

OPINION

In Sri Lanka, money fuels genocide

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OVER the past year, the cracks in Sri Lanka's façade of liberal democracy have started to show. Filling them with money, be it through direct aid, encouraging trade or international loans, has obvious appeal. Sri Lanka's lack of liberalism however, is not due to economic hardship; precisely why economic development will not lead to its salvation. In Sri Lanka money is merely used by the state to pursue its own fascist agenda.

Several months after the government claimed victory in the war with the Liberation Tigers, civilians continue to languish in camps or in temporary shelters with no access to jobs, houses or a living. The fact that conflict and discrimination have propelled many, Sinhalese and Tamil alike, into poverty is undeniable. The need for financial aid, through either aid agencies or economic development is accepted by all aware of the humanitarian situation. It is the method of administering it is questioned.

Any money, be it through direct humanitarian aid, encouraging trade or international development loans eventually finds its way into the hands of the state. In a liberal democracy this economic boost should in theory, be distributed fairly across society in order to serve those most in need.

It is often argued that despite a state's flaws, impeding the flow of money only accelerates economic descent, as well as disproportionately exacerbating the plight of the poorest.

Sri Lanka, despite its regular elections, does not represent our ideal of democracy. Society is not, in the eyes of the state, considered to be made up of equal individuals. The minority, vulnerable through numbers, is oppressed by state and people through the enforcement of the racial divide and by the sheer magnitude of the numbers of the majority. This discrimination is ratified through the distribution of parliamentary seats, through the access to jobs and upper echelons of society and through access to education opportunities. It is propagated through the generations through state propaganda and reinforcement of Sinhala fascist policies.

Many international analysts have long been critical of the Sri Lankan government's lack of transparency and accountability. Despite money being allocated for development projects, improved infrastructure and industry have for too long remained pipe-dreams, with the money assigned to unfinished projects left unaccounted for - or disappearing into the pockets of politicians who use it to maintain their families or their patron client networks.

After the tsunami, aid agencies expressed concern over the disparity in aid distribution, with a consistent leaning towards the Sinhala south over the Tamil North and East regions. Even now whilst the state perpetuates the poverty of Tamil civilians by forcibly maintaining their refugee status within camps, there have been numerous reports of newly



Money is fungible, with foreign funds being used for weapons and to line the pockets of officials

built Buddhist temples and Sinhala colonies in the traditional Tamil homelands of the North and East.

In order to alleviate the immediate suffering of the poorest, the government must welcome international and Diaspora aid agencies into the country and allow them to take responsibility of aid distribution and allocation themselves.

The Sri Lankan state, with decades of Tamil genocide hidden in its closet, is hardly a trustworthy recipient of aid. Despite claiming victory last year, the intolerance of dissent and stifling of individual freedoms has only worsened. Instead of fostering peace the government has focused its efforts and finances on state control. This is why the EU's decision to withdraw the GSP+ trade concession, based on Sri Lanka's

failure to fulfil its commitment to UN human rights conventions, is to be applauded. Although it is a tax relief rather than a direct sum of money, it nonetheless allows the government to mask its failing economy and irresponsible use of the state's finances.

Some analysts however have criticised the EU's move, claiming that the most prudent position would be one of simply doing no harm. The idea that Britain should keep quiet and increase trading with Sri Lanka, in order to surround it within a circle of democratic countries and exert a positive, liberal influence on Sri Lanka is quixotic. Sri Lanka was not in want of democratic trading friends, when driven by a need to defend its ever more brazen abuse of human rights, it chose to make new friends with those that shared

similar views. Indeed it was from within that very circle did Sri Lanka fall so spectacularly from grace.

Juxtapose the government's proposed 20% increase in the country's military budget with the recent claim by Gordon Weiss, a former UN official, that the Sri Lankan government slaughtered upto 40,000 Tamil civilians last year and the idea of feeding the Sri Lankan purse whilst turning a blind eye to its genocidal expenses is not only irresponsible but morally corrupt.

