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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

MCC FOR S GROFF, D TETER, D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GSL COMPLICITY IN PARAMILITARY

FACTIONS' HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

REF: A. COLOMBO 591 B. COLOMBO 561 C. COLOMBO 463 D. COLOMBO 460

E. 2006 COLOMBO 2056 F. 2006 COLOMBO 1896 G. 2005 COLOMBO 2157 H. 2004

COLOMBO 1219

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b, d)

1. (S) SUMMARY: Allegations of government complicity in crimes committed by organized paramilitary groups have mounted in the last year. *Paramilitaries such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-breakaway Karuna group and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) have helped the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) to fight the LTTE, to kidnap suspected LTTE collaborators, and to give the GSL a measure of deniability. The GSL, which denies any links to paramilitary groups, has recently touted its efforts to improve its human rights record, such as the re-publication of procedures on arrests and detentions and the appointment of a "One-Man Commission" to investigate reported disappearances (ref C). However, these efforts so far appear aimed more at improving Sri Lanka's image abroad and have yet to produce concrete improvements in the human rights situation. Outside the capital, the incidence of human rights abuses has continued, including extrajudicial killings, abductions, child trafficking, extortion, and prostitution. President Rajapaksa's government, strapped for cash, has cut direct payments to paramilitaries initiated by former President Kumaratunga and instead turns a blind eye to extortion and kidnapping for ransom by EPDP and Karuna. While many of the charges against the government have been made in public fora, a growing number of trusted Embassy contacts, often at personal risk, have described in detail the extent of the GSL's involvement with paramilitary groups. END SUMMARY.*

GSL Finds Paramilitaries Useful

2. (S) The GSL sees several advantages in allowing paramilitary groups to operate in the country. Paramilitary groups in the North and East help the GSL fight the LTTE and compete with the LTTE for public support and new recruits. These groups also enhance security in Colombo by kidnapping and sometimes killing those suspected of working with the LTTE. Frequent abductions by paramilitaries keep critics of the GSL fearful and quiet. Ultimately, the GSL's objective is to turn Karuna and EPDP leader Douglas Devananda into pro-GSL political leaders in the East and North, respectively. The

government hopes this will ensure long term control over these areas even if some form of devolution is instituted.

3. (S) In the meantime, these paramilitary groups give the GSL a measure of deniability. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

told us that some military commanders in JaffnaXXXXXXXXXXXX want to clamp down on paramilitaries but have orders from Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa to not interfere with the paramilitaries on the grounds that they are doing "work" that the military cannot do because of international scrutiny. On XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX confided to XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX that the Defense Ministry had instructed him not to interfere with "military intelligence" operations (ref E).

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4. (S) The GSL has a history of funding paramilitary groups. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX pointed out that under former President Kumaratunga, the GSL had begun the practice of paying paramilitaries to refrain from engaging in criminal pursuits. Several Embassy interlocutors have independently confirmed this. However, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said that the current government, cash-strapped, has ended this arrangement. Instead, he alleged, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa has authorized EPDP and Karuna to collect the money from Tamil businessmen. This may account for the sharp rise in lawlessness, especially extortion and kidnapping, that many have documented in Vavuniya and Colombo. Even though EPDP and Karuna are each comprised nearly exclusively of ethnic Tamils, the crimes that they commit are almost always against other Tamils.

Karuna Group Becomes Pre-eminent Paramilitary

5. (S) The Karuna faction's formal name is Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), which means "Liberation Tigers of the Tamil People" in Tamil. This name is an attempt to sap legitimacy from the LTTE by taking the "Liberation Tigers" part of their name. In less than one year since Karuna returned to Sri Lanka, the TMVP has become the most powerful paramilitary organization in the country. It began in 2004 when Karuna broke away from the LTTE, taking about 4,000 Tiger cadres with him (ref H). After the LTTE struck back, inflicting serious losses, then-President Chandrika Kumaratunga helped Karuna escape to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where he remained until July 2006. He remained active in managing his cadres even while living abroad. Since returning to Sri Lanka, Karuna has used strong-arm tactics to establish a powerful paramilitary group that operates under government protection (ref D).

