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## Nabbing Tigers

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The arrests in the past week of supporters of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers is the kind of crackdown needed to bring the separatist rebels back to the negotiating table. Any meaningful cease-fire negotiations in Sri Lanka are predicated on cutting off the influx of money and weapons to the Tigers, forcing talks in order to forge a lasting resolution and not simply to rearm themselves during the break in fighting.

The arrested Tiger supporters tried to purchase AK-47 rifles and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles, according to a complaint that was unsealed recently in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn. The United States officially declared the Tamil Tigers a terrorist organization in 1997, making it illegal for the rebel group to raise money in the United States. The separatist group still does, however, and sources of funding from Tamil sympathizers abroad, particularly in the West, allows the group to continue fighting in Sri Lanka. Tiger sympathizers also work the public-relations angle, playing up legitimate grievances of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka while downplaying the heinous methods -- the often-forceful recruiting of women and children and the use of suicide bombers -- that the Tigers employ. This was the first time that Tiger supporters were arrested for trying to purchase weapons in North America -- a disconcerting development that some analysts have interpreted as a move to a more operational role for the Tigers supporters in the West.

The Tigers have an active and well-polished propaganda machine, but it should stumble when confronted with court documents that note that the suspects speculated about the number of deaths that could be inflicted by the weapons, and laughed.

The image of the Tigers abroad was dealt a solid blow this year when Canada and the European Union passed stiff bans on the group. Tiger sympathizers are clearly interested in rehabilitating the group's image: also in court were supporters charged with attempting to bribe agents working undercover as State Department officials to get the Tigers taken off of the terrorist list.

The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the separatists is regional, but the Tigers' network of finance and support is international. Targeting that network, as the recent arrests show that

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the United States, Canada and Britain have, may be the only way to bring a cease-fire to the war-weary island.

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