

public statements and testimony to Congress on the “symbiotic relationship” between terrorism and the drug trade, administration officials announced it would ask Congress to eliminate the restriction which currently prohibits U.S. security aid to Colombia from being used in anything but counter-narcotics operations. Under the current law, for example, the U.S. cannot legally provide Colombian authorities with satellite and other intelligence on FARC, ELN or other terrorist activities, unless it could be proven directly related to drugs.

Then, Attorney General John Ashcroft and Drug Enforcement Administration chief Asa Hutchinson announced on March 18 that three FARC leaders, including the head of the its 16th Front, Tomás Molina Caracas (alias “El Negro Acacio”), had been indicted for drug- and weapons-trafficking. Hutchinson specified that the 1st, 7th, 10th, 39th, and 44th Fronts, “among others” are identified as supplying cocaine to Acacio’s operation. Ashcroft said the entire FARC was being indicted: “Today’s indictment charges leaders of the FARC not as revolutionaries or freedom fighters, but as drug traffickers.”

That established, on March 21, the administration included a change in restrictions on aid to Colombia, in its supplemental request to Congress for \$27.1 billion in new security aid. The bill would permit Colombia to use U.S. aid to counter the “threat posed by groups that use narcotics trafficking to fund their terrorist and other activities.” No change was proposed, however, to the drug legalizers’ favorite law, known as the Leahy amendment, which, in the bogus name of protecting human rights, allows George Soros’ stable of “human rights” activists to knock out any Colombian military officer who fights to win, in any battle with the narcoterorists.

Should Congress approve the change, stepped-up U.S. military aid should start going through. However, given the Bush administration’s adoption of the utopians’ imperial military posture globally, the question of what *kind* of aid goes to Colombia, and what, if any, broader policy package accompanies it, looms as a big question.

Thus far, officials, from President Bush on down, insist they have no intention of sending U.S. ground troops into Colombia, but rather, as Secretary of State Colin Powell said in a March 20 interview with the Colombian daily *El Tiempo*, “It’s a matter of trying to support the government of Colombia while it defends itself from terrorists and the drug trade.”

Repeated reports, however, insist that plans for increased aid to Colombia come attached to the sending of a new contingent of U.S. Special Forces trainers, modeled on the current deployment of “trainers” and “advisors” to the Philippines—who *are* deployed in combat, despite the official lies to the contrary. In any case, Colombia has not been losing this war because of a lack of Special Forces training, but rather because of the foreign-imposed refusal to mobilize all the State’s resources—military, economic and civilian—to defeat Wall Street’s Dope, Inc.

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## Sri Lanka

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# Tamil Tigers, Colombo Search For Peace

by Ramtanu Maitra

At midnight on Feb. 23, the new Sri Lankan government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP), signed a cease-fire agreement with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Tamil Tigers supremo Velupillai Pirabhakaran also signed the agreement, and expectations are running high, particularly in Sri Lanka’s Tamil community, that it may lead to talks to settle the 19-year-old conflict, which has claimed thousands of lives.

Soon after the cease-fire agreement was signed, India welcomed the move. In mid-March, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca was in Sri Lanka, and told the Sri Lankan authorities that her government considers the current peace process the best possibility ever to end the war. She said the United States would be watching the Norwegian-mediated peace process very closely.

### Another Oslo Initiative

The cease-fire agreement was brokered by a Norwegian delegation. The Norwegian government had maintained close links with the Tamil Tigers, through Tamil exiles settled in Norway. An international monitoring group, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), will oversee the cease-fire. The head of the Mission will be the final authority on any dispute between the parties. Retired Norwegian Maj. Gen. Trond Frudhovde will head the Mission; and the former Norwegian negotiator, Eric Solheim, will be the Special Adviser for the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

Needless to say, not everyone likes the Norwegian intervention, which goes back many years. Both the powerful Buddhist Sangha of Sri Lanka, and the country’s President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, have accused the Norwegians of bias toward the Tigers. On the other hand, a Tiger statement said its leader Pirbhakaran had asked for Norway’s “continuous engagement” in efforts to start talks with the government.

