

Financial Times points to US regime-change intrigue in Sri Lanka

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A featured article last week in the *Financial Times*—a prominent mouthpiece for the British financial elite—on the January 8 presidential election in Sri Lanka highlights the very close attention being paid in London, and Washington, to the poll.

The report published on December 22 is fully in line with US intrigues to lever President Mahinda Rajapakse from office in favour of the common opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena, who is backed by a pro-American coalition of parties and organisations.

The article's partisan character is indicated in the headline "Sri Lanka's leader pledges peaceful handover should he lose the election"—a promise extracted from Rajapakse during an interview with the *Financial Times* correspondent.

Rajapakse called the election two years early in a bid to consolidate his grip on office amid growing public opposition at home and also a mounting US-led "human rights" campaign internationally. Like all such campaigns, the US is cynically exploiting the Sri Lankan military's crimes during the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—a war that Washington backed to the hilt—to further its own predatory ambitions in Asia.

No sooner had Rajapakse called the election than his own health minister, Sirisena, announced that he would contest the poll in what the *Financial Times* characterised as an "unexpectedly well-organised opposition campaign."

For obvious reasons, the article did not dwell on how and who organised Sirisena's candidacy so well. While Sirisena's sudden defection from the government might have come as a surprise to Rajapakse, the top US and British diplomats had been informed weeks before.

The key go-between brokering the arrangement

between Sirisena and the pro-US opposition United National Party (UNP) was former president Chandrika Kumaratunga who, since leaving office, had cultivated relations in Washington via her work with the Clinton Foundation.

The *Financial Times* confirms that "Sri Lanka's election will be watched closely by western governments hopeful that its next administration will investigate allegations of war crimes committed during the country's civil war." Given that Rajapakse has "struck a defiant tone on the issue of war crimes allegations," it is clear that the newspaper and "western governments" are barracking for his opponent.

The article also hints at the real reason behind US hostility to Rajapakse. It notes that he has pledged a new drive for investment should he win, "including forging deeper economic ties with China." The US and its allies began targeting Rajapakse over "human rights" in the wake of the LTTE's defeat in 2009 in a bid to force him to end Sri Lanka's growing dependence on Chinese arms, financial aid, investment and political support.

The campaign against Rajapakse has escalated through a series of US-backed resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council, culminating in the establishment of an international inquiry this year that could recommend war crimes charges against top Sri Lankan officials.

The efforts to pressure Rajapakse have been part of the Obama administration's far broader "pivot to Asia" aimed at undermining Chinese influence throughout the region and encircling China militarily in preparation for war. Over the past five years, the US has been systematically strengthening strategic relationships, not only with allies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, but with every country in Asia

including India, Vietnam and Indonesia.

As the co-author of a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report in 2009, US Secretary of State John Kerry made clear that Washington could “not afford to lose” Sri Lanka—a reference to the island’s key strategic position in the Indian Ocean. Washington’s intervention in the Sri Lankan presidential election signals that regime-change in Colombo, rather than long-term pressure on Rajapakse, has now become the priority.

The *Financial Times* gives an ominous indication of what is to come should the election not produce the result desired in Washington. It cited unnamed “local analysts [who] describe the contest as too close to call, raising fears that a narrow defeat could prompt instability and violence if Mr Rajapakse’s family-dominated regime attempted to maintain its hold on power.”

It is not just Rajapakse and his ruling coalition that are notorious for election rigging and violence but the UNP and other opposition parties. The *Financial Times* carefully avoids any reference to the fact that, as a government minister and secretary general of Rajapakse’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Sirisena is just as culpable for war crimes. He is also very experienced at electoral fraud.

The US and its allies are not so worried about a narrow loss by Rajapakse, but the fact that he could win, despite all of Washington’s machinations. The *Financial Times* article is a sign that the US, Britain and other allies are willing to prompt “instability and violence” should Rajapakse defeat the opposition candidate.

The pattern is all too evident in the many US sponsored “colour revolutions” in the former Soviet republics and countries like Lebanon and Iran. The opposition candidate will challenge the “rigged” result and launch protests of disenchanted middle class layers, with covert support from various US foundations and a global media blitzkrieg demonizing the election winner.

The phony US “human rights” campaign, which is backed by various middle class liberal groups, NGOs and the pseudo-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP), has already prepared the ground for a Sri Lankan colour revolution. In one way or another, all these organisations are campaigning for Sirisena, fraudulently presenting him

and his rightwing allies as champions of democracy, or more furtively as the “lesser evil” compared to Rajapakse.

The *Financial Times* article signaled that Washington is preparing to ramp up its campaign, if needed, after the election. It noted that senior administration figures, including US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, “view Sri Lanka as an important test case in holding countries to account for human rights abuses.”

The US intrigues in Colombo are a warning to the working class in Sri Lanka, as well as South Asia and internationally, of the rapidly sharpening geo-political tensions that are driving towards world war. The US will stop at nothing to further its ambitions for economic and strategic domination in Asia and globally.

The drive to war cannot be halted by supporting one or other capitalist party or through elections but only through the independent mobilisation of the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally to abolish capitalism—the root cause of war. Rajapakse and Sirisena represent competing factions of the bourgeoisie which is utterly incapable of mounting any genuine struggle against imperialism and imperialist war.

The Socialist Equality Party is the only party fighting in this election for this perspective. Our candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena is campaigning to educate and mobilise workers to turn to their class brothers and sisters in South Asia and internationally to build a global anti-war movement of the working class on the basis of socialist internationalism.



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