Abductions and Killings

6. (S) The Karuna group is probably the most active Sri Lankan paramilitary in abductions and extrajudicial killings. XXXXXXXXXXXXX confided to PolOff that even MPs fear that the GSL will use Karuna to assassinate them. XXXXXXXXXXXXX echoed this anxiety to us XXXXXXXXXXXXX. A number of XXXXXXXXXXXXX MPs, Muslims as well as Tamils, have told us privately that they fear for their lives. XXXXXXXXXXXXX stated that he believed Karuna set up the assassination of Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham on Christmas Day 2005 (ref G) with the help of EPDP leader Devananda. XXXXXXXXXXXXX was also positive that Karuna cadres were employed in the killing in Colombo of popular Tamil MP Nadarajah Raviraj on November 10, 2006 (ref F).

7. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX confirmed that Karuna has extended his activities to Jaffna from his base in the East. XXXXXXXXXXXXX has documented XXXXXXXXXXXXX abduction cases in Jaffna XXXXXXXXXXXXX, many of which he believes are the responsibility of the Karuna group. XXXXXXXXXXXXX told PolOff that he was discouraged XXXXXXXXXXXXX told us he has

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evidence of XXXXXXXXXXXXX. However, because of XXXXXXXXXXXXX and limited resources, he was only able to document a sample XXXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXXX described one abduction in which a man suspected of having ties to the LTTE was taken and a "calling card" was left with a picture of Karuna on the front and a calendar on the back, indicating that the man's "time had run out."

Child Soldiers

8. (S) The TMVP is allowed to operate throughout the East in close proximity to SLA bases, often with clearly underage cadres guarding its camps with machine guns. XXXXXXXXXXXXX stated that the GSL allows Karuna's cadres to recruit children forcibly from within IDP camps in the East. XXXXXXXXXXXXX said the average age of Karuna recruits is 14. XXXXXXXXXXXXX's allegation that Karuna recruits children from IDP camps with the tacit approval of the military was confirmed by XXXXXXXXXXXXX. We have received confidential reports of the Karuna group's recruitment and use of child soldiers from a U.S.-based NGO as well.

Extortion and Prostitution Rings

9. (S) Karuna does not have the international fund-raising network among the Tamil Diaspora that the LTTE has built over the past 25 years. As a result, he has resorted to a wide range of criminal activities. XXXXXXXXXXXXX stated that when the GSL brings

in shipments of food and supplies to IDP camps from Colombo, Karuna's cadres are given the opportunity to go through the shipment first. They are allowed to take any food they need for themselves, as well as any supplies they believe they can sell, with only the left-overs making their way to the IDPs.

11. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX also explained that Karuna operates prostitution rings out of the IDP camps to "take care of" GSL soldiers, stating that the women "had no choice" but to acquiesce to Karuna cadres' demands. XXXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXXX independently described how women are forced into prostitution, or to give up their children to traffickers. The methods are similar to those in Jaffna (paras 17-18). Families sometimes try to arrange their daughters' marriages at the age of 12 or 13 in the hope that it will reduce the likelihood of their being forced into prostitution.

12. (S) Although the GSL has consistently denied supporting Karuna, XXXXXXXXXXXXX allowed PolOff to listen to tapes of his interview with Gothabaya. The Defense Secretary was effusive in his praise for Karuna and the

SIPDIS benefits the GSLXXXXXXXXXXXX

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Making Karuna Legitimate

13. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX The TMVP does not yet have the status of a formal political party. According to Sri Lanka's Constitution, new parties cannot register when an election is "pending" in any part of the country. Elections for local councils are long overdue in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which are now in constitutional limbo following the October 1, 2006 Supreme Court decision to de-merge the two provinces. As a result, the GSL must find an existing political party for Karuna to "join," perhaps later changing the name to TMVP, in order for Karuna to stand for elections. XXXXXXXXXXXXX said thatXXXXXXXXXXXX has so far resisted GSL efforts to force a shotgun marriage with Karuna, but that he may ultimately have to yield.

