

Tamil nationalists support US-backed opposition in Sri Lankan election

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The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main Tamil nationalist party, in Sri Lanka is extending unconditional support to the US-backed opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena in the presidential election. For weeks, the TNA delayed its announcement that it would stand in the elections, citing the need for discussion with its members, Tamil intellectuals and scholars. It announced its support for Sirisena in a December 30 press conference upon the arrival of TNA leader T. Sampanthan from India.

Sampanthan was staying in New Delhi; the reason for his visit and with whom he consulted was not disclosed to the media.

The TNA press statement supporting Sirisena uncritically endorsed him as an untainted candidate with the mission of restoring “the values of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law” that had suffered unprecedented attacks under President Mahinda Rajapakse. The statement praised “the new consultative and consensus based political culture that would evolve pursuant to the victory of the Common Opposition Candidate.”

In an interview with the *Daily Mirror*, Sampanthan repeated, “We think Maithripala Sirisena will bring the country together as one nation. Going by the past record, we have no reason to believe that President Rajapaksa will be reasonable by the Tamil people.”

In fact, the record of Rajapakse is not much different than that of Sirisena. Sirisena, who was health minister and at times functioned as defence minister in Rajapakse’s absence, deserted the regime to be nominated as the opposition candidate. He is just as responsible for the crimes during the civil war and the attacks on the working class. Sirisena has been a member of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) since 1967, serving for the last 10 years as its general

secretary.

The SLFP, which was founded in 1951 promoting Sinhala communalist ideology, won the parliament elections in 1956 and enacted the *Sinhala Only Act*, which further institutionalized discrimination against minorities, leading to the first major communal violence against the Tamils in 1958.

Sirisena accused Rajapakse of exterminating democracy, promoting his family and political cronies, and abusing the power of the presidency, leading towards a dictatorship. However, he is silent on Rajapakse’s decision to restart the racist war against Tamils in 2006 that ended with mass slaughter and the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. The ruthless military onslaught carried out with the diplomatic and military assistance of the US, India and the European Union resulted in the brutal massacre of thousands of civilians and the incarceration of more than 280,000 people into army-run detention camps.

Sirisena has stressed in several statements that his administration would not relax the military occupation in the North, endorse an international war crimes inquiry, or initiate negotiations for devolution of powers to the North and East.

In a press conference on January 5, Sirisena announced the support of the minority parties, the TNA and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, for his candidacy was based on agreement with his 100-day election manifesto, which promises the abolition of Executive Presidency and other constitutional reforms. He has not signed any agreements with the minority parties for any political resolution for their issues. “I have no intention of withdrawing the army from the north. As president, national security will be my responsibility,” he said.

Sirisena’s attitude towards the Tamil and Muslim minorities is no different than that of Rajapakse. His

statements if anything represent a more hard-line approach; should he be elected, he would be more ruthless than Rajapakse towards minorities and towards the working class.

Nevertheless, the TNA's unconditional support to Sirisena indicates that it is also part of the Washington-engineered plan for regime change. *TamilNet* comments, "The TNA hierarchy has been instructed by external forces to back Maithiripala Sirisena. TNA's R. Sampanthan and former SL president Chandrika Kumaratunga have established a clandestine deal on TNA's contribution to the regime change."

In the 2010 presidential elections Washington formed a similar coalition of opposition parties which supported General Sarath Fonseka, who led the army during the civil war, as the presidential candidate. Recent WikiLeaks documents reveal that his candidacy was also an attempt by Washington to defeat Rajapakse.

US Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) President Basheer Segu Dawood tailored a coalition of the right-wing United National Party (UNP), SLMC, TNA and other opposition parties backing Fonseka's candidacy. The TNA was willing to join the coalition, but initially reluctant to accept Fonseka. Sampanthan told Butenis that he would support the "Rajapaksas before Fonseka as the lesser of two evils." How Butenis made Sampanthan support Fonseka was not disclosed in the document.

Since the end of the war, the TNA has worked in line with the "pivot to Asia," the Obama administration's military build-up and diplomatic offensive against China. Washington cynically took up the human rights abuses and war crimes that the Rajapakse government committed with US backing during the final stages of the civil war, sponsoring a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The resolution was adopted on March 2014 and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights began preliminary investigations in June 2014.

The purpose of this inquiry is not to punish the war crimes, in which Washington itself is implicated, but rather to intensify pressure on the Sri Lankan government to break ties with China and fall in line with the US.

The TNA supported the US-sponsored resolution. In

November 2011, Sampanthan led a TNA delegation for a 10-day visit to the United States on the invitation of the US State Department. Visiting US diplomats regularly met with TNA leaders in Sri Lanka. Obviously, the decision of the TNA to unconditionally support Sirisena is a further attempt to rely on US imperialism to obtain a political settlement that was impossible under Rajapakse.

The TNA strives for a political settlement with imperialism that would enable the venal Tamil bourgeoisie greater scope for the exploitation of the Tamil workers and poor. It aims for a communally-based power-sharing arrangement between Sinhala and Tamil elites, arrived at through the devolution of power in the North and East of the island at the expense of working people.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on the Tamil-speaking workers and youth to reject the TNA-endorsed candidate Sirisena and Rajapakse, and vote for our candidate, Pani Wijesiriwardena.



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