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Aid in Sri Lanka – Traditional Donors and Their Failure to
Incite Change

by

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Department of Asian & International Studies
City University of Hong Kong

2012
Abstract

In 2009 the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka reached a climax. Western aid conditionality, which was previously used as a means of keeping Sri Lanka focused on peace initiatives, failed as leverage against impending human rights abuses. Such conditionality infringed on the sovereignty of the country and its ability to deal with its own terrorist issues without external intervention. This form of aid conditionality was particularly ineffective as it was in the face of Eastern donors who were unconditional in their offers of aid. These Western conditions therefore acted as a catalyst in Sri Lanka’s movement to Chinese, Indian and Iranian donors, while culminating an atmosphere of anti-Western rhetoric and interference in the country. Significant amounts of aid have since been given by these donors to Sri Lanka resulting in economic growth along with a myriad of human rights abuses, where during the last few months of the war an estimated 40,000 civilians died and afterward as a result of disappearances. This paper argues against the use of conditional aid as leverage against human rights abuses when it infringes on the sovereignty of a nation, particularly while in the face of non traditional donors. This paper stresses the need for caution and awareness in the use of aid conditionality taking local perspectives into consideration.
Introduction

The Sri Lankan civil war drew to a close on the 18th of May 2009, ending what was an almost 26 year old conflict between the Tamil Tiger rebel group and the Sri Lankan government. The origins of the war were based along divisions of ethnic lines with the rebel group in the North being Tamil- an ethnic group with a large majority in South India- and the South of Sri Lanka being dominated by the Sinhalese. The rebel group fought to claim their right to a separate Tamil state, much of their motives precipitating after genocide in the South claimed 3000 lives adding to already prejudiced post colonial systems in education and language policy. (Yarwood 2009) Yet lives were lost on both sides of the war with an estimated 70,000 deaths resulting from the violence. (ibid) Loss was not limited to the number of casualties but also extended to the realm of the economy where rampant expenditure on the war took a toll on the economy; military spending reaching a peak in 1995 amounting to 5% of GDP (Kumudini R. et al. 2012). In addition to this, the tourism sector suffered considerably with many nations warnings on visiting Sri Lanka. This had negative implications on the nation, which derives a third of its income from tourism. (Ondaatjie & Tighe 2007).

With the destruction of the war and losses on both sides, a temporary ceasefire was attempted in 2001 which brought both the government and rebel groups together in hopes that a peaceful solution could be met. Facilitated by Western mediators who were largely influenced by the Tamil Diaspora living in their respective home countries, mediations failed and fighting resumed. (Harris 2010). Western governments and traditional donors had since stressed the need for peaceful solutions and channeled aid into the country on the pretext of “peacebuilding” and investments in harmonizing the conflict. (ibid) Aid was used as a form of leverage in the form of peace building by the West, using it as a tool to keep Sri Lanka in the ceasefire accord as well as using it to enforce human rights. This was in the face of more non traditional donors, in particular China and India, who used aid to advance their own strategic interests in the country. It could be argued that Western leverage and perceived “bullying” on the pretext of human rights caused an aversion toward Western interests and ideals as a result of what was perceived as an infringement on Sri Lanka’s sovereignty and capability to handle its domestic affairs. This pushed the country into the arms of the more non-traditional donors whose offers of aid were without condition and nonchalant when it came to issues of human rights which continue to worsen.
Using Aid to Incite Change

Sri Lanka has long relied on foreign aid and investment in the country with its aid landscape dominated by relationships with more traditional donors. Japan in particular has had a long history with Sri Lanka, donating significant amounts of aid while imposing few conditions on the help being provided. The country still continues to be a large donor but has of recently raised its concern for ongoing human rights issues within Sri Lanka. Tokyo's special envoy to Sri Lanka for instance, Yasushi Akashi, who helped Sri Lanka raise $4.3 billion for peace building efforts in 2003 has called on Sri Lanka to investigate its human rights abuses. (AFP 2011) Yet Japanese concern on human rights issues were limited to a single statement and was in stark contrast to what was soon to be seen by the West. Such sentiment was expressed a lot less implicitly and with a lot more vigor in 2009 by the United States and other traditional European donors when the war against the Tamil insurgents was at its peak. The Sri Lankan government had the rebels cornered in their last stronghold with an estimated 50,000 civilians caught in the cross fire. (Perera 2009) The United States in particular expressed strong disapproval for the handling of the situation and to coerce the government into managing the situation better, moved to block a necessary IMF loan that Sri Lanka required in order to shore up deficits in its foreign reserves. (ibid)

“We have raised questions about the IMF loan at this time. We think it is not an appropriate time to consider that until there is a resolution of the conflict,” said US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the time. (Ranasinghe 2010).