No doubt, the peace process is going to be an arduous one, and it requires an enormous amount of goodwill from both sides to succeed. The difficulty began with President Kumaratunga contesting the agreement. A harsh political opponent of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, her party, the People’s Alliance (PA), lost a bitterly fought electoral battle to the

UNP last December—only a few months before the cease-fire agreement was signed. Subsequently, President Kumaratunga has gone on record to publicize her view that she does not approve of the agreement, because it provides undue advantage to the LTTE.

In 1995, President Kumaratunga herself signed a cease-fire agreement with Pirthakaran. The agreement failed, though it was similar to the present one, but with some significant differences.

A reading of the agreement indicates that the Tamil Tigers got more than they could have expected. It deals with many issues which are open to different interpretations, and the Norwegians are expected to have a tough task in resolving these differences, given the rigid stance expressed on earlier occasions by people on both sides. Wickremesinghe is aware of the shortcomings, and has admitted that there could be “problems.” He said on one occasion that while the cease-fire would create a peaceful atmosphere, the war will not end because of the cease-fire agreement.

Wickremesinghe has already begun to build support in Sri Lanka’s majority Sinhala community. It is a difficult task, but, given the other alternative, which is the continuation of the bloody war, peace should be acceptable to most Sinhalas.

The cease-fire agreement provides that neither party shall engage in any offensive military operations, but it does not limit direct or indirect weapons, armed raids, ambushes, assassinations, abductions, destruction of civilian or military property, sabotage, suicide missions, and activities by deep penetration units. There is a view that “abductions” will cover forced conscription of child-soldiers allegedly indulged in by the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan Armed Forces would continue to perform their legitimate task of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, without engaging in offensive operations against the LTTE. This is, again, a vague provision, liable to be interpreted differently by the two parties. If the Army aims to prevent unloading of arms in LTTE-controlled territories, this will be contested, as LTTE claim unfettered freedom in “their” territories. This part of the agreement is worrisome to the Sri Lankan Army, in particular.

### **Need for International Support**

Setting aside the hard path that lies ahead of effective negotiations, both sides need international support. With his landmark visit to Jaffna, a Tamil-majority area under military control of the Tigers, in early March, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister has earned the goodwill of the Tamils. Conversely, the same visit reassured the majority Sinhala community that the peace process is not intended to divide the country. Describing the visit as “bridging the North-South divide,” the Sri Lankan *Daily Mirror* said it was historic, because it signified “the beginning of a process to restore the country’s unity and integrity.”

Notwithstanding his success at Jaffna, Wickremesinghe



*Sri Lanka’s newly elected Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, in office only three months, has begun the extremely difficult course of cease-fire negotiations with the strong separatist forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

may run into a brick wall within his Sinhala community. The first phase of local elections in Sri Lanka took place on March 20, and the concluding phase is set for March 25. These elections have already been labelled a referendum on the cease-fire agreement. Particularly aggressive in opposing the agreement is the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) party, a coalition partner in President Kumaratunga’s People’s Alliance. The JVP, a right-wing nihilist political group, was banned by the late Sirimavo Bandaranaike, then Prime Minister, and President Kumaratunga’s mother, following an armed JVP uprising in 1971 to topple the Bandaranaike government. In those days, the JVP was very close to the North Korean Maoists. But since then, it has metamorphosed into an extreme right-wing Buddhist fundamentalist party, with strong links to the Buddhist Sangha.

An end to the Sri Lankan war would improve the overall security situation in South Asia. The Tamil Tigers, with a strong fundraising base in the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and Scandinavia, have evolved into a dangerous and powerful terrorist group. Besides the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in the Middle East, few other secessionist groups match the Tigers in arms and drug networking. They get their arms from East Europe and Singapore and carry heroin from both Myanmar and Pakistan. They have an extensive working relationship with various tribal secessionist groups in northeastern India, and the Maoists in both India and Nepal. There were sketchy reports of links with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Such linkages are difficult to establish, but Tigers were spotted in Afghanistan during the heyday of the Taliban.

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