

LTTE leader makes desperate appeal to “world powers”

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12 December 2007

The annual “Heroes Day” speech of Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was another sign of the organisation’s political bankruptcy and deepening crisis. Its central thrust was a desperate appeal to the same international powers that have been backing the Sri Lankan government’s renewed war to destroy the LTTE.

The speech was delivered on November 27 amid ongoing Sri Lankan military operations against the LTTE’s northern strongholds. The day before, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, who is the Sri Lankan president’s brother, provocatively declared that the military would kill Prabhakaran just as it had assassinated the LTTE’s top negotiator S.P. Thamilselvan in a targeted air strike last month.

Since President Mahinda Rajapakse narrowly won office in November 2005, the military has restarted the country’s protracted civil war. First came a series of provocative killings and abductions, then, after July 2006, military offensives in open breach of the 2002 ceasefire agreement. The army now claims to have seized all the LTTE-controlled territory in the Eastern Province in operations that resulted in at least 5,000 deaths and the displacement of more than 200,000 people.

Throughout the past two years, the countries overseeing the international “peace process”—the US, EU, Japan and Norway—have effectively supported the renewed war. While occasionally appealing for a renewal of peace talks or criticising the Sri Lankan authorities’ flagrant abuses, the major powers have turned a blind eye to the military’s offensive operations. The US in particular continues to provide the Sri Lankan military with training and assistance.

In the course of his speech, Prabhakaran castigated the Rajapakse government for restarting the war. He lamented “the partisan and unjust conduct of the international community” that “paved the way for the breakdown of the ceasefire and the peace efforts”, adding that “the generous military and economic aid they have given to the Sinhala State and their diplomatic efforts to prop up the chauvinistic

Sinhala State has encouraged the Sinhala nation further and further along its militaristic path.”

Prabhakaran’s criticisms of the “international community” were more in sorrow than in anger. The major powers, he complained, were making the same “mistake” as India when 100,000 Indian peacekeepers were sent to enforce the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord that did not meet the aspirations of Sri Lankan Tamils. Prabhakaran repeatedly stressed the “hope” that “the international community” would cease its aid to Colombo and “accept the right to self-determination and sovereignty of the Tamil nation”.

Prabhakaran’s comments again demonstrate that the LTTE’s perspective has been based from the outset on seeking the backing of one or more powers for its project of a capitalist enclave in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Prabhakaran makes no reference to the fact that in the 1980s the LTTE was counting on India’s support for a separate Tamil Eelam. The group agreed to the Indo-Lankan Accord and only turned on New Delhi when it became obvious that India had no intention of allowing the LTTE any significant political role.

The signing of the 2002 ceasefire took place in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the US. Sections of the Colombo ruling elite concluded that it could exploit the Bush administration’s “war on terror” to force the LTTE to the negotiating table on favourable terms. In peace talks that began in 2002, the LTTE jettisoned its longstanding demand for a separate state and promised to cooperate in creating a “Tiger economy” with the United National Party-led government. Negotiations collapsed amid ongoing denunciations by opposition parties, including Rajapakse’s Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which backed Rajapakse in the 2005 presidential election.

Prabhakaran’s response to the renewed war is to make a craven appeal for “international support”. “We know very well that the military, economic and geo-political interests of the world’s powers are embedded in our region,” he declared. “We understand their concern to take forward their

interests. We also recognise the concerns of the international community to bring about stability and good governance to this island for these reasons.”

The comments are a declaration that the LTTE understands the interests of the major powers, the US in particular, and is more than willing to accommodate to them in return for political recognition. The LTTE’s acknowledgement of the need for “stability and good governance” is designed to address international concerns about the destabilising impact of the war in the region, especially India, on which major corporations heavily rely as a source of cheap, skilled labour.

To emphasise the LTTE’s willingness to serve, Prabhakaran continued with a hymn of praise to the international community. “The world’s powers, even while taking forward their own geo-political interests, respect human rights and democratic institutions,” he declared. “That is why nations like East Timor and Montenegro broke free of their subjugation and gained their freedom with the help and support of the international community. Even now, the international community continues to work for the freedom of nations like Kosovo.”

The willingness of Prabhakaran to gloss over the criminal activities of the Bush administration in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as its preparations for war against Iran for US geo-strategic interests makes clear that there is nothing the LTTE would not do to secure a role, however minor, in Sri Lanka. The references to East Timor, Montenegro and Kosovo—three tiny vassal states that are completely dependent on the US and its allies economically, politically and militarily—underscore the same point.

The conditions in each of these countries also make clear what is at stake for working people. East Timor remains one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated 40 percent of the population chronically malnourished and 10 percent living in refugee camps. The small Balkan enclaves of Kosovo and Montenegro are both dominated by rightwing Western-backed governments that preside over high levels of poverty and unemployment and are politically responsible for the persecution of ethnic minorities.

The establishment of some form of autonomy or independence for the North and East of Sri Lanka under imperialist tutelage would benefit a narrow privileged layer of the Tamil ruling elite, but do nothing to meet the pressing needs and democratic aspirations of ordinary working people.

Prabhakaran’s constant references to the “Tamil Nation” and “Sinhala nation” highlight the communal character of the LTTE’s program. Its Tamil separatism serves the same essential class purpose as the Sinhala chauvinism of the Colombo political establishment—to defend the interests of

the Tamil or Sinhala bourgeoisie by dividing the working class and rural poor along ethnic lines.

Prabhakaran and the LTTE blame the “Sinhala nation” as a whole for the renewed conflict, precisely at the point when broad layers of working people—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—are hostile to the war and its impact on living standards. Strikes and protests over wages and conditions are becoming increasingly common. The LTTE, however, is organically incapable of making an appeal for a joint struggle of working people against the government and the war.

Working people across the country’s ethnic divide have to draw lessons from the collapse of the ceasefire, the renewed war drive and the LTTE’s bankrupt appeals to “world powers”. Workers can only advance their interests by rejecting all forms of nationalism, communalism and chauvinism and uniting to defend their common class interests.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is the only party that has insisted that no faith can be placed in the imperialist powers and their so-called “peace process.” We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the North and East of the island as the means of uniting working people in a political offensive for an end to the war, social inequality and for genuine democratic rights for all.

The SEP fights for a workers’ and peasants’ government that would reorganise society from top to bottom to meet the social needs of the majority, rather than the profits of the wealthy few. We call for the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the broader struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics throughout South Asia and internationally.



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