EPDP: "Political Party" and Paramilitary

14. (S) The EPDP, originally called the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), began as a rival to the LTTE. One wing of the EPRLF founded the EPDP as a formal political party when its leader, Douglas Devananda, was elected to Parliament in 1994 and aligned with the government. Devananda continues to hold the single parliamentary seat his party won in the 2004 election. As part of the ruling coalition, he serves as Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare. Although registered as a formal political party, the EPDP remains a feared paramilitary group, wielding non-official

power over parts of the Jaffna peninsula and especially the offshore islands with the tacit approval of the Sri Lanka Army.

Extra-Judicial Killings with the Military's Support

15. (S) *Working in concert with SLA soldiers stationed in the Jaffna peninsula, the EPDP is able to conduct extortion, abductions, extra-judicial killings and other criminal acts without fear of consequences, according to numerous sources.* XXXXXXXXXXXXX told us about EPDP's involvement in extra-judicial killings in Jaffna.

Independently,XXXXXXXXXX confirmed much of XXXXXXXXXXXXX's account. He explained that when the EPDP intends to kill a target, they first provide notice to the military. The number of soldiers patrolling the streets of Jaffna (40,000 total on the peninsula) is such that there are literally soldiers stationed at every street corner. At an agreed time, all of the soldiers in the designated area take a five to ten minute "break" at once (although the normal practice is to take breaks in shifts). At that point, armed and masked gunmen, often riding on motorcycles, race down the street and assassinate the intended victim. Shortly after the killing, the soldiers' break over, they return to their posts to deal with the aftermath. While police investigations are common, they almost never lead to arrests. XXXXXXXXXXXXX also told us of a XXXXXXXXXXXXX doctor XXXXXXXXXXXXX who performs forced abortions, often under the guise of a regular check-up, on Tamil women suspected of being aligned with the LTTE.

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16. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX Child Trafficking

17. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX said he believes that EPDP is operating child trafficking rings in Jaffna with a base on Delft island, which the EPDP "owns."

XXXXXXXXXX explained that because of the large number of widows in Jaffna, men associated with the EPDP, often from neighboring villages, are used to seduce women with children, especially girls, with the promise of economic protection. After establishing a relationship, the men then take the children, sometimes by force and sometimes with the promise that they will be provided a better life. The children are sold into slavery, usually boys to work camps and girls to prostitution rings, through EPDP's networks in India and Malaysia. XXXXXXXXXXXXX maintains that children are often smuggled out of the country with the help of a corrupt Customs and Immigration official at Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo.

18. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX's story was partially verified by XXXXXXXXXXXXX who stated that the EPDP works in concert with the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) to operate Tamil prostitution rings for the soldiers. XXXXXXXXXXXXX stated that young women were taken and forced to have sex with between five and ten soldiers a night. Sometimes they

are paid approximately a dollar for each "service." The young women's parents are unable to complain to authorities for fear of retribution and because doing so would ruin the girls' reputation, making it impossible for them ever to marry. Families have begun arranging marriages for their daughters at a very young age in the hopes that the EPDP and soldiers will be less likely to take them. In addition to trafficking in children, XXXXXXXXXXXXX detailed how the EPDP operates an illicit alcohol smuggling ring using child "mules."

U.S. Takes a Hard Line against Paramilitaries

19. (S) Addressing the activities of these paramilitaries and their blatant disregard for human rights is a top priority of the Embassy. Ambassador, DCM and Pol Chief have met repeatedly with the President, the Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe and others to emphasize the importance of reining in these groups and ending the abductions, killings, and other human rights abuses. Visiting senior USG officials, including Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) Richard

SIPDIS Boucher and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for SCA Steven Mann have delivered tough messages on human rights to the highest levels of the GSL, noting that continued abuses could affect defense cooperation.

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20. (S) COMMENT: While none of the evidence put forward by our contacts constitutes a smoking gun, the preponderance of these statements) and the extent to which they independently corroborate each other) points to a pattern of GSL complicity with paramilitary groups on multiple levels. It appears that this involvement goes beyond merely turning a blind eye to these organizations' less savory activities. At worst, these accounts suggest that top leaders of its security establishment may be providing direction to these paramilitaries. While it is perhaps understandable that the GSL wants to use every possible means in its war against LTTE terror, we must continue to stress to the Government the importance of reining in the paramilitaries and establishing internationally accepted norms for arresting, investigating, prosecuting and, if appropriate, punishing those suspected of cooperating with the LTTE. BLAKE