to take advantage of government systems that permit lobbying. For instance, the Sikhs have been able to court Congressmen in the United States Congress who support their cause of Khalistan and who can be counted to vilify India when the occasion arises.

But the differences are also notable. In the Sikh case many of the institutions that were used to support the insurgency actually pre-existed the militancy in the Punjab. (Obviously, this statement does not apply to militant outfits and the like.) This means that such organizations had to be politicized and mobilized in the service of a Sikh state. In the case of the Tamil diaspora, the diaspora was itself a precipitant of the civil war. Therefore one could reason that the pro-insurgency institutions that Sri Lankan Tamils established were of utility to the insurgency from their nascence. Whereas the Sikh community was tasked with deploying its vast array of resources that were developed for other reasons in an earlier period, the Tamils had a number of organizational assets that were specifically designed to aid the struggle back home.

Second, while the Sikh diaspora and the interest in Khalistan have largely waned with the exception of a few vociferous strongholds, Tamils abroad remain very much engaged in the fate of Tamils at home. While in recent years, the Tamil diaspora may have shifted from a preference of supporting militancy to one of supporting diplomacy, they remain very much active in shaping the events in Sri Lanka. What accounts for this difference?

One possibility is that the Sikh diaspora, to a great extent, was focused on the singular event of the Golden Temple assault. While it is true that Khalistan had its proponents prior to 1984, it was this

event that galvanized the most extensive—if fleeting—support for the movement. To be sure, the Sikhs in the Punjab waged a long and bloody battle. However, in the popular representation of the conflict abroad, *Operation Bluestar* and the iconic martyr Bhindranwale were the focal points of the movement for Khalistan. As described above, the gurdwara were key loci for this political organization. Biswas suggests that the Khalistan movement may have dissipated because it overly relied upon one cluster of events and because it did not develop a strong base outside of gurdwara politics. While there were several important institutions within the Sikh diaspora that contributed to the Khalistan movement, it is notable that it never really developed a sophisticated over-arching organizational structure for the movement. Nor were Khalistani proponents ever able to forge and sustain a platform that transcended local differences and personal political equities to formulate a global strategy.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, Tamil diasporan mobilization has not been fomented by one event or cluster of events nor has Tamil mobilization been heavily vested in one kind of activity. It is notable that of all of the diasporan sources of support for the LTTE, “temple politics”—the ostensible equivalent of “gurdwara politics”—was not mentioned. (This is not to say that temples have not been important in some senses, but that they have not been the primary venue for action.) Instead, the Tamil diaspora primarily contributes to the LTTE through means that are much more expansive socially. Whereas the gurdwara is a local institution that can be connected to other gurdwaras, Tamils seemed to participate in activities that were wider in scope and scale than local gurdwara activities. Rather, Tamils have created a much more broadly based forum for mobilization and resource collection that has a global scope and a global strategy. Arguably, this fundamental difference in organizing and mobilizing structures has enabled the Tamil diaspora to project and maintain a more robust globalized positioning relative to the Sikh diaspora.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, because the Tamil diaspora has been so thoroughly integrated into the global LTTE strategy, the LTTE could not simply act with impunity and disregard their equities. The desire of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora to have their struggle viewed not as a terrorist movement but as a just struggle against Colombo’s oppression in the post-9-11 world was an important factor in the



LTTE's decision to pursue a political solution (however tenuous that process is at present). Concurrently, the global change in policy towards the LTTE gave the Sri Lankan Tamils in diaspora legitimate means by which they could cease "willing donations" or at least have a more credible reason for refusing to be extorted by the LTTE tax collectors. The ability of the diaspora to choke off funds to the LTTE was a direct manifestation of the preferences of the Tamil diaspora for a peaceful solution.

