

More evidence of US involvement in Sri Lankan regime-change

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Sri Lanka's presidential election on January 8 resulted in the ousting of Mahinda Rajapakse and the installation of Maithripala Sirisena as president. While the new government's leaders and their pseudo-left backers claim this outcome was the result of an "uprising of the people" against Rajapakse's autocratic rule, it was in reality a regime-change operation as the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) alone has explained.

Right from the outset, it was clear that Sirisena's sudden emergence as the "common opposition candidate" was the result of carefully-orchestrated, behind-the-scenes intrigues. On November 20, one day after Rajapakse announced the election date, Health Minister Sirisena quit the government and declared that he would be standing in the election backed by the opposition United National Party (UNP) and other parties.

The WSWS has already detailed the involvement of Washington, acting through former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. The Obama administration was deeply hostile to Rajapakse's ties with Beijing and determined to ensure that Sri Lanka is fully integrated into the US "pivot to Asia" and military build-up against China.

More evidence has now come to light on Washington's hand in Rajapakse's removal.

On February 6, the Sri Lankan government's information department web site published a report on the visit of Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera to Washington. It highlighted "the revival of the cordial relationship between the two countries" and explained that this was the "result of the fruitful discussions the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, as the opposition leader, had with the US State Department officials, including [US Assistant Secretary of State]

Biswal and former Ambassador to Colombo Michelle Sison."

The report provided further details of Wickremesinghe's top-level meetings in Washington. "During his one-month stay in the US last April, Wickremesinghe had met and held discussions on Sri Lanka's political future with the senior officials at the State Department, and White House, and the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives."

On his return to Sri Lanka, Wickremesinghe met with US ambassador Sison on May 22 at the UNP headquarters. A media report at the time noted that the focus of the discussion "was regarding the current political situation of Sri Lanka."

When the UNP announced Wickremesinghe's extended trip to the US last year, it was billed as a study tour at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. Clearly that was just a cover for lengthy discussions with top State Department and White House officials over "Sri Lanka's political future"—that is, how to advance their common objective of removing Rajapakse from office. US ambassador Sison coordinated the meetings.

The US has been putting pressure on Rajapakse to break ties with Beijing since 2009 when the Sri Lankan military defeated the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the island's long-running communal war. Having fully backed the war, Washington has cynically exploited the military's war crimes and the threat of charges to try to force Rajapakse to distance his government from China.

Rajapakse sought to balance between Washington and Beijing but the US made clear that was untenable. In March last year, Washington flagged its impatience by pushing a resolution through the UN Human Rights Council calling for an international inquiry into human

rights abuses in Sri Lanka. Wickremesinghe's visit and discussions in the US followed in April.

The other key figure in the intrigues was former President Kumaratunga, who as a former leader and a senior figure within Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, was able to broker the deal for Sirisena to defect and run as opposition candidate with the UNP's support. She also has close connections in Washington and to the White House via her association with the Clinton Foundation. As Obama's previous Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton was the architect of the "pivot to Asia" and was deeply involved in all of its intrigues, including in Sri Lanka.

In a lengthy interview with Sirasa TV on February 3, Kumaratunga acknowledged her role, saying she had been the main architect in bringing Sirisena forward as the common opposition candidate. Kumaratunga said that many people had urged her to intervene against Rajapakse, adding: "Foreign countries strongly brought proposals [to me] on this." She refused to name the countries or to elaborate, but the US was clearly one of the countries.

The opposition plans for the election were shown to top US and UK diplomats by UNP leaders, Karu Jayasuriya, Mangala Samaraweera and Ravi Karunanayake.

The *Sunday Times* editorial on February 8 noted: "It is an open secret that the former US Ambassador in Colombo reached out to the Opposition, especially the then Leader of the Opposition [Wickremesinghe]" and moved away from engagement with former President Rajapakse.

In carrying out this regime-change operation, the opposition parties exploited the deep hostility among workers, young people and the poor towards the Rajapakse government over its anti-democratic methods and austerity policies. Sirisena declared that he was fighting against the "dictatorship and family nepotism of Rajapakse" and promised economic relief for the people.

This pro-US campaign was immensely helped by pseudo-left organisations such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party who falsely painted Sirisena and Wickremesinghe as democrats. As a senior minister in the Rajapakse government, Sirisena bears responsibility for all of its anti-working class policies. Likewise, Wickremesinghe's UNP has a long history of attacks

on the democratic and social rights of workers and youth.

Having helped install Sirisena, the US is now seeking to rapidly transform its relations with Sri Lanka. During his recent visit to India, Obama said: "In this region, India can play a positive role in helping countries forge a better future, from Burma to Sri Lanka, where today there's new hope for democracy."

Similarly, in a speech to Brooklyn Institute on National Security Strategy, Obama's National Security Advisor Susan Rice declared: "We'll help countries in transition—like Burma, Tunisia, and Sri Lanka—become more open, more democratic, and more inclusive societies. We'll support established democracies that are in danger of backsliding."

Washington's machinations have nothing to do with fostering democracy in Sri Lanka or anywhere else in the world. Rather, the US is seeking to ensure its dominance throughout the globe, particularly in Asia over China. Sri Lanka, which is strategically located across Indian Ocean sea lanes, is a critical element of the Pentagon's war plans against China. The new Sri Lanka government has wasted no time in showing its readiness to align with US interests. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Samaraweera is visiting Washington this week to meet with US Secretary of State John Kerry to discuss closer relations.

US imperialism has brought Europe to the brink of war with its reckless confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. Washington's aggressive policies in Asia against China carry the same dangers. Workers in Sri Lanka, Asia and around the world must draw the necessary conclusions lessons and build an anti-war movement of the international working class to put an end to capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system which is the root cause of war.



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