They should have been stopped

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Allowing supporters of a terrorist group, the Tamil Tigers, to take over downtown Ottawa sets a dangerous precedent By David B. Harris, Citizen Special April 15, 2009 To the astonishment of many, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been allowed to flex their muscles in Ottawa, the heart of Canada's democracy. Citizens must understand the disturbing implications of this, and the pressing need to resolve resulting issues.

The LTTE -- the Tamil Tigers -- is a terrorist group that is banned under Canadian law. The organization claims to represent ethnic Tamils in the latter's struggle for dignity and autonomy in largely Sinhalese Sri Lanka. Tamils were for decades second-class citizens there, and many suffered ill-treatment at the hands of Sri Lanka's military. The civil rights situation might have improved over time, but now thousands of mainly Tamil civilians are trapped among their ostensible Tiger defenders as the secessionist war effort collapses. Unfortunately for the Tamils, their cause was tainted by its affiliation with the Tigers. Thanks to the organization's penchant for mass-casualty suicide-bombings of civilian targets, and its use of child soldiers, Canada's Conservative government banned the LTTE in 2006. Here in Canada, Tigers have also extracted "taxes" from Tamils, and are implicated in drug and other criminal fundraising. Canadian Tamil shop owners have seen their premises wrecked for carrying insufficiently pro-Tiger literature. At least one Canadian politician has participated in a Tigers' flag-raising ceremony. And there are Tiger-affiliated street gangs in Toronto, where most of the hundreds of thousands of Canadian Tamils live. Following similar disruptions in Toronto, LTTE supporters were heavily represented in the demonstration-cum-invasion of downtown Ottawa that began last week. Apparently without bothering to secure municipal permits for the protests, Tiger supporters laid siege to the national capital, their red LTTE flags casting shadows over Parliament itself. These disruptions periodically paralysed citizens' lawful and legitimate business in the Wellington Street area and other central Ottawa routes bordering on Parliament. The daily commutes of thousands were disrupted. Bluntly put, this meant that Tiger sympathizers were illegally allowed to dictate the suspending of legitimate traffic and citizen access at will. Meanwhile, plentiful terrorist flags fly in an appropriately scarlet stream, some held aloft by children. Supporters of a world-class terror organization thus made manifest what has already started to dawn on many Canadians: terrorist groups and their apologists are becoming confident about flaunting their increasing power and influence in Canada. In all this, the LTTE's public taunting of Canadian law and standards was remarkable. So was the absence of a sense among protesters that the exercise was an insult to the parliamentary governmental system that declared the Tigers an enemy of humanitarian principles and Canadians' security. In the spirit of the age, official statements indicate that officers responded to all this unlawfulness with "dialogue." Canadians need answers to many questions: How could the core of our national capital be taken over in such a way? Why did Ottawa's police assume passive approaches to the invading and paralysing of one of the capital's most logistically and symbolically significant routes? It can be good to avoid clashes, but what of the periodic impression that police were irrelevant before a swarm of self-advertised terror supporters that seemed so obviously to be breaching bylaws? Why did the mayor and city government not instantly condemn the outlawry? Will transgressors be charged? And how much is this costing? Despite Ottawa's shortages of equipment, ambulances had to squat strategically throughout the city's downtown byways -- just in case the Tigers gave up on dialogue -- along with ominously dark-windowed four-by-fours and emergency fire vehicles. Is the logic that the Tigers will stop draining city finances once the federal government hands over policy-making power on Sri Lanka? As for supply-side terrornomics: Where does the money for staging such protests come from? The same place you go to finance suicide vests? This is a question for counterterrorism authorities or whoever is left to run Ottawa when the Tigers, doubtless tiring of police outreaching, liaising and dialoguing, eventually toss the city back to its leaderless residents. The enforcement of our laws is doubly important at a time when near-boundless immigration, related demographic shifts and radicalizing communities mean that officials could increasingly be tempted to profit politically from appeasing dangerous, but influential, groups. Canadians must hold their politicians and bureaucrats accountable for acting in the national interest. In the meantime, we must remember that our behaviour in such matters is studied carefully by Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda and other extremist groups that target Canada and the West. They take a professional interest in knowing which cities conduct themselves like soft targets. David B. Harris is a lawyer and director of the International and Terrorist Intelligence Program, INSIGNIS Strategic Research Inc., and former CSIS chief of strategic planning. He served as counsel to an intervener organization at the Air India and Iacobucci terror inquiries.Courtesy: Ottawacitizen.com