

The LTTE Air Asset

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The LTTE's Acquisition of Air Assets means that it has acquired Strategic Depth and capabilities that would not only bolster its Military, that mainly comprises guerrilla fighters, but also bring VPs, Air Assets and High Security Zones of Sri Lanka and India within its target range.

The constituents and dimensions of this Air Threat are: a) airstrip of about 1250 meters in Iranamadu allowing light to medium size aircraft to operate with a payload of 1.5 to 2 tons. (A fuel load adjustment could provide for a payload enhancement, however the range will be reduced and vice versa). b) The airfield has been provided with surveillance and self-protection means - radar, other electronic means and the support facilities to enable safe operations. The hard kill options are expected to be the Close Range Anti Aircraft weapons and Surface to Air Missiles and c) The type of aircraft in possession of the LTTE is the Czech Aircraft ZLIN Z-143. The biggest aircraft in the 143L range can carry four passengers with a payload of about 500kgs.

The ZLIN Z-143 can be used for training, cross-country flying, reconnaissance, communication duties and limited air offensive missions. Purchasing and shipping an aircraft requires adherence to end user licenses and other stringent regulations. Yet the LTTE has been able to buy their air inventory despite being branded a terrorist organization. Any aircraft is required internationally to be registered (even applicable to the Military), have identification marks/symbols and tail number, and to be flown as per both International Civil Aviation Organization Regulations and the relevant laws of the land. The aircrews and the maintainers need clearance from a competent authority. The skies over Sri Lanka are under the sovereign control of the Government of Sri Lanka, aircraft flying in the Sri Lankan airspace should have express authorization of the SL Government. International airspace is controlled by International Agreements. Flying by an unrecognized group like the LTTE, is therefore a gross violation of both Sri Lankan and International Law.

The need of the hour is to nip the bud otherwise it would be just a matter of time before the LTTE scouts for more potent air platforms and weapon systems. The Sri Lankan authorities should at the minimum trace the documentation trail - the commercial transaction, details of importer, import license and where it was obtained, contractual agreements etc.

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