This comment was soon followed by special session held by the UNHCR which called for an international commission of enquiry to look into human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. A UN report estimated that around 40,000 civilians had lost their lives during the last few months of the war. (Haviland 2012). However instead of having the intended effect of forcing the government to take the lives of its civilians into consideration, what resulted instead was perceived blackmail. This perceived action was considered by the government an attack on Sri Lanka and its stance on terrorism, resulting in the government’s movement toward other donors. The sentiment expressed at the time can be noticed in the following statements made by Sri Lanka’s foreign secretary.
‘Sri Lanka, confronted with the choice of economic blackmail or finding an accommodation with terrorism, had to strengthen its ties with alternative partners’, Dr. Palitha Kohona, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Secretary, told BBC News. (Ranasinghe, 2010)

In the presence of much Western pressure, Sri Lanka started its own commission investigating war crimes allegations, even proposing its own UN resolution deemed, “Assistance to Sri Lanka in the promotion and Protection of Human Rights”, (Bhadrakumar 2009), with strong support by its allies, China and India. The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission(LLLRC) which was Sri Lanka’s commitment to human rights, has aimed to complete their project in a total of five years and as stated by opposition politicians, was nothing more than a ploy to reduce international scrutiny. (Aneez 2012). While the government continues with its commission, disappearances have become the norm in post war Sri Lanka, with a disappearance occurring on average every five days. (Fernando 2012) The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances has submitted “12,460 cases to Sri Lanka of which 5671 currently remain outstanding”, (ibid) These disappearances as according to the article, are second in number only to Iraq.

Aid continued to fall during this time, with Western government using it as a means to coerce Sri Lanka into respecting human rights within the nation. This was particularly led by more vocal groups in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The U.S. in particular cut their aid to Sri Lanka by over 64 % between 2004 – 2007 (Rajasingham 2011). To demonstrate the particularly strong connection between American aid donations and Sri Lanka’s human rights record, shortly after the release of the controversial film “Sri Lanka’s killing fields”, which depicted war crimes committed by the country, $13 million dollars of aid to the nation was cut right after. (ibid) Aid, the article states is not expected to resume to previous levels until the Obama administration once again approves of the country’s human rights record. Yet the counter argument to this as the article states is that American aid may have simply decreased because of waning interest in Sri Lanka as the country is simply not of a great strategic concern to the United States with the only uniting factor being a post September 11th stand against terrorism. (ibid) “Human rights roles play little or no role in the allocation of security assistance” highlights a study by the Institute of International Relations and Area Studies, Ritsumeikan University. (Apodaca, 2004), with claims made it would be against the strategic interests of the United States to criticize an ally for their human rights record. (ibid) According to Claire Apodaca this would indicate that the United States, while not considering Sri Lanka to be an ally can be open with its criticism of Sri Lanka especially perhaps with the increased Chinese and Iranian presence in the country. (Badhrakumar, 2009)
Yet the United States isn’t the only country which demonstrates a reduction in its volume of aid to Sri Lanka, with many other traditional donors also demonstrating significant reductions in aid to the nation. (Index Mundi 2012) It is not sufficient to posit that other traditional donors also have reductions in aid while the need for it is still present simply because of waning strategic interest. However it might be more accurate to point that in the face of such an overwhelming number of human rights abuses and Western rhetoric against this, there have been other considerable amounts deductions in aid from other donors as evident from the following table (ibid).

(The figures are presented in 1000’s of US$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>European Union Institutions</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>United States</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>111,600</td>
<td>11,140</td>
<td>21,120</td>
<td>26,030</td>
<td>19,610</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>96,690</td>
<td>20,300</td>
<td>19,760</td>
<td>30,560</td>
<td>51,790</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>59,230</td>
<td>5,590</td>
<td>36,300</td>
<td>18,620</td>
<td>12,690</td>
<td>18,150</td>
<td>91,620</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>2,690</td>
<td>35,260</td>
<td>32,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>48,100</td>
<td>6,370</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>45,130</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>155,430</td>
<td>43,470</td>
<td>3,620</td>
<td>28,960</td>
<td>26,080</td>
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The decrease in NET DAC aid donations from 2008-2009;

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<th>Years</th>
<th>Net DAC</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>517,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>433,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>433,830</td>
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Noting that with the exception of France and the East Asian states, there has been a significant drop in the amount of aid sent to Sri Lanka from the peak of the war during 2009 to the last year of available data, 2010.