### Notes

1. This essay is less interested in problematizing "diaspora" as a stable object of inquiry in general, or examining South Asian diasporas in particular. See for example, Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996); Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in Theory," *Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, pp. 295–310. R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
2. See *inter alia* Robin Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state," *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (July 1996), pp. 507–20; Verne A. Dusenberry, "A Sikh Diaspora?" in Peter Van der Veer (eds) *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 17–42); Rohan Gunaratna, "International and Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency" (2 December 1998), [www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDET.cfm?articleid=57](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDET.cfm?articleid=57) [accessed 30 August, 2003]; Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Khachig Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," in *Diaspora*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1996), pp. 3–26; Peter Van der Veer, "Introduction," in Peter Van der Veer (eds) *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) pp. 1–16); See Oivind Fuglerut, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); R. Cheran, *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 2002); Sarah Wayland, "Ethnonationalist networks and transnational opportunities: the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30 (2004), pp. 405–26.
3. See *inter alia* Dan Horowitz, "Diasporas and Communal Conflicts in Divided Societies: The Case of Palestine Under the British Mandate," in Gabriel Sheffer (ed), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Winter 1999/2000), pp. 108–38; Yossi Shain, "The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution," *SAIS Review*, Vol. XXII, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2002); Yossi Shain and Martin Sherman, "Dynamics of

- disintegration: diaspora, succession and the paradox of nation-states," *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1998), pp. 321–46; Gabriel Sheffer, "Ethno-National Diasporas and Security," *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 60–79; Gabriel Sheffer, "Ethnic Diasporas: A Threat to Their Hosts?" in Myron Weiner (ed.) *International Migration and Security* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 263–85; Gabriel Sheffer (ed.) *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Myron Weiner, "Security, Stability, and International Migration," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Winter 1992/93), pp. 91–126; Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Grey Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); Brian Nichiporuk, *The Security Dynamics of Demographic Factors* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000).
4. This history is not intended to be comprehensive. Additional sources are provided throughout. This is only intended to provide a thoroughly unfamiliar reader with some sense of the movement and its consequences.
  5. Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Harjot S. Oberoi, "Ritual to Counter Ritual: Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question, 1884–1915," in Joseph T. O'Connell et al. (eds), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Asian Studies, 1988); N. Gerald Barrier and Verne Dusenberry (eds) *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience Beyond Punjab* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1989). Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Cynthia Kepply Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
  6. The story of Sikh nationalism must be seen in the context of the concurrent Hindu nationalist project, which attempted to absorb Sikhs into the fold of Hinduism. Sikhs nationalists rejected the Hindu nationalist claim that Sikhs are Hindus and sought to establish clear boundaries of identity through *inter alia* the development of new Sikh rituals (e.g., for birth, marriage, death) and the mobilization of the legal system to attain legitimacy for these new rituals (e.g., the Sikh Marriage Act). A thorough discussion of this phenomenon is well beyond the scope of this work. The salient point is that as a result of myriad religio-political identity movements in the sub-continent, a number of Sikh political entrepreneurs had begun formalizing the demand for Sikh sovereignty well before the 1980s. For comprehensive accounts of this complex and highly contested process, the reader should consult Kapur (1986); Harjot Oberoi (1988) and Harjot S. Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
  7. See for example Kapur (1987); Oberoi (1988); Barrier and Dusenberry (1989); Axel; Mahmood.
  8. In particular, many analysts both within India and without contend that Giani Zail Singh (who eventually became the President of India in 1982) developed Bhindranwale as a foil to the Akali government to diminish the ability of the Akalis to challenge the electoral authority of the Congress party in Punjab.

