

EDITORIAL AND OPINION

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Natural Order

Why Sri Lanka ignores international outrage over the camps

Even as the monsoons loom, and despite widespread international alarm and concern, Sri Lanka continues to keep hundreds of thousands of Tamils penned behind barbed wire in militarised tent camps. Since May, when the Colombo government declared victory over the Liberation Tigers, the entire population of the Vanni has been locked up thus. Despite the manifest outrage of international human rights groups like HRW and Amnesty International, relief agencies and several Western states, Sri Lanka defiantly continues to brutalise the detainees. This month the Sinhala state has reduced water supplies, causing untold suffering amid the heat.

Whilst various international actors attempt to goad, cajole and compel Sri Lanka to let the civilians go, few have examined the reasons for their incarceration. As far as the Tamils are concerned, it is obvious: this is the latest manifestation of the Sinhala state racism. Colombo is not only punishing the Tamils for their past defiance of Sinhala rule, it is, like the sovereigns whose rule preceded the pastoral states that emerged in Europe since the seventeenth century, also seeking to impose its authority by instilling terror.

The state will fail in both. There was never a time when the legitimacy of Sinhala domination would be acceptable to the island's Tamils. Indeed, as scholarship of Sri Lanka has rigorously laid out, it is the Sinhala state's manifestly chauvinistic violent efforts - in which international actors, including Western states have been implicated, if not complicit - to institutionalise a racial hierarchy that have led to the compaction of the Eelam Tamil identity. At what point - if ever - did it become concerning to international actors that the state military was mono-ethnic? As one American military historian has noted, the policy of an all-Sinhala army has been in place since 1962. At the same time it is worth noting how Britain and other Western states have been involved in 'Security-Sector-Reform' and military training for at least two decades.

Secondly, state terror will not permanently cow the Tamils. The destruction of the LTTE's conventional fighting capability has paused the island's protracted war. It has almost certainly not ended it. If the Black July pogrom in 1983 could not cow the Tamils, then neither will the mass slaughter of 2009 or the continued brutality against our people. Along with several measured international voices, this newspaper has consistently argued that Sinhala

oppression will beget Tamil resistance. Tamil faith in West-led liberal internationalism will foreclose space for militancy. For now.

In the meantime, it is worth recalling that the misery President Mahinda Rajapakse is today inflicting on the Tamils is merely a continuation of the suffering visited on them by a series of Sinhala regimes before his (something those pinning their hopes in 'regime change' should bear in mind). As the Sri Lankan scholar Neil De Votta has rigorously laid out, even by the seventies Sri Lanka had regressed into an ethnocracy bent on Tamil subjugation. When the Norwegian-led international peace intervention began in 2001, over eight hundred thousand Tamils had been internally displaced whilst hundreds of thousands more had fled abroad.

The present focus on the Vavuniya camps and Sri Lankan state inaction, whilst entirely justified given the acute suffering and the imminent catastrophe of flooding, has meanwhile obscured the country's complete disintegration into an acutely polarised ethnic blocs. This is not a problem in Sinhala terms, provided minority anger does not turn into challenges to the natural and rightful hierarchy between them and the majority. In short, the reason all ongoing international efforts to get Sri Lanka to treat the island's inhabitants as equals have failed is because the majoritarian logic embedded in the state - and exemplified by the military - simply does not hold all peoples as equal.

This week, Britain, whilst setting out a catalogue of problems that are clearly linked to the Sri Lankan state's active policies, announced it will continue "engagement" with the ethnocracy. Almost certainly, this policy of appeasement, which has been tried and failed repeatedly before, will fail again. Whilst the rhetoric of liberalism - exemplified most recently in Colombo's soliciting of international funding for 'rehabilitation of ex-combatants' - will continue to be deployed, in short order it will be clear that none of the 'post-war' transformations expected of Sri Lanka will be undertaken. As two eminent scholars, Deborah Winslow and Michael Woost argued, even by 2004, Sri Lanka was not a place where war was taking place, rather the country was war itself: "not a stop-gap, but a new social formation." Merely tinkering with it - "engagement" - will change absolutely nothing.

Road to stability in Afghanistan runs through Pakistan, India

Joshua Gross

Christian Science Monitor

THE devastating terrorist attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul last week signals a new sense of urgency to the Obama administration's deliberations over Gen. Stanley McChrystal's assessment of the war in Afghanistan.

Here's what Washington needs to understand: The road to stability in Afghanistan runs through Islamabad and New Delhi.

To diminish the mistrust and hostility that destabilizes Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, the US needs to take a holistic regional approach.

Most important, the president should commit the United States to a gradual troop surge.

The leaked McChrystal report has been criticized for omitting an exit strategy, but what unnerves skeptical lawmakers reassures American allies in the region.

A surge will send a strong political message and prevent hedging by ordinary Afghans - not to mention the Pakistani and Indian security establishment - who are trying to gauge American resolve. As Kurt Volker, former US permanent representative to NATO, said: "If they think that the United States is packing up, they won't bet their lives on opposing extremists."

A phased troop buildup will signal our long-term commitment to stability in the region. With such assurances, Pakistan's security sector will be empowered to act more boldly in purging extremist elements from their midst.

Pakistani commentators rightly point out that much of the conflict across the border is fueled by disgust with the Afghan government, rebellion against foreign occupation, extreme Pashtun nationalism, and tribal dynamics. But they are reluctant to confront the reality that havens in their own country provide Taliban fighters with weapons, training, and the protection of Pakistan's intelligence service.

The US must focus on pressuring Pakistan to shut down these havens. Even the most dangerous elements of Pakistan's government will be more circumspect when they realize that the 60,000 plus US troops in their backyard aren't going anywhere.

We cannot stabilize Afghanistan without addressing the insecurities of the Pakistani military elite. That said, a harder line on Pakistan will only be effective if it is accompanied by reciprocal pressure on India.

Recent efforts to pilot a non-proliferation resolution in the UN

Security Council might have ruffled feathers in New Delhi, but they calmed the generals in Islamabad. The administration should take the extra step of insisting that the US military contractors looking to cash in on the \$100 billion modernization of the Indian military pack up and come home. Massive sales of US military technology to India could upset the region's fragile balance of power.

For years, Pakistan has asked Afghanistan to accept the Durand Line as the border between the two countries. Afghan ambiguity on the issue has bred Pakistani contempt. The US can use its leverage in Kabul to push the Afghan and Pakistani governments to jointly establish and secure their border.

These monumental diplomatic tasks can only be accomplished within the framework of formalized negotiations. It is notoriously difficult to get Indian, Afghan, and Pakistani decision makers in the same room, let alone mediate their profound and existential grievances. The US has been hesitant to take on this challenge in the past, but a sustained troop presence in the region will give these negotiations a sense of permanence that previous appeals lacked.

In order to lay the framework for an official summit between the leaders of the three countries, the US should empower Special Representative Richard Holbrooke by expanding his mandate to encompass India. All concerns should be open for discussion, including Pakistani support of jihadi groups in Kashmir and alleged Indian and Afghan cooperation in arming Baloch separatists in Pakistan. Everyone at the table must agree to swallow a bitter pill.

American public support for the war is lagging. Americans are justly dismayed by the prospect that more blood and treasure will be spent to prop up a government that won an election through deceit and coercion. Afghan President Hamid Karzai's image has been permanently tarnished. But Afghanistan is bigger than one man.

Now more than ever it is essential for President Obama to stand with Afghanistan. If Democratic support is not forthcoming, he should court congressional Republicans.

American credibility and regional stability are at stake.

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