In addition to depleting aid, there have been with significant demonstrations and stands taken by respective governments to alienate and position Sri Lanka as a country which they argue is a nation with little respect for human rights. For instance with the up coming commonwealth meeting scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka, the Canadian prime minister has promised to boycott the event along with similar calls to do so from the British Prime Minister, David Cameron (BBC. 2012). This may only serve to further alienate and affront already poor relations between the West and Sri Lanka.
An analysis of Western and American foreign policy.

To analyze what went wrong with Western interventions in Sri Lanka, one needs to look back to changes in America’s foreign policy. For a long period of time, foreign policy of the United States followed strong strategic interests based around the Cold War, but such has since shifted into the purpose of promoting, peace, democracy and human rights as seen in the German and American development assistant goals:

“Poverty reduction, environmental protection, peace building, realizing democracy, and promoting equitable forms of globalization” (Hoeffler & Outram 2011).

While it can be argued that human rights and “peacebuilding” are well intentioned and positive goals, there has been considerable literature and movements in the Western world that stress these ideals are correct, of utmost importance and should be promoted throughout the world as it part of a global hierarchy or order that supersedes the boundaries and concepts of a nation. (Durkheim 1957) This call to order and promotion of liberal American values while well meaning and perhaps true, does not imply as with the case of Sri Lanka, that scant regard be paid to the present situation and dynamics within the country when trying to implement such a philosophy. Such values, as according to Carol Lancaster from Georgetown University, will form an integral part of America’s foreign policy in promotion of these very virtues. (2000) As seen from the quote, aid is mentioned as a vital tool in this process.

“In sum, foreign aid will continue to be an essential foreign policy tool to promote U.S. interests and values abroad. Its major purposes will include peacemaking, addressing transnational issues and other challenges arising from globalization, providing humanitarian relief and promoting “humane concerns” abroad.”(ibid)

The above quote illustrates the interplay between aid and foreign policy, and sheds light as to the reasoning behind why America chose to initially block the IMF loan to Sri Lanka. Aid was being used very much as a means of leverage, at a point when it was utterly urgent that Sri Lanka receive this aid to shore up its foreign reserves in order to coerce the
government into preventing human rights abuses and ensuring the safety of its entrapped citizens. America was acting in line with its development assistant goals, taking its assumed lead in conflict prevention and peacekeeping. (ibid) This can also be said to be true of other countries which align themselves with such values, such as those of Germany who share similar development assistant goals and who also demonstrate a significant reduction in volumes of aid to Sri Lanka.

Promotion and implementation of such liberal ideals on human rights and peace, representative of the West, rang true for Norway as well when it tried to mediate peace talks between the government and rebel groups in 2002. (Bajoria 2009). A Western led initiative; there was much talk about peace and fostering of harmonious ethnic relations. In fact, Feinstein Harris from the Feinstein International Center took note that donor rhetoric at the time, required agencies to;

“*demonstrate, to a greater or lesser extent, how the proposed intervention would strengthen inter-communal ethnic relationships, facilitate ethnic harmonization, build peace, and reduce conflict*” (2010).

This intent on fostering peace and harmony, characteristic of Western policy and initiatives, while well intentioned did not take local perspectives on the rebel groups into consideration nor did they consider how Sri Lanka would view these peace led initiatives. In fact, aid was once again used as a means of leverage, with Western donors threatening to cut donations and aid to the country if the Sri Lankan government left talks. (Ranasinghe 2011) All this was while the rebel group kept violating the ceasefire agreement and rearming itself compounding frustrations and relations with the Sri Lankan government which felt clearly disadvantaged. (ibid) This was the pivotal moment when policy and perception of the West shifted causing realignment with more non traditional donors.

