



U.S. Policy on Sri Lanka: The Need for a Change of Course

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'Time' magazine this week ranked Sri Lanka's ethnic civil war as the 3rd top 10 "underreported war" in 2008. Even worse, the Genocide Prevention Project has placed Sri Lanka in the top 8 "red alert" countries that are currently experiencing genocidal conflict; countries that appear in all 5 "expert" indexes that track genocidal trends. With over 100,000 killed, nearly a million internally displaced and 1 million made to flee the country (all 3 groups overwhelmingly from the ethnic Tamils), noted for highest number of disappearances and most dangerous place for journalists and humanitarian workers, Sri Lanka is a Failed State.

The U.S. has a crucial role because it was a co-chair to the failed peace process, has provided humanitarian aid, critical military aid and training and is one of Sri Lanka's top export markets. Current U.S. policy adheres to an inconsistent approach in seeking conflict resolution while simultaneously pursuing counter-terrorism.

HELP Advocates Sri Lanka believes both strategies cannot be pursued concurrently and the U.S. should take a more constructive and neutral role in engaging with both parties to the conflict to find a peaceful political solution. Here are our proposals to the Obama-Biden transition team:

- 1) President-Elect Obama is on record stating that the problem in Sri Lanka is the problem of the 'Other' and that will be the problem of the 21st century. Secretary of State-Designate Hillary Clinton stated the need for understanding the basis of conflicts and cited the Tamil conflict as one that should not be bundled into war on terror. We recommend a thorough and immediate re-evaluation of our Sri Lanka policy.
- 2) Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jeffrey Lunstead stated that the U.S. needs the ability to talk to groups that are designated as FTO. A policy change in this respect will be in the U.S. interest for the 21st century. This will give us the ability to persuade the LTTE to transform its ways and pursue peace. (see attached letter by Rep. Brad Sherman).
- 3) The U.S. military aid is largely curtailed, and China and Iran are pumping billions of dollars worth of aid to Sri Lanka, all of which enables the GoSL to disregard human rights and finding a sound political solution. The reevaluation of the FTO list and a public proclamation to consider a two-state solution as one of the possible options to resolve the conflict will regain our bargaining position with the GoSL and pave the way for halting the war and engaging in negotiations.
- 4) The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Members of Parliaments are elected by the Tamil population. Start direct talks with them at the highest level instead of regarding them as pro-LTTE politicians. (TNA/LTTE relationship is similar to Sinn Fein/IRA relationship).
- 5) U.S. should co-ordinate its Sri Lanka policy with a friendly India. However, the U.S. needs to override the secretive agenda of the failed Indian bureaucracy. South India with a huge Tamil population and a lot of Western investments must not be de-stabilized. The U.S. has already deviated from the Indian line by voting Sri Lanka out of the UN Human Rights Council.
- 6) Consider appointing a special Peace Envoy for Sri Lanka. Possible names that we suggest are Finland's Martti Ahtisaari, our own President Bill Clinton or Senator George Mitchell.
- 7) There are thousands of Tamil Americans in the country who have a stake in the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Please consult them regularly on important policy approaches on Sri Lanka. **HELP Advocates Sri Lanka** can facilitate such meetings.

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