- See Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab: Operation Bluestar and After* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1984). For a more detailed account of this miscalculated strategy of Indira Gandhi's Congress Party, see M. Tully and S. Jacobsh, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle* (New Delhi: Rupa, 1985); Hamish Telford, "The Political Economy of Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 11 (November 1992); Kapur; Yogendra K. Malik, "The Akali party and Sikh militancy: move for greater autonomy or secessionism in Punjab?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (March 1996), pp. 345–62.
9. For a comprehensive account of *Operation Bluestar*, see LT. Gen. K.S. Brar, *Operation Blue Star: The True Story* (New Delhi: UBSPD, 1993).
  10. Giorgio Shani, "Beyond Khalistan? The Sikh Diaspora and the International Order," (New Orleans: paper presented as part of the panel on Communal Conflict and Self-Determination Movements in the Local-Global Nexus, International Studies Association Annual Convention, March 27, 2002), [http://www.isanet.org/noarchive/shani.html#\\_ftn14](http://www.isanet.org/noarchive/shani.html#_ftn14) [accessed September 2003].
  11. Ranjit K. Pachnanda, *Terrorism and Response to Terrorist Threat* (New Delhi: UBS, 2002), pp. 98–99, 100–103, 104–119. Also see "Sikh Separatists," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol.17 (7 March 2003), [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com) [accessed 7 March, 2004].
  12. The most recent estimate of 17 Million is from Axel, p. 9.
  13. See Axel, Shani, Barrier and Dusenbery; Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settles in Britain* (New York: Tavistock, 1985); Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Harry Goulbourne, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
  14. Tatla, p. 43.
  15. Oberoi, 1988, p. 27.
  16. *Ibid.*
  17. Shiromani Akali Dal (henceforth the Akali Dal) has been the most prominent Sikh political organization. It was formed (albeit under a different name) on 14 December 1920 at the Akal Takht, within the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar. The leader of the Akali Dal is called a "Jathedar." Since its inception, it has controlled the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Central Gurdwara Management Committee, or SGPC). Between 1930 and 1940, the Akali Dal struggled for communal Sikh rights. In 1946 it launched agitation for an independent, sovereign Sikh State but obviously failed to achieve this goal. In subsequent decades, some of the voting block of the Akali Dal was ceded to the Congress party. The Akali Dal launched two agitations for the formation of a Punjabi-speaking province, Punjabi Subah, in 1955 and 1960. The Akali Dal also supported the movement for Khalistan between 1980 and 1992. By the early 1990s, the Akali Dal had fragmented into a number of groups that argued for varying degrees of sovereignty and/or integration within federal India. For more details see Kuldip Kaur, *Akali Dal in Punjab Politics: Splits and Mergers* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1999). For the full text of this proclamation, see Oberoi, 1988, p. 37.

18. Sihra, 1985, p. 55; cited in Oberoi, 1988, p. 39.
19. Shani, 2002, drawing from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London/New York: Verso, 1993).
20. Tatla, p. 63.
21. Outside of India, these structures may be commissioned as gurdwaras or they may be renovated civic buildings or churches. In locations where the community members cannot sustain or fund the construction of a permanent gurdwara, they may rent a school gymnasium for the sangat. The history and location of gurdwaras reflect the dispersal pattern of the Sikh diaspora. For example, the oldest gurdwara was established in 1908 in Canada, but they are most numerous in the U.K. where there are at least 202 (Tatla, pp. 73–4).
22. For a more thorough description of this process, see Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the "Game of Love,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
23. Goulbourne, p. 161; Tatla, pp. 73–4.
24. This claim has been repeatedly made by various Indian intelligence and law enforcement agencies. For example, this issue was raised during a recent meeting of the Indo–US Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism and Law Enforcement attended by the author.
25. See Bruce La Brack, "The New Patrons: Sikhs Overseas," in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne Dusenbery (eds), (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989).
26. These important historical gurdwaras include Nankana Sahib in Sheikhpura District, Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, a modest structure billed as the birthplace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Gujranwala, and Dera Sahib in Lahore. These sites comprise Sikh pilgrimage destinations throughout the year coincident with important events within the Sikh calendar, usually birth and death anniversaries of key Sikh gurus.
27. The author attended one such Gurpurab in Nankana Sahib in November of 1995.
28. Based on fieldwork in November 1995.
29. Goulbourne, p. 159.
30. See Goulbourne; Tatla; Pettigrew; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol. 17 (2003).
31. As a result of the U.S.-led global war on terrorism and the new strategic partnership between the U.S. and India, several such groups have been proscribed as "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" in the U.S. Other states have also adopted similar measures.
32. Tatla, p. 71. For an early analysis of the Punjabi press and its challenges in the United Kingdom, Darshan Singh Tatla and Gurharpal Singh, "The Punjabi Press," *New Community*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (January 1989), pp. 171–84.
33. One means of doing has been the establishment of academic chairs of Sikh studies. While these chairs were funded by the communities to further Sikhism on a broad spectrum of academic fronts, these communities have come to feel betrayed by the types of knowledge being produced by these chairs. All three chairs have come under attack and the professors in them have been deemed, by many in the communities, to be apostate Sikhs. For an interesting account of one such program, see Gurrinder Singh Mann "Sikh

