
Sri Lankans critical of envoys

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By David Chater in Colombo A rash of new posters has recently appeared around Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital, criticising Western diplomats. The caption below the photographs of Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, David Miliband, the British foreign secretary, and Erik Solheim, the Norwegian minister of international development, says "Wanted for aiding and abetting terrorism".

The Western envoys had in previous weeks called for a pause in the Sri Lankan government's assault on the Tamil Tigers' last stronghold in the north of the country to allow humanitarian relief to reach the estimated 50,000 civilians who have been trapped in the crossfire. It is pressure Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Sri Lankan president, is determined to resist. A quick review of the editorial columns over the weekend revealed strong criticism of the way the Sri Lankan military has been portrayed in mainstream Western media. Shakuntala Perera of the Daily Mirror said: "The moral right of Western superpowers that went to war with and bombed entire cities in Afghanistan and Iraq on perceived threats of terrorism, as opposed to the reality of terror that Sri Lanka has grappled with for three decades must be questioned." No answer I did indeed pose the question of perceived duplicity as reported by the local media when Al Jazeera accompanied Miliband and Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister, to a camp in Vavuniya housing Tamil civilians who had escaped from the combat zone. Both men refused to answer the question. Their silence, however, has not staved off the criticism. The Island newspaper suggested that Miliband, Kouchner, and Clinton offer their services in countries it said needed the most assistance, namely Iraq and Afghanistan. But writer H L D Mahindapala went even further by directly criticising the "double standards" of the world's greatest powers. He said: "What is unacceptable is the obscenity of their morality which serves neither human rights nor peace. Each time they take the moral high-ground to dictate terms to small nations they find themselves exposed without even a fig leaf to cover their nakedness." Mahindapala's words resonate with many in Colombo who have grown weary of the war and its ongoing threat. Some have said that if the UK or the US can pursue a war in a distant land to secure their cities, then Rajapaksa should have the equivalent right to do the same for Colombo. Courtesy: Al Jazeera.net