This almost hegemony of ideals through the peace keeping mission and later through the UN resolution against Sri Lanka has resulted in cries from the Sri Lankan government against what it claims are “neo-imperialistic” efforts against a small developing nation. Yet while the concept of “neo-imperialism” and its application to Sri Lanka might be disputable, many have claimed that such terms are used as a mask to cover ongoing human rights abuses (Jayapalan 2012). There is strong evidence to assume that there was significant foreign aid intervention in Sri Lanka around 2002. The reasoning behind this has much to do with Western perception of the Sri Lankan conflict (Harris 2010). Feinstein Harris deems that the West perceived significant “structural inequalities” within the country and its ethnic communities.
(ibid). This was taken to heart by peacekeepers, and other aid operations within the country in their promotion of “peacebuilding” programmes where much of the divisions and suspicions arose between the Sri Lanka and the West.

To understand how many these divisions arose Feinstein Harris claims that during this time there were three significant changes within the social and political landscape of Sri Lanka. (1) This included a rise in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, which came at a time of crisis. (2) The “othering” aspect of equating and aligning the “Tamil” identity as being one of a terrorist and (3) Increasing “rejection and criticism of the state’s strategy or of the suggestion that terrorism is a symptom of more deep-rooted social and political problems (2010). Much of this he states, was in direct contradiction to the initiatives and peace building strategies and aid programmes led by the West. (ibid)

Sergei de Silva Ranasinghe, a Sri Lankan defense writer at the National Security Institute at the University of Canberra, posits that the significant Tamil population in the West, played a significant role in shaping foreign perception of the Sri Lankan war. The large Tamil population had considerable power to sway parliamentary action and policy toward intervention in Sri Lanka. The Tamil vote within Western countries, often 40,000 strong as in the UK often lobbied to provide a certain level of Tamil autonomy to the rebel population and shaped Western views of the war in Sri Lanka as having the Tamils largely victimized. All this was while the Tamil rebel group, known as the LTTE, broke countless significant ceasefire agreements rearming itself for its attack. (Ranasinghe 2011) These Western perceptions and policies following through in aid interventions were therefore in contradiction to Sri Lankan-Sinhalese perception of the Tamil Tiger rebel group and soon, “peacebuilding” and “conflict resolution” came to “be used as metaphors of Western support for the LTTE’s secessionist aspirations and being anti-state.” (Harris 2010)

The use of “peace”, had attached such a stigma in Sri Lanka that soon Oxfam began dropping the use of the word in its Sri Lankan projects around the time of ceasefire and peacekeeping mission in 2002 (Harris, 2010) Such aversion to the word “peace” demonstrates the opposition to Western aid initiatives in Sri Lanka at the time and the failure of those very methods at their goals. It could be argued that at this point in time, after the peace keeping mission and before the full on scale war, that the Sri Lankan government was becoming more averse to Western intervention which they felt was biased, sympathetic toward the Tamil Tigers and largely influenced by the Tamil Diaspora. In fact Norway, the country which had primary responsibility for the peace negotiations was stripped of its position after an attack on the Sri Lankan
embassy in its capital. (Al Jazeera 2009) It was at this time, when perceived failure of the West pushed Sri Lanka to look for other non traditional donors. (Ranasinghe 2011)

To analyze the current Western DAC aid roles in Sri Lanka, and taking the United States as an example, much of the present investment in the country continues to be along the lines of investment in “peace and security, democracy, human rights and good governance”, (Rajasingham 2012) , again while well intentioned these aid initiatives are characteristic of those that the United States and other DAC donors, with the exception of the East Asian States, followed through during the ceasefire agreements of 2002 with an emphasis on the already taboo words of “peacebuilding”. The sums allocated have also been somewhat paltry in comparison to what it had previously allocated in 2008,- a figure of $51 million - with only $22.2 million set in aid for the country for the year 2012. Out of which $9.2 million dollars shall go toward the contentious causes of promoting peace and security. (ibid)

**Sri Lanka’s anti-Western rhetoric and movements away from the West.**

It must be noted that the UN resolution against Sri Lanka was one of many initiatives and attempts at peace and moderation of human rights by the West. Leverage through the means of aid investments as well as aid which focused on peace building often, as demonstrated previously failed to take into consideration Sri Lankan perspectives on peace and the rebel group. The dynamics and complexities of the situation has been somewhat lost on the West , which not considering Sri Lanka to be a strong strategic partner, continues to limit aid sent to the country while criticizing its human rights record. To fill in the gap left by the DAC donors have come Chinese, Indian and Iranian donors.