- Studies and the Sikh Educational Heritage” & “Teaching the Sikh Tradition: A Course at Columbia,” in John Hawley, John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann (eds.), *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
34. See Goulbourne.
  35. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: Vol. 2, 1839–1988* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966, re-issued 1991), p. 310.
  36. Goulbourne. See also Axel, pp. 4–6.
  37. Goulbourne. Also see Pettigrew.
  38. Goulbourne.
  39. Darshan Singh Tatla, “The Punjab Crisis and Sikh Mobilization in Britain,” in Rohit Barot (ed.), *Religion and Ethnicity: Minorities and Social Change in the Metropolis* (Kampe, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993), p. 96. Also Ram Narayan Kumar, *The Sikh Unrest and the Indian State: Politics, Personalities and Historical Retrospective* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1997) and Pettigrew.
  40. Goulbourne.
  41. *inter alia* Kapur; Tully and Jacob; Brar; and Pettigrew.
  42. Pettigrew.
  43. Goulbourne, p. 137. Also see Pettigrew.
  44. Goulbourne; Kapur; Tully and Jacobs; Pettigrew.
  45. *Ibid.*
  46. Goulbourne, p. 152.
  47. See *inter alia* Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Axel; Mahmood; Pettigrew.
  48. Verne A. Dusenbery, “A Sikh Diaspora? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities” in Peter van der Veer (ed.) *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 17–42. See also Mehar Singh Chaddah, *Are Sikhs A Nation?* (New Delhi: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, 1982).
  49. Pettigrew.
  50. Obviously this query is well beyond the scope of this work. However this question is thoroughly explored in the yet-unpublished dissertation of the other. Louis Fenech (personal communication, March 2004) makes another excellent point about the mutually constitutive natures of the narratives embodied by these various commodities. Fenech argues that many of the paintings that one encounters in museums and gurdwaras are in fact derived from passages in *Sundari* and *Bijai Singh*. These images have also formed the basis of a series of statues that can be found in a village in the Punjab. According to Fenech, these statues have become a site of spectacle which has given this village a newfound popularity in the Punjab.
  51. There was no coherent political structure uniting the entirety of the island even during the periods of colonization under the Portuguese (beginning in 1505) and later under the Dutch (beginning in 1656). Rather, there were a number of fragmented Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms scattered throughout the island, centered in Kotte in the southwest and in Kandy in the central highlands; and a predominantly Hindu Tamil Kingdom in the north of the island, centered in Jaffna. Helena Whall, “Assessing the Sri Lanka Peace

- Process" (London: Paper for the Political Studies Association–UK 50th Conference, 10–13 April 2000).
52. This history is in no way intended to be comprehensive. A multi-optic account is well beyond the scope of this analysis. For further details, the reader may consult a number of sources, inter alia: Devanesan Nesiiah, "The claim to self-determination: a Sri Lankan Tamil perspective," *South Asia*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 55–71; Asia Foundation. *Focus on Sri Lanka* (The Asia Foundation, 2001); Manik De Silva, "Sri Lanka's Civil War," *Current History*, Vol. 98, No. 632 (December, 1999), pp. 428–32; Manoj Joshi, "On the razor's edge: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 19 (January/March 1996), pp. 19–42; Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994); Kenneth Bush, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (Spring 1990), pp. 41–58; Robert N. Kearney, "Tension and Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Current History*, Vol. 85 (March 1986), pp. 109–12.
  53. Ibid.
  54. See Joshi.
  55. Whall; Joshi.
  56. See Peter Chalk, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's Internal Organization and Operations: A Preliminary Analysis," *A Canadian Security Intelligence Service Publication* (17 March 2000), [http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/eng/comment/com77\\_e.html](http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/eng/comment/com77_e.html) [accessed July 3, 2003]. See also Daniel Byman et al, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); Zahabia Adamaly, Ana Cuter, Shyama Veketeswar, "Lessons from Sri Lanka: Communities and Conflict: An overview of a symposium held on June 13, 2000 in New York City" (New York: the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs and the Asia Society, 13 June 2000), [www.asiasource.org/asip/sri\\_lanka.pdf](http://www.asiasource.org/asip/sri_lanka.pdf) [accessed 30 November 2004]; "A World of Exiles," *The Economist* (2 January 2003), [http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=1511765](http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=1511765) [accessed 2 September 2004].
  57. See "A World of Exiles."
  58. Adamaly et al.
  59. For a much more nuanced exposition of the various waves of Sri Lankan Tamil emigrants and their political relationships, see Rohan Gunaratna, "Sri Lanka: Feeding the Tamil Tigers," in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds), *Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).
  60. Rohan Gunaratna (2 December 1998); Chalk (2000) claims that the LTTE had cells in at least 54 countries as of winter 1999.
  61. Rohan Gunaratna, "Bankrupting the Terror Business," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 12, No. 8 (1 August 2000). There are several other such organizations. For example, see Byman et al (2001); *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol. 15 (2002). [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com) [accessed 7 March 2004]; Philippe Le Billon et al., "Controlling Resource Flows to Civil Wars: A Review and Analysis of Current Policies and Legal Instruments" Background Paper for the International Peace Academy "Economic Agendas in Civil Wars"

