

LTTE a terrorist organization in US eyes but no action taken so far: Raphael. (1995, September 03). *The Sunday times*.

LTTE A TERRORIST ORGANISATION IN US EYES BUT NO ACTION TAKEN SO FAR: RAPHAEL

Even though the LTTE has been listed as a terrorist organisation in the US State Department's list of international terrorist organisations, the policy of selling lethal weapons to Sri Lanka has not changed, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Robin Raphael, told a press conference in Colombo on Friday. One reason was human rights considerations and the other was the US policy of attempting to decrease the level of the sales of arms, she said. Ms. Raphael, however, said that Sri Lanka's human rights record has considerably improved in the last 2 years. The following are excerpts of the press conference.

Q: The United States has always been saying it stands for a United Sri Lanka but it has never said it stands against separation or a separatist movement. Why is that?

A: We have said that we have supported territorial integrity of Sri Lanka but beyond that we don't view it as our place to get into discussions, on the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. That old diplomatic phrase, 'interfering in internal affairs' and suggesting how things are to be organised, we don't view as our role.

Q: How does Washington see the LTTE? As a terrorist organisation? Where does it stand?

A: The LTTE has carried out terrorist actions. I think getting into the whole issue of who is a terrorist group has become rather arcane. They are listed in our latest report on terrorism... I don't think it is useful to find a definition on what a terrorist organisation is partly because it has presidential ramifications.

Q: What can you tell us about your discussions with the Foreign Minister and other officials?

A: This is a routine visit. I was trying to come in May which has put off due to personal family reasons. I am trying to catch up. We had a full range of bi-lateral issues to discuss but clearly I was interested on the government's views on the situation in the country.

Q: Did the government ask assistance to fight the terrorists?

A: I don't want to go into details on the specific aspects of the discussions but we have a limited military programme...with Sri Lanka. We have an ongoing training exercises and supply of non lethal equipment which is an on going process.

Q: What are the implications of placing any organisation as a terrorist organisation in the State Department's list?

A: There are legal ramifications and so on. Its a complicated legal issue.

Q: Did any of the officials raise the issue of the meeting of the State Department with a group of Tamils during 'Operation Leap Forward' and the earlier meeting with the LTTE leader in Paris?

A: I don't know what the meeting of the group of Tamils you are referring to but the spokesman for the LTTE from Paris was in Washington and it was just at the time the cessation of hostilities had broken down. We took advantage of that meeting to make a very strong pitch and expressing our views on the need to continue negotiations.

Q: Did you in your discussions with Sri Lankan officials, also impress upon them the need to resume a dialogue with the LTTE?

A: We discussed the whole situation in general but of the LTTE backed out of the negotiations and backed out of the cessation of hostilities, my impression is that the government would like to resume the dialogue, would like to resume negotiations.

Q: Given what you said that the LTTE are the ones that broke the ceasefire and that they are on the terrorist list why does the US continue not to sell lethal military equipment to Sri Lanka?

A: That is our policy. Our policy has not changed. There are a number of reasons for it. Human rights considerations are one of them. Again whether the LTTE being on the terrorist list or not we recently issued, we have human rights concerns, we have overall concerns about arms sales, about the global effort to try and decrease the level of arms sales. And really the government of Sri Lanka has really no problems in having arms they don't have to buy from us.

Q: Despite the change of government, Washington's views have not changed about human rights in Sri Lanka?

A: For a couple of years things have certainly improved and overall I think they have clearly improved. This government has committed itself to a very high standard of human rights. You



Robin Raphael

have this problem of 21 bodies having turned up and so on. I think the government has certainly done a good job trying to find out who did that. Overall, we maintain a keen eye on that.

Q: What was Washington's attitude towards the practical proposals which has been put forward by the government. Does Washington consider it a good basis for settlement?

A: We really aren't commenting on the substance of the proposals. We are certainly impressed by the fact that the government put them on the table. Its the first government to have done so. It serves as a basis for debate and discussion. I think the fact they are on the table we view very positively. But again whether its enough or not enough that's for the Sri Lankan people to decide.

Q: Colombo has been trying to get western government clamp down on the activities of the LTTE abroad... Propaganda, fund raising. Is there anything the United States would do to help.

A: It needs to be understood that we can't move against people in the United States unless they violate the laws of the United States and that one example is the question can't you do something about the money American Tamils send... it might be used for buying arms and so on. The answer to that is: No, not unless the laws have been violated. The Tamils might be one example. But if you look at the example where there is a lot of interest, look at the Irish example. So I think if people violate US law we will certainly move against them. If they don't there is no action we can take.

Q: Government is looking into the question of

banning the LTTE. In case the government bans the LTTE would the US too ban it?

A: I would say again people would have to break US laws.

Q: Does the US have any evidence of the LTTE being involved in international narcotics smuggling? That is a violation of your laws, isn't it?

A: It would be. But we don't have specific evidence of that which I know of.

Q: Does it mean smuggling of narcotics into the US or smuggling narcotics internationally? Canada has evidence of LTTE's involvement in narcotics smuggling. You don't take up the international question, is it?

A: Legal process have to be gone through. Someone has to come to us and say such and such has happened...

Q: The hostages in Kashmir have been languishing there for nearly two months now. How do you see the chances of a peaceful end to this stand off.

A: I don't want to speculate. We have been working that issue very hard. We keep our fingers crossed.

Q: Have you been able to identify their shadowy group.

A: Lot's of speculation that I don't want to add to.

Q: There was a newspaper report that President Clinton had personally spoken to Benazir Bhutto. Is that correct?

A: That's totally fabricated. We have spoken to the government of Pakistan. They have right from the word go condemned this act.

Q: How do you view US-Sri Lanka trade and economic relations?

A: Quite positively. There has been a billion dollars worth of exports last year. I had breakfast with the American Chamber this morning and they were optimistic.

It won't be a totally easy ride. But investors want to increase their investments to Sri Lanka though even from their point of views its not perfect.

Q: But there is a slump in Sri Lanka's business activity.

A: I don't watch all the indicators. What I look at is what our people are saying and in terms of how they view the market here and its basically positive.

They wish privatisation would go a little faster. Its a positive outlook.