British newspapers reveal Tamil Tigers' desperate appeal to imperialist powers

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The British press last week revealed that senior leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were in peace negotiations with British and American diplomats immediately prior to their killing by the Sri Lankan army on May 18. Also involved in the talks was the United Nations secretary general's chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar.

The *Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* both published reports stating that Balasingham Nadesan, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, and Seevaratnam Pulidevan, the head of its peace secretariat, held talks with Nambiar through a series of intermediaries, including a journalist and a delegation of British diplomats.

The *Guardian* states that the LTTE leaders also made further contact with Norwegian Environment and Development Cooperation Minister Erik Solheim prior to their deaths. Solheim had since 2002 been involved in repeated attempts to broker a peace agreement as a special envoy. Solheim sowed fatal illusions in the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse. Following the local elections in Sri Lanka in 2006, he commented after meeting with the president, "The local election result was a clear mandate to Mahinda Rajapakse to move the (peace) process forward."

The *Sunday Times* article by journalist Marie Colvin was headlined, "Tigers begged me to broker surrender." She explained how the initial contact between the LTTE and British and United States officials and the United Nations had been facilitated through her.

She has covered the civil war in Sri Lanka since being "smuggled into territory eight years ago" in order "to investigate reports that the government was blocking food and medical supplies to half a million Tamils." She had met and known Nadesan and Puleedevan since that time

The *Guardian* details how the two leaders of the LTTE attempted to agree a last minute deal with the Sri Lankan government just hours before they were killed by the army in the early hours of May 18 while in the process of surrendering.

A British official states that UK involvement was "at most indirect," but the article includes a quote from Nambiar saying that he had had "direct contact" with British diplomats in New York and also with an unnamed British minister. Nambiar added, "There was a ministerial demarche [a formal diplomatic representation] to the secretary general from the UK office in New York."

Nambiar passed on the information obtained by the *Times* journalist regarding the proposal of Nadesan and Pulidevan to surrender to the Sri Lankan government. He says that he also spoke to Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona about the proposal.

The government had no intention of brokering a ceasefire or allowing any surrender by the LTTE leadership. Nambiar told the *Guardian*, "The Sri Lankan government did not say that they would accept the surrender. They said it may be too late."

After being contacted by the LTTE regarding the surrender, Solheim "then contacted the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Sri Lankan government."

A text message was then sent from Kohona to the Red Cross, which read, "Just walk across to the troops, slowly! With a white flag and comply with instructions carefully. The soldiers are nervous about suicide bombers."

In Colvin's *Times* article she described the harrowing conditions facing the LTTE fighters as they were cornered into a tiny strip of jungle and a beach area during the final army offensive: "Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were trapped with them, hiding in hand-dug trenches, enduring near constant bombardment."

"For several days I had been the intermediary between the Tiger leadership and the United Nations as the army pressed in on the last enclave at the end of a successful

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military campaign to defeat the rebellion," she writes. "Nadesan had asked me to relay three points to the UN: they would lay down their arms, they wanted a guarantee of safety from the Americans or British, and they wanted an assurance that the Sri Lankan government would agree to a political process that would guarantee the rights of the Tamil minority.

"Through highly placed British and American officials I had established contact with the UN special envoy in Colombo, Vijay Nambiar, chief of staff to Ban Ki-Moon, the secretary-general. I had passed on the Tigers' conditions for surrender, which he had said he would relay to the Sri Lankan government."

Colvin corroborates the *Guardian*'s report. She states that in conversation with Nambiar during the morning of May 18, he told her that he had been told by the Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa that the two leaders would be able to surrender by hoisting "a white flag high."

Colvin stated, "Once more, the UN 24-hour control centre in New York patched me through to Nambiar in Colombo, where it was 5.30 a.m. on Monday. I woke him up.

"I told him the Tigers had laid down their arms. He said he had been assured by Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Sri Lankan president, that Nadesan and Puleedevan would be safe in surrendering. All they had to do was 'hoist a white flag high,' he said."

Shortly after this Colvin lost contact with Nadesan's satellite phone and spoke to an LTTE contact in South Africa, to whom she relayed the instructions to hoist the white flag.

Colvin reports, "A Tamil who was in a group that managed to escape the killing zone described what happened. This source, who later spoke to an aid worker, said Nadesan and Puleedevan walked towards Sri Lankan army lines with a white flag in a group of about a dozen men and women. He said the army started firing machineguns at them. Nadesan's wife, a Sinhalese, yelled in Sinhala at the soldiers, 'He is trying to surrender and you are shooting him.' She was also shot down."

Reports are now emerging that the civilian death toll in Sri Lanka during the last months of the war stands at more than 20,000, with thousands more injured. Rajapakse has revealed that 6,261 Sri Lankan security forces had died and another 29,551 had been injured since the government resumed the war in 2006.

A report published in the *Times* June 1, cites India's responsibility for allowing the slaughter to proceed. Major-General Ashok Mehta, a former commander of Indian forces in Sri Lanka, states, "We were complicit in this last phase of the offensive when a great number of civilians were killed. Having taken a decision to go along with the campaign, we went along with it all the way and ignored what was happening on the ground."

Last week, at a session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Indian government supported China and Russia in opposing a proposal for a war crimes inquiry into the deaths of Tamil civilians during the last weeks of the war. Egypt and Cuba also opposed a war crimes inquiry, stating that the civil war was a "domestic matter that doesn't warrant outside interference."

The *World Socialist Web Site* in its May 29 statement, "Sri Lanka: the defeat of the LTTE and the dead-end of nationalism," explained that the crushing failure of the LTTE was bound up with its political perspective based on winning the support of one or another of the imperialist powers.

The statement read, "In the final analysis, the debacle suffered by the LTTE was the outcome of a perspective that lacked any progressive economic or political rationale: that the answer to government-backed anti-Tamil discrimination was the carving out of a separate ethnically based state for the Tamil minority on one section of the small island of Sri Lanka."

The statement continued, "From the outset of the civil war 26 years ago, the LTTE's armed struggle was wedded to a strategy of winning the support of one or another of the major powers for setting up a statelet in the north and east of the country.

"Over the following decades, the LTTE has appealed for imperialist backing, consistently making it clear that its aim in carving out a mini-state on the island was not the betterment of the social conditions of the masses of Tamils, but rather the creation of a capitalist economy that would provide cheap labour for international capital."

The LTTE's appeals fell on deaf ears, right up until their massacre by the Sri Lankan army. Indeed, ever since Rajapakse resumed the war against the LTTE in 2006, neither the United States nor British governments ever wavered in their support for the Sri Lankan war drive.

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