

South Asia, the US “pivot” and the perspective of permanent revolution

Wije Dias
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This speech was delivered by Wije Dias, the general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) to the May 3 International May Day Online Rally, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Comrades, I am speaking from Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The rising geo-political antagonisms around the world and the dangers of war are taking an acute form in South Asia. The entire region is being drawn into the maelstrom as US imperialism pursues its ambitions for global domination and its “pivot to Asia” aimed at militarily encircling China.

The consequences are very clearly expressed in Sri Lanka, where US Secretary of State—John Kerry—has arrived for the first time in a decade. His stated aim is to “reset” relations between the United States and Sri Lanka—in other words, to ensure that this strategically-placed island is firmly within the US orbit.

Washington has already put a great deal of effort into “resetting” relations. Hostile to the former president Mahinda Rajapakse and his government’s ties with China, the US mounted a concerted “human rights” campaign to force Rajapakse to mend his ways. When that failed, Washington backed the push to replace him, in the presidential election this January, with Maithripala Sirisena. Kerry played a direct role. He rang Rajapakse on election night to warn him that the White House wanted to see “a smooth transfer of power” to Sirisena.

Kerry’s visit this weekend follows those of a string of top American military and diplomatic officials who have arrived in Colombo to hold talks with the new government over the past three months. Kerry’s job is to ensure that Sirisena is fully in tune with Washington’s interests and can be counted on in any conflict with China.

The regime change operation in Colombo is a warning of the utter ruthlessness of US imperialism. It is destabilizing the whole region with complete disregard for the consequences. Driven by the ever-worsening breakdown of global capitalism, the US is desperately seeking to offset its historic decline through diplomatic intrigues and provocations, and through military means.

Central to Washington’s schemes in South Asia is its strategic partnership with India, which has deepened with the election of the Hindu supremacist Narendra Modi as prime minister. For years, Modi was banned from entering the United States because of his central role in the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat. But now that Modi is such a willing accomplice of Washington, his “human rights” record is tossed aside and he is given royal treatment.

The flurry of official exchanges speaks for itself. In just one year, Kerry and US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel have been to New Delhi, and Modi has visited Washington. In a first for a US President, Obama was the honoured guest at India’s Republic Day celebrations in January. The close military collaboration is highlighted by the fact that the United States, not Russia, is now the biggest military supplier to India.

Washington’s backing is only encouraging the Indian ruling class to more aggressively throw its weight around. Modi is already taking a more provocative stance against Pakistan and China. It must be recalled that India and Pakistan have already fought three wars over the past 60 years. And India and China have fought a bloody border conflict. Now all three countries have nuclear weapons.

Washington’s contempt for the fate of the South Asian masses is underscored by a ghoulish report by

prominent American strategist Anthony Cordesman. He predicted that, in the nuclear war between India and Pakistan, tens, if not hundreds of millions would die a horrible death. But as far as the US was concerned, he declared, the war would “not necessarily have serious grand strategic consequences” and “might well have benefits.”

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The US has already devastated Afghanistan in more than a decade of war and military occupation. With the election of Obama, the Afghan war became the AfPak war. The CIA continues to rain drone missiles on the border areas of Pakistan killing hundreds of civilians. This is compounding the crisis of the Pakistani government and further fuelling tensions with India.

No corner of South Asia is exempt from imperialist intervention. Just as Washington used the 2004 tsunami for a foray by US Marines in Sri Lanka, so the Pentagon is exploiting the devastating earthquake in Nepal as an excuse to send the US military into that country.

Today the International Committee of the Fourth International is calling on workers around the world to answer the catastrophe being created by capitalism with the fight for socialist internationalism. In South Asia that means the working class must reject every party and faction of the bourgeoisie, and their Stalinist, trade union and pseudo-left hangers-on. The response of the ruling classes is complete subservience to imperialism and a deepening assault on the jobs and living conditions of working people. Petrified of opposition from the working class, they seek to set worker against worker by whipping up national, regional, linguistic and religious differences.

The working class must reject this. More than a century ago, Leon Trotsky explained in his *Theory of Permanent Revolution* that the national bourgeoisie in backward countries is utterly incapable of meeting the democratic and social aspirations of the masses. Again and again that has been proven in the bitter experiences of the working class of the Indian subcontinent.

Only the working class, by rousing the peasantry and urban poor, can end the danger of war, guarantee democratic rights and provide a decent future for humanity. This is an international struggle in which the workers of South Asia—nearly half a billion in India and

tens of millions more in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka—must play their part. The critical question is a revolutionary program and perspective, and above all revolutionary leadership, which the International Committee of the Fourth International alone provides.

We call on workers throughout South Asia and around the world, including in the United States and other imperialist centres, to join us in the fight to build the ICFI in every country for the revolutionary struggles ahead.



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