The Sri Lanka Army’s strategy of acting like guerrilla organisation, the restructuring of the Army, ending corruption, increasing its strength, firepower and a direct chain of command that went from the top to grass root levels, forced the end of terrorism in the country.

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Sarath Fonseka, in his first public appearance nearly three months after the elimination of terrorism in the country, made these comments at ‘Counter Point,’ organised by the PIM Alumni on Friday.

Speaking on ‘Winning Military Strategies - Lessons for Managers,’ General Fonseka said that when he took over the Army, the LTTE was acting almost like a conventional army and was considered to be unstoppable. Like a conventional army, they had to protect land, equipment and armaments. “From our side, we changed our tactics and strategies. We started acting like guerrillas, making incursions into their territories in small groups and carrying out daring attacks when the LTTE challenged us in the jungles,” General Fonseka said.

He said that the decision of going for war is a political decision. The Army, together with the other military forces, concluded the war according to political will.

General Fonseka was speaking on how he prepared the Army to fight the Elam War Four. He said that when he was appointed Commander of the Army on 6th December 2005, the organisation was in need of lot of changes, including enhanced manpower, excellent training and better equipment.

“30 years of war had caused a lot of frustration to the people, who had lost their faith in the Army and their confidence that the violence could ever be contained. The war was started in August 2006 in Jaffna. My first task was to prepare the Army for battle. For that, I restructured the entire Army deviating from traditional methods. I appointed new people, new faces of my choice to the battlefront, people untainted with corruption, people capable of carrying their duties effectively. I dramatically increased the manpower of the Army with recruitment. My strategy also included the procurement of arms and ammunition, battle tanks, armoured carriers, the best equipment could buy. I also changed the strategy of the battle from conventional tactics to guerrilla tactics. For that, I needed excellent commanders and improved firepower. We started operating in small groups and actively operated in the jungles. Earlier, it was the LTTE who operated in the jungles. When we moved into the jungles, they avoided meeting us at all costs,” he said.

The General said that during the war, the Army’s main strategy was to confront the LTTE’s strongest positions.

“During the Jayasikuru operation launched to liberate Jaffna, I observed through experience that when we attacked the LTTE’s most formidable strongholds, they became very weak. With that in mind, we commenced our assault from the A9 road, the Maddu road, Mannar and the Mulativu jungles. Sometimes it took us four to five days just to take control of one or two
kilometres. But the results were good for us. We minimised our casualties and increased the losses of the enemy. At the end of 2007, we were operating 35 battalions on all fronts and the LTTE had to react to our plan. We were engaging them every day, 24 hours a day, weeks and months on end. We maintained our assault in all conditions. In pouring rain and floods, in the hot sun and drought, we kept the momentum going until we achieved victory,” General Fonseka said

Restructuring the Army made it necessary to stamp out corruption at all levels, corruption which was rampant from the lowest to the highest ranks.

“Every year, the government allocated lot of money to the Army, which is an expensive organisation to maintain. Because of corruption at every level, we were not doing what we were asked to do. I made it clear that not five cents will be spent by the Army without proper accounting. To that end, I implemented strict rules and standards. I sat on Tender Boards and was personally monitoring every detail. This was not a function of the Commander of the Army, but I personally went through every detail to ensure that the blight of corruption was eradicated from the Army.

General Fonseka also said that in the past, there was a tradition that when an officer is caught making money illegally, he would not suffer any punishment, his service and seniority would not be affected, and his next promotion assured, as long as he paid back the stolen money in full. “I ended this tradition. The guilty received appropriate punishment.”

Speaking on new recruitments and promotions in the organisation, the General said that he deviated from traditional methods of awarding promotions and selected all commanders on merit and performance, and not on seniority.

“We recruited and trained 3,000 to 5,000 men per month. We also promoted 1,500 soldiers from the ranks of corporals and sergeants to lieutenants. We achieved excellent results through these methods, as we made the best use of those with strong battle experience. My new methods of recruitment and merit-based promotions gave me the manpower to win the war, ‘ he said

I also implemented a direct chain of command which goes down to grass root levels in the Army. There were many instances when I had to remove commanders from their jobs and appoint replacements. We had to have the correct men in place when the going got tough. And there was huge resistance from the enemy every day. At one point, we suffered many casualties and 130 troops died in a single day. Whenever there was a victory, I used to share that with my officers and when there was rise in casualties figures I took the blame to myself without passing to anyone. In that sense I my self was under pressure all the times but kept the momentum going” General Fonseka said

Speaking on Army intelligence and its performance the General Fonseka said that indigence was back word in the past.

“I removed almost all the officers attached to it. I found that most of them has been serving
that unit more that 15 to 20 years and filled with new young faces. They were brand new set of people committed, sincerely did their part, a very good job. If you take most of the Air Force targets, Navy ships targets are taken on Army intelligence unit.

Speaking on the support given by the other forces General said that Air Force, Navy and Police did splendid service with Army to gain the victory in war. The coordinated efforts and close monitoring of the battle changing of the tactics became as a daily routine.

“End of the day we had difficult time patience endurance demonstrating good results in eliminating terrorism from the country which one point considered unimaginable concluded General Sarath Fonseka.

At the conclusion of General Fonseka’s remarks the audience at the ceremony gave him standing ovation which is a rare sight.

By Deepal V. Perera ~ dailymirror.lk ~