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Humanitarian contradictions



There is universal condemnation today of the LTTE for the continued holding of civilians as a human shield in the tiny stretch of land it still holds, thanks to the cautious operation by the Security Forces. This extends from the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to his Under Secretary General on Humanitarian Affairs, the Indian authorities, the British and French Foreign Ministers, the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Peace Process (US, ED, Japan and Norway) and many others.

In his latest briefing on the Sri Lankan situation, April 15, John Holmes, UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs says: "The UN agencies, International Committee of the Red Cross and our staff and people, when they came out of the LTTE hold they made it absolutely clear that people were being held against their will. They had to flee and if they try to leave they are being fired upon. When they try to flee, huge pressure is put on them against their leaving like forced recruitment of the civilians including children against their will, to fight or work for the LTTE. (Emphasis mine) There may be some immediate family members who may stay but overwhelming majority would want to get out at least for safety reasons irrespective of political reasons."

Call for a ceasefire

With all this body of opinion ranged against what is acknowledged as the most ruthless terrorist organization in the world, with a clear understanding of its policies directed against the civilians under its control, it is strange that the same people and institutions that make these charges are seeking to put pressure on the Government to bring about a ceasefire in its humanitarian military operations against the LTTE.

They seek a "humanitarian pause" and various other ruses to halt moves to put down this terrorist organization, banned in most of the countries that call for a "humanitarian pause" or ceasefire, allegedly in the interests of the Tamil civilians who are held against their will by the LTTE.

Bundle of contradictions

All of this is a huge bundle of contradictions, which needs explanation. Firstly, the Government has clearly stated that what it is carrying out is a humanitarian military operation, in fact a humanitarian mission to free the Tamil people of the North and East from the clutches of LTTE terror.

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Comments and suggestions to Web Editor

It has succeeded in most vast areas of the East and North, nearly one third of the country, where the LTTE once held sway, and has now pushed into sliver of land it still lords over. To allow the LTTE the freedom to carry on with its terror over those who are allegedly its "own" Tamil people, who it claims to "liberate" will not only be a folly of unprecedented proportions but a gross violation of the very principles of humanitarian action, whatever the well-fed, well-paid, well-oiled, often violent and comfortably ensconced expatriate Tamils in western



Civilians are the priority

countries, having no aims of returning whatever of returning to Lanka and sharing the suffering of their Tamil brethren under the LTTE, their agents, apologists, and so many others may say of the present situation.

'Humanitarian pause'

It is a basic contradiction to have a "humanitarian pause" to a humanitarian operation - military or otherwise. The people who have so far been liberated from the LTTE's clutches, including more than 65,000 who have recently fled to the Safe Zone in Mullaitivu are proof of the humanitarian nature of this military operation. And now to pauses, and there results. President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced a 48-hour period of defensive action in January his year to allow Tamil civilian to leave the LTTE held area. It was

not productive.

The LTTE imposed harsh methods of holding them back. The Government announced another a pause of 48 hours during the recent Sinhala and Tamil New Year period, which also coincided with Easter, the results were even worse than what happened in January. We have the words of John Holmes himself as proof of this.

Being realistic

"There seems to be less civilians getting out during the [New Year] pause than before. So it is clear that LTTE did not allow those who wished to leave even if they wished to leave the area during this pause to do so, they seemed to be actively prevented from doing so, perhaps more actively prevented from doing so during this pause, so that is a matter for great regret." (John Holmes - Briefing at the UN - April 15, 09)

This must be clear to all other than John Holmes, the British and French Foreign Ministers David Miliband and Bernard Boucher and the UN Secretary General itself, that no among of so-called "humanitarian pauses" can bring about the results that are beneficial to the Tamil civilians held hostage by the LTTE. It is now



A military solution is, in some circumstances, the best way to save civilian lives. Pictures by Rukmal Gamage

time to cut this crap about such pauses, and also take note of John Holmes' more realistic assessment of the possibility of ceasefire, as he explained it in New York, April 15.

"It is pretty clear frankly however that a ceasefire is not something that is available in the present circumstances. We are trying to do something realistic in

the present circumstances." What of the other realities that have emerged? Answering a question on the number of people killed and injured in the LTTE's stand-off at Mullaitivu, John Holmes has told the media thus: "You cannot give verifiable figures. Dozens may be killed per day. It goes up some days, it goes down other days. There were reports 50 - 60 killed or injured and other days it is less but we cannot verify."

