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## Tending to Sri Lanka

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Violence perpetrated by the separatist rebels known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have beset Sri Lanka since the mid-1980s. The most recent cease-fire accord, reached in 2002 with assistance from Norway, has all but dissolved as attacks from rebel Tigers and retaliation from Sri Lankan forces have escalated. So far this year, the death toll has climbed to nearly 800. Citing legitimate mistreatment in the past of the Tamil people by the government in Colombo, the Tigers demand an autonomous state in the North -- amounting to roughly a third of the island -- for the Tamils, who comprise roughly 12 percent of the population.

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Tamil Tigers are known to recruit and train children, indoctrinating them to accept the mentality of suicide bombers. The Tigers are also notorious for high-profile assassinations. The deputy chief of the government peace secretariat, a high-ranking Tamil in the Sri Lankan government, was killed last weekend -- one year to the day after the Sri Lankan minister of foreign affairs, another high-ranking Tamil, was killed. The brazen 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the former Indian prime minister who cracked down on the influence of the Tigers in the late 1980s, caused India to formally ban the rebel group in 1992.

The fight against the Tigers, most of whom are Hindu, is a predominantly regional battle, not a part of the greater war against Islamic fascism. That said, Sri Lanka's struggle against terrorism is not entirely isolated from the larger war. Terror tactics pioneered by the Tigers -- most notably suicide bombings -- have been incorporated by other terror groups. There are larger regional implications from this conflict as well. India's opposition to the Tigers is clear: Southern India has a population of 50 million Tamils who may be emboldened by a divided Sri Lanka and push for their own autonomy. But unpleasant memories of the bloody decision to send peacekeepers to Sri Lanka in 1987 kept India in a more circumspect role.

During a visit to the Sri Lankan capital Colombo in January, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns said that "this long conflict is only going to come to an end when the LTTE and the government sit down and find a way forward to end the violence and convince the LTTE to stop using violence as a political weapon."

The prerequisite for any true cease-fire and productive discussion, however, is genuine motivation on both sides. For the Sri Lankan government, the desire to resolve a conflict that has torn the small country for more than two decades is very real; for the Tamil Tigers, it is not. In the past, the Tigers have entered cease-fires in a weakened state and used the temporary breaks in hostilities to recover and refortify their position.

After India outlawed the Tigers, the United States designated the group a terrorist organization in 1997; England did the same in 2001, followed by Canada and the European Union this year. These moves dishearten the Tigers, but to make meaningful progress toward a permanent resolution of the

crisis, cease-fires cannot function merely as opportunities for the Tigers to regroup. In short, the Tigers' ability to rearm themselves needs to be curtailed, and one way to do that is to stop the flow of money to Sri Lanka from Tiger sympathizers, particularly those in the West.

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