

Editorial

Cut off the Tigers

A group of congressmen is urging the Bush administration to increase its involvement in Sri Lanka. A recent letter from Reps. David Price and Rush Holt and 48 other congressional Democrats and Republicans to President Bush calls on the administration to step up diplomatic engagement in order to help the small island nation reach a long-term peace with the terrorist rebel group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Noting "a pressing need for a more concerted effort by the international community to bring both sides back to the negotiating table," the congressmen conclude that the United States "has the opportunity to serve as a leader of such a renewed international effort."

The protracted conflict dates back more than three decades and has cost more than 60,000 lives. A 2002 ceasefire brokered by Norway fell apart last year, although it became clear that the Tamil Tigers had used the break from fighting to re-arm. Fighting has escalated, as the Sri Lankan military claims to have at last beaten the rebels out of the east, which, along with the north, has been a Tamil Tiger stronghold.

Neither side, unfortunately, can boast a morally impeccable record. The congressional letter also calls on the Sri Lankan government to end the use of extrajudicial killings and disappearances in the government controlled areas. To its credit, Sri Lanka has made efforts to address this issue by creating a special commission, which, in sharp contrast to the Tamil Tiger organization, operates under the scrutiny of international observation. "When credible evidence is available," wrote Sri Lankan Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke in a letter to Mr. Holt, "the government has taken steps to serve indictments on army and police personnel." Ten indictments were handed down against security and police forces in 2006 and 10 in 2007, according to the ambassador.

What human-rights violations the government may have to answer for, however, pale in comparison to the barbarity of the Tamil Tigers, who pioneered the use of the suicide bomb and have a track record of kidnapping children and turning them into soldiers. Human-rights issues will continue to be a concern until a genuine and lasting peace can be forged, and the United States can play a significant role in facilitating this by targeting and breaking up Tamil Tiger fund-raising networks in the United States, and working with Canada and the European Union to disrupt the Tigers' financial networks there as well. These networks, which according to Human Rights Watch rely on "intimidation, extortion, and physical violence," are critical to the Tigers' ability to perpetuate their terrorist campaign, and disrupting the flow of money to the terrorist

group is an important step toward forcing its leadership back to the negotiating table.

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