Trade with China and Sri Lanka has increased significantly in recent years with the current trade volume for 2011 being at $3.14 billion, an increase of 49.8% over the previous year. (Zhu Zhe, 2012). The two country’s have long shared a shared history with dealings in rubber and rice from the 1960’s but ties have strengthened as of recently largely due to the rise of India. (Ranasinghe, 2010) Sovereignty issues were at heart in a sentiment expressed by China in 2001, with claims that China shall monitor Sri Lanka’s interests and shall act to maintain its “sovereignty and territorial integrity” as a “countervailing force” against the rise of India. In 2001, 90% of China’s arms sales went to countries that surround India. (Malik, 2001) So it is of strategic interest as well for China to continue it’s investment and expansion in Sri Lanka, in defense of its sovereignty, an interest it had stated in making prior to the current jaded views of the West.
To comprehend the movement away from Western donors and alignment with non-traditional ones, one needs to examine the sentiments felt by the Sri Lankan, Sinhalese ruling majority when faced with the frustration and perceived injustice of Western aid. The anti-western rhetoric in Sri Lanka has been prevalent and vocal, one has to look no further than Sri Lanka’s foreign secretary who stated that Sri Lanka’s “traditional donors…had receded into a very distant corner”, to be replaced by countries in the East. The reasons he cites for this are that the new donors are wealthy neighbors who “behave themselves”, expounding further that these countries do not, as the quote says;

“Go around teaching each other how to behave. There are ways we deal with each other- perhaps a quiet chat, but not wagging the finger”. (Sengupta 2008)

Such anti-western sentiment was also expressed by the defense secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa who, faced with dwindling Western aid and poor trade balances stated in frustration against the West;

“They don’t buy anything from us, they don’t give us anything, they don’t give us aid, but because of their skin we get excited”. (Ranasinghe 2011)

Such was even vocalized at the United Nations by the Sri Lankan ambassador to the UN, Dayan Jayathileke, as he pointed out the lack of Western consideration to the issues to the government faced.

“They did not stop to think that fellow democracy” would be placed in a position of disadvantage in the face of a terrorist organization that had “no restriction on smuggling weapons”. (Ranasinghe 2011)

This is all while China through its aid “enabled…..the defense of Sri Lanka’s independence, sovereignty and restoration of its national unity”. China, it can be stated took advantage of sovereignty and issues of national identity that had culminated as a result of the war, emphasizing its need to protect the country. (Feinstein Harris 2010). This was particularly true for China and not India, as India’s involvement was somewhat constrained given its large Tamil population in the south of the country, setting China up to become a very active strategic partner. (Ranasinghe, 2011)
During the year 2008, when violence during the war was escalating China gifted Sri Lanka with six F7 fighter jets not to mention aid which amounted to US$ 1 billion (Braudhakumar 2009). Following on its initial aid commitment China has built a $1.3 billion coal power plant, a $209 million dollar airport and is currently constructing a port in southern area of the country for $1.2 billion. (Zhu Zhe, 2012) Chinese aid to Colombo in the year 2011 was also considerable with most of its aid going into improving and developing the country’s road network (Gamage 2012).

China has considerable reasons for its investment in Sri Lanka, given its position between India, the East and the shipping lanes around the coast of Africa which is aims to protect. This is especially true if the Isthmus of Kra happens to be completed in Thailand connecting the Pacific region with the Indian Ocean and balance of power shifts are to be predicted (Baudhakumar 2009). China may also use the port as a point for it to refuel and dock its ships which it would use to protect its investments throughout Asia and Africa. (ibid) However it has been contested that the port would only be geared toward Sri Lankan interests and there will not be any Chinese in the port upon completion. (Ranasinghe, 2011). In return for the significant amount of aid and support at the UN, most post war reconstruction projects have been acquired by China and are cumulatively worth US$ 6.1 billion resulting in the presence of 6000, to ten thousand Chinese workers currently present in Sri Lanka. Benefits as evident fall on both China in terms of reconstruction projects and on Sri Lanka in terms of growth, with the country recently reaching middle income status and demonstrating growth of 8.3% in the year of 2011 and 6.5% in 2012 (World Bank, 2012).

