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## Saving civilians from Tigers and Crocodile Tears

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The last week has seen what amount to pleas to save the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam reach hysterical levels. Whilst much of this was couched initially in language suggesting concern not for the Tigers, but for the civilians trapped by the Tigers, gradually the mask slipped, and the true colours of the interventionists showed themselves.

The picture became clear when the Sri Lankan government granted a humanitarian pause which had been argued for on the grounds that this was essential for the captive civilians to escape. There was no actual argument for this, since a pause is needed when something has to be stopped, and there was no need to stop the Sri Lankan forces from firing on civilians fleeing to refuge amongst them. They had never even started this, and in the entire history previously of 65,000 finding their way to safety with the government, there was not a single allegation even of harm coming to them from our forces, even by accident. All the shooting and killing of these escapees was by the LTTE and therefore the plea to stop firing should have been made to them. But no, ulterior motives held sway here, and so the call had to be to the government. And then, when the government obliged, the hidden motives became clear. Instead of concerted pleas to the LTTE to honour the pause and let their captives free, immediately the cry was that the pause was not long enough, and that it had to be extended. Mr. Miliband, with his hockey sticks attitude to life, even went on and on about a ceasefire, as was demanded by the motley crew of Tiger sympathizers who seem to have taken over the soul of the Labour Party. The claim was that two days was not enough. If common sense did not make it clear that this was nonsense, yesterday's events, when almost 40,000 victims of the Tigers poured out in a day, would have given Mr. Miliband and his cohorts the lie. But will there be an apology or even a retraction. Certainly not. How can a pillar of the Foreign Office be wrong, and mere darkies on the ground right about matters in their own country? Meanwhile the method in which the hostages were freed also shows that the arguments of the Tigers and their voluntary and involuntary supporters were all wrong. Weeks of pleas and then the pauses led only to greater Tiger intransigence. Contrariwise, carefully targeted operations that spared civilians and involved only minimal collateral damage succeeded.

Unquestionably, any collateral damage is regretted, but as numerous hostage situations over the world have shown, quick action is necessary, and a few risks, if large numbers are not to suffer death. What might be termed worst case figures, those propagated by TamilNet and used by distinctively independent papers such as 'Sudar Oli', made it clear that claims propagated by various diaspora organizations and parroted by their patrons were all wrong. Unless the Sri Lankan forces were extremely cunning, the evidence suggested that they were simply using small arms as they asserted. Indeed, given the size of the area still held by the Tigers, given the overweening superiority that government forces had proved in previous weeks, it is obvious that the area would have long been over-run had the government not been exercising restraint. That restraint paid off handsomely yesterday in the rapid flight of the civilians whose rescue had been the main motivation behind government policy over the last few weeks. However it is unlikely that this will be followed by pleas from those who have been arguing the Tiger case to allow the rest to follow. Far from looking at the evidence and concluding that the Tigers should be told firmly to close up shop and give relief to the suffering Tamils they still hold, we will find more contortions to claim that the humanitarian option is to allow terror to continue. So Gareth Evans will shower the UN Security Council with missiles, Dave Miliband will launch Des Browne at New York with Simon Hughes to inflict collateral damage, Human Rights Watch will drag Amnesty International in its wake as it tries to torpedo the advancing forces as well as the fleeing civilians – and Nimalka Fernando will dance round Geneva urging all and sundry to snap at our heels. Nothing will change, except that the UN at last, helped by genuine experts on such situations as the Special Representative on the Human Rights of the displaced, seems to be trying to move forward instead of allowing itself to be tied up in the bonds of Tigers and their apologists. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process