

The Origin and Prospect of Human Rights Crisis During Sri Lanka's Civil War

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Abstract:

Although the smoke of Sri Lanka's 27-year-long all-out civil war has cleared, the human rights crisis caused by the civil war is still fermenting. It has become an international hot issue, casting a gloomy veil over the country's development. Sorting out and analyzing the root causes of the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka will help the country achieve post-war reconstruction and national reconciliation and find feasible ways to resolve the situation.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, Human Rights, Crisis, Sinhala, Tamil

Introduction

The civil war between the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups in Sri Lanka lasted for 27 years, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and a large number of people becoming refugees, erupting a severe human rights crisis. Analyzing the root causes of the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka will help the international community and the Sri Lankan government jointly promote the solution and improvement of human rights issues.

The origins of the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka's civil war

The human rights crisis in Sri Lanka's civil war was caused not only by errors in ethnic policies that triggered fierce ethnic conflicts but also by improper intervention by external forces such as India and by the ineffective work of relevant United Nations agencies.

1. The extreme violence of the Tamil Tigers is the primary cause of the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. The contradictions between the Tamil and Sinhala communities in Sri Lanka are deep-rooted. These contradictions and hatreds gradually evolved into the Tamil Tigers, a radical organization that advocates the use of force to achieve independence. As the initiator of the civil war, the Tamil Tigers have been repeatedly defined as a terrorist organization by many countries. Most of the human rights crises in Sri Lanka during the civil war were caused by the LTTE. It mainly includes genocide against the Sinhalese people, launching suicide terrorist attacks, and taking civilians and government prisoners hostage as human shields. At the beginning of the civil war, genocide against the Sinhalese broke out in areas where Tamils gathered. In July

1983, 13 government soldiers were killed, kicking off the war; in 1984, two Sinhala villages were looted in Mullaitivu; in 1985, in the ancient Sinhala cultural city of Anuradhapura. In Le, the Tamil Tigers hijacked a bus and fired indiscriminately at citizens waiting for the bus, killing 146 people. In addition, the Tamil Tigers also launched frequent terrorist attacks. In July 1987, "Captain Miller" of the Tamil Tigers drove a small truck loaded with bombs into the government army camp and killed more than 40 government soldiers.

During the civil war, the Tamil Tigers launched more than 170 terrorist attacks, and many international dignitaries died at their hands, such as Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi. The Tamil Tigers also established the "Black Tiger" death squad, a unit that specializes in terrorist attacks. The members of this unit are mainly women around the age of 20. They are equipped with submachine guns, suicide explosive kits, and a container containing cyanide, and are Requires readiness for sacrifice and suicide. At the same time, the Tamil Tigers repeatedly hijacked civilians as human shields during the Sri Lankan civil war to block the attack of government forces, hired a large number of child soldiers, and tortured them. The LTTE also fired at people evacuating areas under its control, resulting in many deaths. The vendetta and terrorist attacks carried out by the Tamil Tigers are undoubtedly a sign of contempt for human rights and ruthless trampling of the international order.

2. The Sri Lankan government's tilted ethnic policies and inappropriate retaliatory actions are the direct causes of the deepening human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. After Sri Lanka's independence, the Sinhalese took control of state power. They began to implement a series of preferential

policies in language, education, employment, and other aspects, which intensified the Tamil people's sense of imbalance and further intensified the ethnic conflicts between Sinhalese and Thai. Since the 1970s, armed groups dominated by Tamil youths have continued to emerge and cause large-scale bloody conflicts. This is also the direct cause of the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. In the face of the terrorist attacks by the Tamil Tigers and its genocide and persecution of the Sinhalese people, the Sri Lankan government not only used conventional means to fight back but also used some unfair means to retaliate. For example, in 1983, in response to the Tamil military attack in Jaffna, the Sinhalese also launched attacks against the Tamils in Colombo and other places, resulting in the death of 400 Tamils. In 1985, government forces killed 23 Tamils in retaliation for the Anuradhapura massacre. The Sri Lankan government's unfair methods in military operations also include the use of heavy artillery to bomb civilians and the execution of surrendered prisoners of war. The government forces' undue revenge and vendetta actions undoubtedly intensified the already serious ethnic conflicts. They laid the foundation for the outbreak of a severe human rights crisis in the civil war.