While China is not the only donor of consideration, India has donated close to $4 billion and continues to invest considerably in the country. (Hariharan 2012) Sri Lankan relations with India have soured as it supported a UN resolution calling for human rights investigations in Sri Lanka not to mention the considerable Tamil population in India which is very vocal against the incumbent Sri Lankan, Sinhalese regime. This Tamil discontent has been compounded by recent attacks in the South of the country against Sri Lankan tourists. (Yardley, 2012) This souring of relations presents India with having significantly less sway when it comes to monitoring current abuses in the country or using its aid and investment presence as leverage. China on the other hand, through the process of playing to and safeguarding issues of sovereignty has exerted considerable influence in Sri Lanka. Policies of “harmony and deep pockets” (Sengupta 2008) have cemented China’s place as a strong strategic partner with both countries benefitting considerably. China’s power also extends to its allies such as Iran who gave Sri Lanka $1.3 billion to help it buy Iranian oil (ibid), not to mention the
power that it and Russia have over the island in the security council where Chinese defense of Sri Lanka is critical against U.S. efforts to ensure external investigations into war crimes. (Mortimer, n.d.).

It can be argued therefore that China’s presence often means that Sri Lanka can ignore western persuasion into its human rights issues, no longer does the west have any strong leverage against the country, and with Chinese not to mention Russian veto power Security Council alliances and resolutions against Sri Lanka are powerless. (Mortimer 2012) The country has continued to drop down the press freedom index and now sits in the bottom twenty. (Reporters without borders 2012) while looming over it’s head are expulsions from trade agreements, boycotts (BBC 2012) which it cannot ignore as despite China’s ever increasing presence, Sri Lanka’s main export markets are still the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium and Italy. (The Sunday Observer 2011) As Western aid has lost its leverage in Sri Lanka, its trade might still have considerable leverage. However the recent removal of “GSP plus” trade concession benefits by the EU as a result of human rights abuses which were widely feared to have detrimental impacts on exports proved to be ineffective with exports growing 38% the following quarter. (ibid) Trade barriers as a form of leverage are therefore proving somewhat ineffective as well in the coercion to better human rights environment within the country.

Conclusions

China, the United States and Sri Lanka have become actors in a play that demonstrates the extremes of intervention and aid when it comes to navigating the sovereignty of a country. The U.S. and other Western donors imposed restrictions on the aid that they were giving as leverage against rights abuses and kept Sri Lanka vested in a ceasefire agreement that it perceived as being biased and sympathetic toward Tamil plight. This was coupled with Western humanitarian aid interventions under the guise of “peacebuilding” which Sri Lanka perceived as intruding on its ability to make decisions itself without western regard. Frustrated with the results and infringements on the ability to make its own decisions about what it considered was a local issue, it joined hands with powers that supported its independence and attacks on “terrorist” groups. Liberal amounts of Chinese aid and hands off policies on such aid have left Sri Lanka growing economically but free to silence many critics and journalists, hushing up dissent in terms of its war effort, development policies and corruption. This has been compounded by China’s defense of Sri Lanka at the Security Council.
Significant shifts in world power, as a result of the rise of China and also the recent economic issues plaguing the West are resulting in a re-alignment in Sri Lanka’s foreign and domestic policy. In Sri Lanka’s quest to become “Asia’s Miracle” (Zhu Zhe 2012), as it brands itself, the country is faced with the challenge of improving its human rights record in face of western lobbying as well as maintaining its export market to ensure its rapid development.

Currently there has been little, if any middle ground or alternative solutions to the present issues in Sri Lanka. While India asserts that it is willing to accommodate Sri Lanka’s needs, it expresses its displeasure over China’s involvement (Ranasinghe 2010) it is faced with a local Tamil population that limits its involvement, coupled with its support of the UN resolution against Sri Lanka which the country interpreted as an affront to its sovereignty. If this were not the case, considering its position and influence through trade and aid it would have been in a considerable position to monitor human rights related issues.

Sovereignty is defined as “freedom from external control”, (Websters 2012) a grace that Sri Lanka felt it lost with the West and gained in the arms of China, the only nation that valued its ability to do what it needed to do best in the war. The questions the Sri Lankan case brings to light are; where does the fine line lie between respecting sovereignty and honoring human rights and solutions to conflict? And what questions should donors ask themselves when donating?

Feinstein Harris argues that “nationalism and sovereignty” are factors that cannot be ignored when it comes to humanitarian assistance and actors must consider their “assumptions and attitudes” before attempting to interfere in conflict afflicted countries as “neo imperialism and western arrogance will no longer be tolerated” (Harris, 2010). He goes on to suggest caution “peacebuilding” objectives while taking into account “perceptions and manipulations of host country interests”.(ibid) Western intervention can therefore be interpreted as detrimental when local conditions are not completely considered as in the case of Sri Lanka. This constitutes lessons learned for the West, which should be taken into consideration before attempting further well meaning, but dangerous attempts at peace in a very volatile environment.
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