Apart from the fact that one cannot see the logic behind giving unverified or unverifiable figures, for which the UN Office in Colombo has earlier apologized, there are also questions about the authenticity of these figures.

Warning

They could well have come from the LTTE sources the UN now admits to having contact with. They could also have come from Norway that has told LTTE demonstrators in Oslo that the UN was in contact with the LTTE. Be that as it may, let us take the figures as stated, and consider it in the context of the "imminent bloodbath" that Holmes, Miliband, Boucher et al and the hyper demonstrative Tamil expatriates in the West keep warning of.

When there is a pause in the military operations, hardly any people are allowed to leave; they are restrained from doing so, including the arming of children. When here is no pause there, about 50 to 60 civilians killed daily - one does not know by whom, or at least the accusers do not know for certain. However, there is evidence from the same "humanitarian concerns" that the LTTE does fire at and otherwise attacks civilians attempting to flee their control. So, if a ceasefire is unrealistic, as John Holmes admits, yet the Government must not act swiftly to liberate the balance of Tamil civilians (the figure interestingly has come down to nearly 100,000 from the once fashionable 200,000 or 300,000 bandied about without verification earlier) one must allow for 50 to 60 civilians to be killed each day.

Taking the figure of those killed as 50 a day (John Holmes - unverified), it is 500 in ten days, which is not a bloodbath but only a trickle from the point of view of these humanitarians. Let it go on for 20 days and it is a 1,000 and we can keep on multiplying. But, meanwhile there will be large numbers, even in their thousands escaping per day (John Holmes, again), as it did happen when the fighting was on earlier.

Duty of the Govt

So the logic would be to carry on the fight to liberate the Tamil civilians, which is the duty and obligation of the Government and in fact it is Right to Protect (R2P) of its own civilians, which is the sacred duty of the Government, in the reasonable expectation that the LTTE can be defeated and the opportunity given to most of the Tamils held hostage by LTTE terror to escape to freedom.

Let me quote Michael Radu Co-Chairman, US Center on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, and Homeland Security, who should know better on this: "Ultimately, Western views and policies vis-...-vis Sri Lanka prove that humanitarian feelings and "human rights" are no policy alternative to common sense, and that even small countries, if desperate enough, could solve their secessionist/terrorist problems even despite the powerful human right NGOs pressures to commit national suicide.

Second, and most important and with wider implications, short term, obsessive preoccupation with "civilian casualties" is often a death sentence to civilians in a civil war.

Military solution

"The longer the war, especially when the victory is obvious, the more civilian casualties. Hence a military solution is, in some circumstances, the best way to save civilian lives. In general, pacifism disguised as "human rights" or not, always leads to more death, especially in remote, third world, small countries vulnerable

to the influence of AI or HRW. Ending a war-by force if need be-protects more civilians than prolonging it under any pretexts.”

These are realities that have obviously escaped the knowledge of the tub-thumpers for a ceasefire or the failed humanitarian pauses in Sri Lanka’s military operations to defeat the LTTE and terrorism. It is evident today that there is no option but the military defeat of the LTTE, to assure freedom for the Tamil people under its jackboot of terror, to arrive at an inclusive, consensual political solution of the crisis in Sri Lanka’s ethnic relations, sharing of power and other pressing issues. Those who plead for the LTTE are not helping this cause of the Tamils and all other Sri Lankans.

Interestingly, John Holmes has admitted that UN is now in contact with the LTTE, not on the ground, but elsewhere. In the interests of transparency, it will be useful to know where and when such contacts have been made with an organization banned by so many member states of the UN, including permanent members of the Security Council, as an international terrorist organization. Does the UN have such contacts if the Janjaweed insurgents in the Sudan, accused of the atrocities in Dafur? Has it any such contacts with Al Qaeda or the Taliban in Afghanistan? And, if not, why not?

There is a video clip now in circulation, sent by a Sri Lankan expatriate in Maryland, USA, which is a shocking record of how the LTTE cut off both legs of a little boy who tried to run away to freedom, before his parents and many others. It is too gruesome to be seen by any child and is hard on most adults too.

One hopes that like that celebrated US photographer’s shot of a Vietnamese citizen, suspect of being a Vietcong sympathizer, being shot in the head in public, shocking the American people to intensify opposition to the Vietnam war, this would also shockt he world into realizing what the LTTE really is, and that it cannot have sympathy from any one who speaks for humanitarian causes.

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