3. The intervention of India and other foreign forces is the external reason for the continued human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. Nadu State in southern India has pervasive ties with Sri Lankan Tamils in terms of blood, language, and culture, making it the base camp of the Sri Lankan Tamils' independence movement. During the civil war, India often proactively intervened in Sri Lanka's domestic affairs under the banner of "protecting human rights." As early as August 1981, the Indian Nadu State Assembly passed a resolution to intervene in sectarian conflicts in Sri Lanka. In 1983, during the racial riots in Sri Lanka, the Indian state of Nadu also reacted strongly. The close ties between southern India and the Tamil people in Sri Lanka have allowed the Sri Lankan Tigers to gain strong support from the Tamil people in India. This made the Sri Lankan government very passive.

For this reason, the Sri Lankan government has made many protests against the Indian government. Under the guise of "resolving the Tamil crisis and giving the Tamil people greater autonomy," India sent 100,000 peacekeeping troops to Sri Lanka after the signing of the India-Sri Lanka Agreement in 1987 to help the Sri Lankan government quell the chaos. However, the Indian army fell deeper and deeper into the battle, suffered heavy losses, and had to withdraw all its troops three years later. The Indian army's entry into Sri Lanka not only failed to quell the rebellion but instead made the LTTE continue to grow. The Indian army's behavior of infringing on Sri Lanka's sovereignty, directly interfering in internal affairs, and

"raising tigers" has been condemned by international public opinion.

Similarly, the United States, Canada, Japan, and other countries outside the region used the human rights issue in Sri Lanka to interfere in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and violate Sri Lanka's sovereignty for a long time after the civil war. On March 21, 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution proposed by the United States, arguing that an independent investigation should be conducted into the crimes committed by the Sri Lankan army during the civil war. Japan also intervened in Sri Lanka's domestic issues because it had assisted Sri Lanka. The fundamental purpose of these extra-regional countries intervening in Sri Lanka's internal affairs is to expand their influence in the Indian Ocean region. In addition, the Tamil Tigers had an extensive overseas support network. About 900,000 Tamils live in Europe, North America, and Australia. These Tamils living overseas provide the Tigers with a lot of material and weapons support yearly. Improper intervention by external forces such as India has prolonged the civil war in Sri Lanka. It is the external reason for the continued severe human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.

4. The ineffective work of relevant United Nations agencies is an essential reason for the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. During the Sri Lankan civil war, the United Nations Secretariat, Security Council, Human Rights Council, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and relevant UN agencies in Sri Lanka were hampered in their work and efficiency in the Sri Lankan civil war due to various reasons. The low level of human rights in Sri Lanka has exacerbated the human rights crisis in the civil war. First, as an essential agency for preventing the escalation of civil wars and resolving conflicts, the United Nations Secretariat presents problems with unclear distribution of powers and responsibilities and unfavorable accountability. As the crisis escalated, the Secretariat never determined which agency should be responsible for this incident. However, they established the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Working Group in Sri Lanka and held several informal meetings. However, the results of these meetings are not binding, and the decisions lack influence and coercion. Therefore, although some promises were obtained from the government forces and the LTTE, such as "not to use heavy artillery," these promises were rarely fulfilled. Investigations into civilian casualties caused by shelling have repeatedly emphasized that the origin of the shelling is unknown. This has led the United Nations to repeatedly emphasize the anti-humanitarian behavior of the Tamil Tigers while ignoring the behavior of the government forces, which has dramatically reduced the prestige of the

