



Civilians dying in war is a sad reality – Col Hariharan

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Retired Indian Military intelligence officer Colonel R Hariharan who is also a writer on insurgency and terrorism says that civilians getting killed in between two warring parties was a sad reality of war.

"It is in the nature of war that civilians in the vicinity of fighters would get killed. Both sides are fighting to save themselves and kill the other so they don't bother about civilians getting killed in between. This is the sad reality of war," said Col Hariharan, who had served in Sri Lanka as the head of intelligence for the Indian Peace Keeping Force between 1987 and 1990, during an interview with web based news organization *rediff.com*.

Col. Hariharan said that the "civilians are part of the LTTE concept of war. Civilian casualties provide good stories for LTTE propaganda."

Extracts of Col Hariharan's interview: "Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army are responsible for the crisis regarding civilians trapped in the war zone. And the civilians are also partly to blame for the situation developing into a crisis. The civilian population involved is a mixed bag of LTTE supporters and their families, families of LTTE members, ordinary people, and officials of various kinds.

The convergence of civilians into LTTE-held areas started when the war advanced slowly from Mannar district but it spread after the fall of Paranthan-Kilinochchi. The civilians fled at the behest of the LTTE because they were scared of their treatment at the hands of the Lankan army and they were still hopeful that the LTTE would hit back.

When the war intensified further, at the request of the Red Cross, it was the Sri Lanka government that declared a safe no fire zone first in an area east of Mankulam. Then it was shifted further to the interior as the army succeeded in pushing back the LTTE dramatically.

In all these stages of war for nearly six months, the LTTE could have allowed the civilians to leave the territory now becoming a war zone.

It did not because traditionally the LTTE considers civilian involvement in war as part of its method. Civilians provide some of the administrative cover that would be provided in normal armies. Regular armies also muster civilians for assistance in construction of defences, running supply convoys, medical cover etc.

So civilians are part of the LTTE concept of war. Civilian casualties provide good stories for LTTE propaganda.

The Mullaitivu area was probably selected as the final no fire zone because the land strip provides access only from three directions and sea access was available. This is useful in controlled evacuation. At least theoretically. But the evacuation requires the concurrence of both warring sides. The LTTE to this day had not agreed to their evacuation.

The Lankan army could have avoided the use of heavy artillery (which the LTTE used throughout) and air strikes.

The Lankan army believes, like the Americans, in the use of superior firepower and force in its counter-terror ops (operations). This is what has happened. I don't think it could have been avoided except some effort to separate both the warring sides with a third neutral force and then evacuate the civilians.

America had offered to send the Marines to assist such a process but as it is matter of sovereignty and the Lankan government did not agree. I believe India also did not relish the idea.

So for nearly four months everyone knew this crisis was building up. I had written about

it then as many had done. But everyone — the LTTE, the Lankan government, India, and the international community including the Tamil Diaspora — wished it away or were pursuing their own agenda. So it is a logical culmination of a developing crisis.

Apart from the above non-military reasons, the operation has reached almost the goal post. The security forces are within six km of the last LTTE position. There is really no requirement for air strikes. The LTTE positions are probably within range of infantry battalion weapons like machine guns, mortars, grenade launchers, and recoil-less rifles. And probably the LTTE also lost all its artillery assets by now and artillery retaliatory fire might not be required.

Of course, if the security forces do not use artillery during the final assault, they would suffer more casualties because they would inflict fewer casualties on the LTTE.

However, the moot point is that all the infantry weapons are capable of killing any civilians within their range because the operational area is so restricted. So while the casualties might be less, the threat to civilians there exists."

Asked whether India's assistance to the Sri Lankan military was pivotal in any manner for their military victory over the LTTE? Col Hariharan said: "If pivotal means indispensable, no. If India had not provided training assistance and radar and other non lethal equipment Sri Lanka would have got it from China and Pakistan. But Indian intelligence was vital just like US intelligence inputs particularly regarding LTTE shipments.

Moreover, under the current protocols on combating terror, Sri Lanka could have demanded information from India, we could have prevaricated as Pakistan is doing. But why should we?

We are not obliged to help out the LTTE, a banned organisation in India and 31 other countries.

India should not confuse fighting the LTTE with fighting for the Tamil cause because the LTTE forfeited that expectation when it fought a needless war with India and alienated its support.

India should always support the Tamil struggle for equity. And it should oppose the LTTE's leadership because it has brought only misery.

In response to the question whether he thinks the LTTE will go back to their original tactics of guerrilla war again, Col Hariharan said: "Do they have a choice? Prabhakaran if he survives will have to go back to the basics. He is good at it. But at 54 it is a bit difficult to wage war and renew yourself after every defeat.

I think in the next six months the LTTE guerrillas will reappear. They may not be powerful but there will be gore and drama. India should also watch out where they grow.



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