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# Amnesty International bombs South Asia

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Amnesty International's resident Cluster Bomb Specialist Jim McDonald has gone on another of his shooting sprees. Over the weekend he sent out releases targeting both the Sri Lankan and the Pakistani governments. The first concerned the Sri Lankan journalist J S Tissainayagam, who has now been charged, on the basis of a confession which a court has ruled admissible. It is therefore strange that Amnesty should call for his release, since presumably it would be highly irregular for government to release without reference to a court people who have been duly charged. Amnesty may well believe Tissainayagam to be innocent, but since it has not been suggested over the last couple of decades that the Sri Lankan judicial system is not independent, it should surely leave this decision to the courts. If it believes the Sri Lankan court system is not fair, it should say so. Amnesty could also urge for a swift trial, but it should bear in mind that the delays in this case are not exceptional. Finally, since there are clear charges issued, it is absurd that Amnesty should claim that "statements by senior governments (sic) have indicated that the main reason for his arrest is because of his writing in the Sunday Times newspaper". The Sunday Times, owned by the uncle of the leader of the opposition, continues to be published, and continues to criticize the government. As far as I know, Tissainayagam's articles in the Times did not upset anyone, and they were very different in tone from the articles in another newspaper that seemed much more tailored to Tiger predilections, and which form the subject of the charge. Old McDonald claims too that "The writing and publication of the magazine occurred during the period of the Ceasefire Agreement, where the Government made a commitment not to detain or arrest anyone under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. On this basis alone, the indictments should not have been served." It was precisely because the LTTE abused that Agreement, and expanded its terrorist activities and its arsenal during that period, that the Government abrogated the Agreement well before Tissainayagam's arrest. In short, since Amnesty wants Tissainayagam released, it trots out every conceivable reason why this should happen. And to strengthen its case it trots out no less an authority than its own resident Sri Lankan expert, Yolanda Foster, who declares that 'Sri Lanka's climate of impunity for attacks on the media has made it impossible to get an accurate impartial picture of what is happening in the country.' She should read the Sunday Times. But if Sri Lanka is attacked irrationally, Amnesty goes berserk in attacking Pakistan with regard to the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in which several Pakistani policemen lost their lives. Firstly, all this is the fault of the Pakistani authorities, a concept expressed in the usual wonderfully illogical prose that has now possessed Amnesty - "The Pakistani authorities have a responsibility to prevent armed groups from posing a threat to the life and safety of its population and foreign nationals. Any attack aimed at civilians, including sportspeople, cannot be justified." Amnesty may not understand that all governments have the responsibility to protect all people. If governments had a responsibility to prevent armed groups posing threats, then all governments in the world have clearly failed, and should immediately be replaced by the less irresponsible denizens of Old McDonald's farm. Secondly, Amnesty is once more playing the game of terrorists in declaring only that any attack aimed at civilians cannot be justified, and twinning that with its blame of the government for not fulfilling its responsibilities. This is of a piece with its earlier assertion that the Pakistani authorities failed to protect the right to life of civilians - foreign and national. Do policemen also not have a right to life? The point about terrorism is that it also attacks servicemen in underhand ways which are very different from what might be termed the standard risks servicemen are contracted as it were to face by virtue of their profession. If Amnesty does not realize that it must condemn all terrorist acts, whether aimed at servicemen or civilians, it goes far to justifying the rationale for terrorism, that any servant of a dispensation it opposes is a fair object of attack. The double standards Amnesty adopts are clear when we consider its failure to condemn the British government for failing to protect the servicemen who were killed recently in Northern Ireland. Does it really think those poor men were fair game? Does it think that the British government has no responsibility to prevent armed groups posing threats to the lives of its population, but the Pakistani government does? Interestingly, in an appendix to its diatribe, Amnesty asserts that the "February truce between the government and Taliban militants in Malakand and Swat valley, only served to emboldened militants." This may or may not be true, but it comes oddly from an organization that has been urging the Sri Lankan government to have a Ceasefire with the Tigers, who have not only been emboldened by previous Ceasefires, but used them to slaughter democratic Tamil forces whilst building up their own terrorist capacity. But doubtless Amnesty, like so many in the West, thinks Islamic terrorists are incorrigible, whilst Tigers and others are little lambs waiting to be cuddled. Amnesty ends its diatribe by calling on the Pakistani government to conduct an "independent and impartial investigation" into the attack, doubtless believing that without this exhortation there would be no such effort. Of course it is conceivable that the Pakistani government wanted this attack and will do its best to conceal the identity of the perpetrators, just as it is conceivable that Tissainayagam is responsible for the latest terrorist bomb in Sri Lanka. But anyone who indulges in such conceptions would be better off in the funny farm into which Old McDonald seems, with a little help from Young Yolanda, to have converted Amnesty International. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process