United Nations discourse. Secondly, the United Nations Security Council and the Human Rights Council, the most influential United Nations agencies in armed conflicts, have been slow to hold meetings to discuss this issue and missed the opportunity as the conflict in Sri Lanka intensified. Although concerns were expressed about human rights issues, such as the employment of child soldiers by the Tamil Tigers, relevant meetings were repeatedly delayed, and the review of pertinent draft resolutions was prolonged. Thirdly, the United Nations Office in Sri Lanka needs to maintain close contact and good relations with the local government due to the need to complete on-the-ground work. However, as the civil war in Sri Lanka advances, communication between the agency and the Sri Lankan government has become increasingly difficult. The government does not trust many UN staff and has even expelled some. Under such circumstances, collecting information on the war situation in Sri Lanka has become very difficult and has hindered decision-making at the top. In addition, many problems have arisen in the United Nations' humanitarian operations. For example, the United Nations humanitarian transport convoy was blocked, the investigation of the human rights crisis was delayed due to insufficient collection of information on casualties, and the failure to provide safe passage for surrendered personnel of the LTTE. The ineffective work of relevant United Nations agencies has allowed the inhumane behavior of both sides in the Sri Lankan civil war to be fermented and amplified.

Outlook

Although the smoke of the Sri Lankan civil war has dissipated, the participation of the international community and the Sri Lankan people's desire for peace has made it a general trend to resolve the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government should appropriately adjust its ethnic policies to eliminate the soil for the growth of extremist organizations. The Tamil Tigers have existed in Sri Lanka for a long time, inciting fanatical nationalist sentiments and constantly carrying out genocide and terrorist actions, causing large-scale bloody conflicts. This has a profound foundation in national sentiment. The long-term ethnic antagonism between the Tamils and the Sinhalese is the root cause of human rights issues. Coupled with the Sinhalese's inappropriate ethnic policies towards the Tamils after taking power, it has intensified the already acute ethnic conflicts. Respect ethnic differences, adjust ethnic policies towards Tamils, eliminate ethnic discrimination, give Tamils appropriate space and status in politics, language, culture, education, religion, employ-

ment, etc., satisfy their reasonable demands, and eliminate ethnic discrimination. Ethnic estrangement is the fundamental basis for eliminating the soil for the existence of extremist organizations.

Solve human rights issues independently and eliminate interference from external forces. Sri Lanka's long history of colonization has left deep-rooted ethnic conflicts. After independence, the improper intervention of external forces such as India and the United States not only left Sri Lanka's human rights issues unresolved but also worsened them. As an independent and sovereign country, Sri Lanka still needs to rely on the Sri Lankan government itself to resolve human rights issues in Sri Lanka independently. Eliminate inappropriate interference from external forces such as India and take the initiative into Sri Lanka's own hands.

The international community and relevant United Nations agencies have worked together to resolve the human rights crisis. The international community and the United Nations should have made a difference in determining the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka. However, during the Sri Lankan civil war, the international community and relevant United Nations agencies responded slowly and inefficiently, which allowed the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka to expand and caused more significant losses. To solve the human rights problem in Sri Lanka, the international community and the United Nations need to build a more effective supervision and management system or reform and improve the existing system so that it can respond promptly and effectively when a crisis breaks out and avoid conflicts within the agency that interfere with work efficiency. Moreover, the international community and relevant United Nations agencies must maintain good communication with the Sri Lankan government and strive for the Sri Lankan government's cooperative attitude.

Focus on using economic, cultural, and other comprehensive means to solve human rights issues. During the British rule, Sri Lanka's economic development level lagged, and the system was unreasonable. After independence, the economy recovered for a while, but the economic development rate was slow due to improper policies and other reasons. During the civil war, the government focused mainly on military, political, and diplomatic aspects while relatively neglecting economic and cultural elements. In particular, the LTTE operates in mostly economically backward areas. Coupled with the Sinhalese's biased national policies, the economic and cultural barriers between the two ethnic groups have been artificially widened. It can be said that economic imbalance and cultural division are some of the root causes of Sri Lanka's long-term division and ethnic conflicts. Eliminating economic imbalances, providing preferential economic policies to Tamil ar-

eas, and attaching great importance to enhancing national identity and cultural exchanges are effective ways to solve the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.

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