## Falsehoods and Illogicalities:

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It is those who fire on escaping civilians who should be told to cease / pause / stop such firing Language, Truth and Logic was the title of a seminal work by the philosopher A. J. Ayer, who in effect popularized empiricism in the English speaking world. Empiricism, to put it simply, is the school of thought which requires concrete evidence for the positions people take up. Sadly, terrorism now seems to have effectively destroyed reliance on evidence, insofar as the pronouncements of people on the Sri Lankan situation go. Language and truth and logic seem to have been the principal victims, apart from human beings, of the strange fascination terror has for people who should know better. Take the simple word & Isquo; ceasefire & rsquo;, which should mean the cessation of fire. Very clearly, despite a Ceasefire Agreement in 2002, the LTTE did not cease fire. Not only did they continue to import weapons and conscript people – which it could be argued did not mean they were actually firing, albeit such actions were also specifically forbidden by the CFA – they actually fired freely, first on Tamils opposed to them, hundreds of whom were killed from 2002 on, and then on the forces. The number of servicemen killed in terrorist attacks between December 2005 (a month after President Rajapakse took office) and April 2006 was in the hundreds, leading the Scandinavian Monitoring Mission to question, unequivocally referring to the LTTE, whether there was a Ceasefire still in existence. After April violations were even more blatant, with the suicide attack on the Army Commander and then the twin pronged attack on Mutur and Muhumalai in August (before which the LTTE, repudiating the other purpose of the CFA, namely negotiations. had refused despite being transported to Oslo to participate in talks – perhaps because, contrary to their demand, the Norwegians had insisted that the question of child soldiers could be placed on the agenda). After that the Sri Lankan forces retaliated, but the government kept requesting the LTTE to return to negotiations, and were summarily rebuffed, the last obvious instance of this being the response to the Norwegian ambassador who went up to Kilinochchi in August 2007, and was told that negotiations could not be even considered until the government had withdrawn to the 2006 positions (not the 2002 positions, since the LTTE had in fact crept into much territory in the intervening years, and built airfields, and thought that by 2006 these were irreversible gains). So when in 2008 the government abrogated the Ceasefire Agreement, it was the Agreement it abrogated, not the cessation of fire, which had in effect ceased in December 2005, or even earlier if you count the attacks on Tamils and the murder of Tamil speaking army officers. And it is despite all this that we still have calls for a Ceasefire, most notably from the British, who one thinks would have a better understanding of the English language than most. When this absurdity is pointed out to those who have to explain away the general pronouncements of British politicians, they claim that what is meant is a ceasefire to allow the civilians now held by the LTTE to get away. If that is what is meant, one wonders why it cannot be said, with the now more common phrase ' humanitarian pause ' being used instead. The simple answer is that British politicians are catering not to the Sri Lankan people but to their constituents in Britain, and they have to say what those people want to hear. They may assume that the Sri Lankans will understand that what they really mean is a brief pause in the firing to allow the people to escape, but catch them saving that. As the influential local councillor Mr Iddaikader made clear to his followers in Harrow, some MPs might lose their seats if British Tamils changed their minds about whom they would vote for, Being careful about such matters is natural to politicians, but the British characteristically have the gift of sounding sanctimonious even about simple electoral considerations. So we have constant references to a Ceasefire, with the purpose of this Ceasefire sometimes being mentioned, sometimes not. Others meanwhile have realized that that effort will be fruitless, until the LTTE can be guaranteed to understand better what the word means, and therefore they talk of a humanitarian pause, which they say could not be used by the LTTE to restore its strength, the way they did so successfully during previous Ceasefire Agreements. The trouble is that the LTTE is much sharper than all these idealists or gullible fools or insidious villains, whichever they are, and will use any pause in the offensive to strategic advantage. After all they almost retook Mullaitivu the last time the government let up to encourage civilians to cross over, and indeed when a safe zone was declared, they promptly took advantage of that to move their heavy weaponry into the midst of civilians and fire from there. Incidentally, it was shameful to hear at least one UN official engaging in apologetics for this tactic in asserting that the safe zone had been declared without consultation of the LTTE. Theoretically that position was correct, and if one side declares a safe zone it cannot complain legally or morally if its own forces in that zone are fired upon. But when a safe zone is declared on behalf of civilians, whilst the legal position may still entitle the other belligerent to fire, morally this is obviously reprehensible, and someone with years of experience in the UN system should have known better. Be that as it may, given these experiences, it would not make sense for the Sri Lankan government to declare a humanitarian pause of the formal sort that is urged, unless there were cast iron assurances that the LTTE would not take strategic advantage of such an initiative. The obvious way to achieve this is for the LTTE to lay down its arms, but with a few honourable exceptions, such a solution seems way beyond the imagination of those who pronounce so sanctimoniously. More suspiciously, they do not look at the matter logically, and try to understand how best to achieve their ostensible purpose, which is the release of the civilians who are now held by the LTTE. The first question to ask is, why are these civilians not moving to secure areas. Initially, aided and abetted by equivocators such as Human Rights Watch, the LTTE claimed that the civilians really didn't want to move because they were much happier with the LTTE than anywhere else, and there were idiots who actually believed this. Now that 60,000 people have ignored this propaganda, and voted with their feet, that argument becomes a bit thin, so it has been generally accepted that these people cannot move because the LTTE is keeping them captive. As though to reinforce this point, the LTTE has fired openly on people trying to get away, and now more and more people on whom they fired in secret as it were (without the independent observers whom some equivocators think are essential to establish that the LTTE is indeed guilty of such brutalities) are telling their own tragic stories of what actually happened.

The second question to ask is, who has to pause firing to allow these people to get away. Sadly, no one seems to have noticed that 60,000 people have got away in the last couple of months, and in no instance at all has it been even alleged that they were fired on, even by accident, by the Sri Lankan forces as they made their escape. In short, our men know what they are doing, they can recognize civilians coming to them for refuge, and they have in every instance treated them perfectly. Contrariwise, the LTTE has exploded bombs, fired, laid landmines and even thrown grenades to stop them getting away. In short, what the world should be doing is to ask the LTTE to pause firing for the civilians to get away. Asking the Sri Lankan forces to pause is like asking a man who would not dream of doing anything of the sort to stop beating his wife. And calling on both sides for this purpose is a calculated insult, since the Sri Lankan forces have never fired on those seeking refuge. But logic too flies out of the window, along with language and truth, when people want to make political points. Instead of a simple unequivocal demand to the LTTE to let our people go, those who still seek political or other advantage from the situation will continue to pervert language and let the LTTE make people suffer. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary GeneralSecretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process Courtesy: SCOPP