

Keenie Meenie Services in Sri Lanka (1984–1988)

The British private military company Keenie Meenie Services Ltd (KMS), founded by former 22 SAS personnel, contracted by the Government of Sri Lanka c. 1984–1988 to train Sri Lankan Special Task Force and elite army units operating in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Keenie Meenie Services is the case file's reference instance of a foreign mercenary contract operating inside Sri Lanka with the documented knowledge of a permanent UN Security Council member. The contract sits at the intersection of three structural gaps the case file is built to record: the absence of a binding international mercenary-regulation regime, the absence of UK domestic licensing of private military companies in the 1980s, and the absence of a Sri Lankan accountability mechanism for the period in which KMS-trained units operated. Phil Miller's **Keenie Meenie: The British Mercenaries Who Got Away With War Crimes** (Pluto, 2020) and the supporting **Declassified UK** archive, together with subsequent OHCHR Special Procedures correspondence (2020) and an Information Commissioner ruling against the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2021), constitute the consolidated public record.

§1 What KMS was

Keenie Meenie Services Ltd was incorporated in the United Kingdom and operated from the early 1970s. Its founders and principal officers were drawn from 22 Special Air Service Regiment. Its name is reported to derive from British colonial-era slang for covert operations. Through the 1970s and 1980s KMS provided training, advisory and operational services in Oman, Northern Ireland, Nicaragua, the Comoros and elsewhere. It is the historical antecedent of the present-day Saladin Security and of the wider post-1990s private military and security company sector.

From c. 1984 KMS contracted with the Government of Sri Lanka, then governed under President J.R. Jayewardene, to provide training to the Special Task Force of the Sri Lanka Police and to elements of the Sri Lanka Army selected for operations in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The contract continued through the period 1984–1988, spanning the 1984 escalation, the 1985 Anuradhapura attack, the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord and the early IPKF deployment.

§2 Documented record — academic and journalistic

Rory Cormac's **Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy** (Oxford University Press, 2018) treats KMS within the broader category of British covert action in the late Cold War period and confirms the Sri Lankan contract from declassified Foreign & Commonwealth Office holdings. Phil Miller's **Keenie Meenie** (Pluto, 2020) is the consolidated investigation, drawing on FCO files released under the Public Records Act, US State Department cables obtained via FOIA, parliamentary records and survivor interviews.

BBC Asian Network's 2020 broadcast investigation, **Sri Lanka and the Secret SAS Army**, and the **Independent** and **Guardian** (Jamie Doward, 2020) coverage placed the record into mainstream UK political circulation.

§3 UK governmental response

Hansard records parliamentary questions on the KMS Sri Lanka contract from 1984 onward, including written answers concerning UK government knowledge of and policy toward British nationals training the Sri Lankan security forces. Jeremy Corbyn's 1987 parliamentary intervention is on the public record.

In 2020 the United Nations Special Procedures (Working Group on the use of mercenaries, Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions) jointly addressed the UK Government regarding KMS Sri Lanka. The UK Information Commissioner's Office in 2021 ruled against the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in a Freedom of Information case concerning further disclosure of KMS-related files.

§4 Contemporaneous accountability gap

Amnesty International's 1984 and 1987 reports on Sri Lanka documented patterns of torture, extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance attributable to the Sri Lankan Special Task Force and the Sri Lanka Army in the period in which KMS-trained units were operational. Amnesty did not at that time attribute specific incidents to KMS training, and the case file follows that source-of-record discipline: the structural fact (a UK-incorporated mercenary firm trained units that the contemporaneous Tier-A human-rights record finds to have committed serious violations) is recorded; specific incident attribution to KMS training is not made by TLTE.

The International Committee of the Red Cross's *Montreux Document on Pertinent International Legal Obligations and Good Practices for States Related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies during Armed Conflict* (2008) post-dates the KMS Sri Lanka contract by two decades and is non-binding. It is cited here for the normative principle that has since emerged, not as enforceable law for the 1984–1988 period.

§5 Why the case file records this article

The KMS contract is the cleanest available instance of a permanent UN Security Council member's nationals providing combat training to a state security force engaged in the conflict that is the subject of the case file. It bears directly on the legitimacy of post-2009 UK statements on Sri Lankan accountability, on the basis for OHCHR's call for universal-jurisdiction prosecutions, and on the case file's broader argument that the international accountability gap is not accidental but structural.

Specific legal recovery pathways arising from this record are addressed at /case/ltte-era/legal-recovery-pathways and the Reconciliation Audit Desk's enforcement-gap framing at /unmai/desk/reconciliation-audit.

Sources

- tlte-cite:kms-cormac-2018
- tlte-cite:kms-ohchr-special-2020
- tlte-cite:kms-ohchr-special-2020-2
- tlte-cite:kms-ohchr-special-2020-3
- tlte-cite:kms-asian-network-2020
- tlte-cite:kms-independent-british-2021
- tlte-cite:kms-information-commissioner-2021
- tlte-cite:kms-information-commissioner-2021-2
- tlte-cite:kms-parliament-written
- tlte-cite:kms-parliament-written-2
- tlte-cite:kms-hansard-lanka-1984
- tlte-cite:kms-hansard-corbyn-1987
- tlte-cite:kms-amnesty-international-1984
- tlte-cite:kms-amnesty-international-1987
- tlte-cite:kms-amnesty-international-1987-2
- tlte-cite:kms-doward-2020

- tlte-cite:kms-icrc-swiss-2008

What this is not

- This article does not name individual KMS personnel, serving or former British military personnel, or serving Sri Lankan personnel. Where Miller (2020) and Cormac (2018) name individuals on the public academic record, TLTE does not republish those names.
- This article does not attribute specific torture, killing or disappearance incidents to KMS training. The contemporaneous Tier-A record (Amnesty 1984, 1987) attributes such incidents to the Sri Lankan Special Task Force and Sri Lanka Army units that were KMS-trained; the connecting attribution is a question for accredited investigation.
- This article does not apply the 2008 Montreux Document retroactively to 1984–1988. It is cited for the normative principle, not as enforceable law for the period of the KMS contract.
- This article does not assert that KMS, as a corporate entity, has been adjudicated to have committed war crimes. The Miller (2020) title is a journalistic framing; TLTE follows the OHCHR Special Procedures characterisation.
- This article does not aggregate casualty counts in TLTE voice — the source-of-record discipline defers to Amnesty 1984/1987 and OHCHR OISL (2015).