- Project Conference Policies and Practices for Regulating Resource Flows to Armed Conflicts, Rockefeller Foundation Study and Conference Center, Bellagio, Italy, 20–24 May 2002), /www.ipacademy.org/PDF\_Reports/controlling\_resource\_flows.pdf, [accessed July 4, 2003].
62. Ibid.
  63. See Joshi; Le Billon et al; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol. 15 (2002).
  64. Chalk, 2000; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol. 15 (2002); Valpy Fitzgerald, "Global Financial Information, Compliance Incentives and Conflict Funding," Paper presented to the International Conference on "Globalization and Self-Determination Movements" hosted by Pomona College, 21–22 January 2003. <http://www.politics.pomona.edu/globalization/HTML/Valpy%20Fitzgerald.doc> [accessed 4 July 2003].
  65. Chalk, 2000.
  66. Chalk, 2002.
  67. Author interviews with Sri Lankan military, intelligence and police personnel in the fall of 2002 as well as with analysts within the United States Embassy in Colombo.
  68. Anthony Davis, "Asia, Tamil Tiger International," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 8, Issue 10 (1 October 1996).
  69. See India Express, "U.S. denies any information about LTTE indulging in drug trafficking" (3 March 2001) <http://www.indiaexpress.com/news/world/20010303-0.html> [accessed 29 August 2003].
  70. "International Law Enforcement Cooperation Fights Narcoterror: Drug enforcement agency official testifies before Senate committee," Statements of DEA Intelligence Chief, Steven W. Casteel (20 May 2003), [usinfo.org/wf-archive/2003/030520/epf219.htm](http://usinfo.org/wf-archive/2003/030520/epf219.htm), [accessed 9 December 2004].
  71. Ibid.
  72. Gunaratna (2 December 1998).
  73. Le Billon et al.
  74. Byman et al, p. 44.
  75. Chalk, 2000.
  76. Davis, Anthony; Byman et al, pp. 43–4.
  77. Byman, 2001, p. 45.
  78. Gunaratna (2 December 1998).
  79. Ibid.
  80. See *inter alia* Byman et al; *Gunaratne* (2 December 1998), Chalk, 2000.
  81. See Byman et al; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, Vol. 15 (2002).
  82. Author interviews in Sri Lanka in November 2002.
  83. This situation was very frustrating to Sri Lankan security official who were frustrated that the LTTE could continue with these activities. They expressed concern that should the talks break down, the LTTE would be in a much better position to stage attacks from newly established theatres of operation. Author interviews in Sri Lanka in November 2002.
  84. Comments made by Neil DeVotta, at a lecture at Center for Strategic and International Studies (14 February 2003).
  85. This is in distinct contrast to diasporan Hindu nationalism which has been organized globally under the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The

VHIP in contrast has been able to overcome local differences and political opportunities to establish a global strategy. See Bidisha Biswas, "Nationalism by Proxy: A Comparison of Social Movements Among Diaspora Sikhs and Hindus," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 10 (2004), pp. 269–95.

86. This discussion borrows heavily from Biswas's 2004 comparison of the diasporan Sikh and Hindu nationalism.

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