In Sri Lanka money is fungible and no one is held to account. It is a state that does not share our view of liberalism and has repeatedly massacred thousands based upon its fascist views. A pragmatic ally in these circumstances is nothing but a willing accomplice.

Even with polls, Iraq still a mistake

Georgie Anne Geyer

Yahoo News

ONE would have to have a heart of stone not to be moved by the Iraqi elections Sunday.

Seeing Iraqi men and women step forward to vote their beliefs - people who would most likely be tortured and killed in decades past for even expressing their opinions - is a touching picture indeed. And the election day violence itself was not horrific - for Iraq, of course. A recent newsmagazine cover not only stated that Iraqi democracy had been finally won, but backed up the statement with that infamous picture of George W. Bush with the "Mission Accomplished" banner so shamelessly unfurled behind him on the Navy carrier.

So, if you are one who predicted that Iraq was a prime time foreign policy disaster - as I certainly did - perhaps it is time to move into gear into the newest

chapter of the Iraq war book.

Unlike some famous, but unnamable, political figures who could not seem to decide whether they voted for the war or against it, for funding the war or for the war without funding it, or just for the Afghan war or for the Afghan war but only if it did or didn't go into Pakistan, yes, I was against it. And despite Sunday's moving elections, I remain against it.

When I spent considerable amounts of time in Iraq during the 1970s and '80s, I was driven close to madness by the silence of the people. I don't mean quietness of speech, or calmness of manner, or tranquility of mien. I mean utter, total, drear silence. Except for government interviews, no one would speak to you - at all. It was very much like the Soviet Union in those days, only more so.

Only once was I invited to a home. In this case, the home of a well-known and more or less government-approved writer. We all pretty much sat there for two

hours, barely exchanging a sentence, while we wondered who would turn out to be the inevitable informer in our midst.

So for me, after we invaded Iraq, it seemed wondrous to see Iraqis actually SPEAK! But even that agreeable surprise was not enough. This war was, and is, still a mistake.

First, there were all the lies the American people were fed: Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction to be loosed soon upon the West! The neocon idea that Iraq would easily become a democracy and, even more than that, would then help democratize the entire Middle East. The presumption that we were "fighting al-Qaida there so we would not have to fight it at home."

These lies are as false today as they were yesterday. Saddam, a monster of magnitude, had boasted of such weapons only in order to terrify unfriendly and acquisitive neighbors like Iran. Nor is

there any evidence whatsoever that these elections are having any influence on the rest of the region. And al-Qaida - was it ever in Iraq in any serious numbers?

Then there is the sheer cost of Iraq. One-idea fanatics like the American neocons don't bother their important little selves to think about the cost of their wars. Yet anyone else can rather easily figure out that these wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan have contributed decisively to our financial collapse - and will continue to.

The International Monetary Fund reported recently that at the turn of the 21st century, the United States was producing 32 percent of the world's gross domestic product, only to end the first decade producing 24 percent of the GDP. This marked the most dramatic decline in relative power of any nation in history except for the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War.

Add to this the degree to whi-

ch the George W. Bush administration's and the neocons' obsession with going to war in Iraq, which had nothing to do with 9/11, deflected them from finding and defeating al-Qaida, the true authors of 9/11. If we fail in Afghanistan, there is little question that that failure will be due to our detouring through Baghdad and Basra to find al-Qaida Central.

It is curious in America today - in a dramatic reversal of the parsimoniousness of our Founding Fathers - that we spend so little time thinking of what is valuable to us and what we can practically afford to do. Instead, we strike out in all directions, as if the Lord God Almighty had given us a Promised Land of Holy Credit Cards that will never come due.

And so, when something wrong goes somewhat right, like Sunday's elections in Iraq, we say, "Whew, it wasn't as bad as we thought," or, "Wow, we finally lucked out!" That's simply not enough for a great country like ours.