

Day of Reckoning in Sri Lanka

Foreign Policy

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The Sri Lankan government has issued a deadline of noon tomorrow for the Tamil Tigers to surrender. With the embattled rebels unlikely to put down their guns before then, only forceful and immediate international action to halt the fighting can prevent the possible deaths of tens of thousands of civilians trapped between the warring parties. ()

Much of the international community knows what is happening and what is at stake. Nongovernmental organizations, including the International Crisis Group, have been sounding the alarm bells since last fall. Since then, more and more hard proof of unacceptable civilian suffering and war crimes have emerged, including the satellite images of the crowded tent camps seen here, video of dead children, and interviews with exhausted ICRC doctors. Nonetheless, the U.N. and influential governments have been slow to act and have allowed a bad situation to grow much worse.

Similar paralysis and foot dragging by multinational institutions and powerful countries produced Rwanda and Srebrenica. Barack Obama's administration has said it is committed to the principals of international law and humanitarian protection. Sri Lanka is the perfect opportunity for the new U.S. president to show that this is not empty rhetoric.

With both government forces and Tamil Tigers abdicating their **responsibility to protect** civilians from mass atrocities, urgent, determined, and united international action is necessary to ensure the safety of the innocent -- by the United Nations Security Council, other multilateral organizations, and individual countries that have relations with Sri Lanka, including India and Japan. ()

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