

US shift on Sri Lankan war crimes probe exposes Tamil nationalists

K. Nesan**1 September 2015**

US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal's announcement that Washington is retracting its call for an international probe into the massacre of Tamils at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war exposes the bankruptcy of Tamil nationalism.

The US-sponsored resolution demanding an international probe in 2014 was a cynical ploy to pressure then-Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa to abandon his orientation to China. The US-engineered regime change operation that ousted Rajapakse and installed Sirisena as president in January brought Sri Lanka back in the orbit of US foreign policy. Washington no longer had any interests in investigating the crimes carried out by top officials of its proxy regime in Colombo, and it rapidly dropped the call for the probe.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) had offered full-throated support to the new Sri Lankan regime, promoting illusions that it would participate in an international probe, as part of a broader political solution for the Tamil people. The TNA-led Northern Provincial Council (NPC) passed a resolution in February supporting such a probe. After Biswal's comments, these illusions are now in shambles.

A five-member delegation from the Tamil Nationalist Alliance (TNA) met Biswal in Colombo. After the meeting, in a "Lankasri" radio interview, TNA leader Sampanthan said nothing about the shift in the US policy pulling back from demanding an international inquiry.

Asked what moves the TNA would take in future, Sampanthan said: "We will take all the necessary steps. We can't speak publicly about this, it is not necessary to do so. We have said everything in our election manifesto and explained to the people in our campaign. We would continue with our work."

Sampanthan's insistence that the people do not need to know what the TNA is doing exemplifies the Tamil nationalists' utter contempt for the workers and poor whom Sampanthan asked a few weeks ago to elect 20 TNA members to parliament. For him, they have no right to know about the machinations between the TNA and US imperialism behind closed doors.

M.A.Sumanthiran, a TNA member of parliament from Jaffna, signaled that the TNA would accept an internal investigation by the Sri Lankan officials with international participation, the mechanism now being proposed by Washington. He told the *New Indian Express*, "We cannot get justice if it is purely a Lankan domestic mechanism. It has to be an internationalised investigation. The involvement of international experts is a must."

Behind the scenes, Washington made very clear to the Tamil nationalists that it would not tolerate any rhetoric about war crimes that could destabilise the Colombo regime.

C.V. Wigneswaran, the chief minister of the Tamil-majority North Province, visited the US in July and was sent home with the message that Washington would set the TNA's line. The Sri Lankan *Sunday Times* wrote that he received "tough tuition" from the US State Department, as "he had been told to work towards reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Northern Province rather than up his rhetoric on genocide charges. He had been told that it was the best chance for him to work with the Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe Government."

Wigneswaran received his marching orders from Washington loud and clear. He issued a press statement on his return that Tamils would vote for a party that genuinely represented the interests of the Tamil people. He has since refrained from attending TNA meetings or

any other political events.

The shift in the US policy has unleashed a political crisis within Tamil nationalist circles. TNA leaders and supporters expressed dismay. In a pathetic bit of bravado, TNA parliament member Sritharan told *Tamilwin*: “we don’t need to accept what America says, we want international mediation.”

However, the Tamil daily *Thinakkural* wrote: “Small nations and minorities are clearly playthings in the hands of the big powers with various interests in the region”.

The crimes of the Sri Lankan civil war are inseparably bound up with bourgeois rule in the country. Neither the various factions of Sri Lankan ruling class nor their foreign patrons have any interest in investigating these crimes or punishing those who are responsible.

It is not necessary to identify who carries the politically responsibility for the destruction and massacres during the civil war. The leaders in the current US-backed government and the opposition were involved in the Sri Lankan state’s declaration of all-out war on the Tamils.

President Sirisena was directly involved in the renewal of the war in 2006, as a minister in government at the time, and then as a top official in the ruling party in the final stages of the fighting.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe—as opposition leader at the time—never expressed even symbolic opposition to the war in the parliament.

Chandrika Kumaratunga, a member of the Clinton Foundation heavily involved in the US regime change operation in January installing Sirisena as a president, was president between 1994 and 2005 and succeeded by Mahinda Rajapakse.

Sarath Fonseka was the commander of the army leading the war in 2009. He was arrested in February 2010 under Rajapakse on charges such as conspiring to overthrow the government, then released on May 2012. Within two weeks of taking the office in January, Sirisena gave him a presidential pardon, restoring his military rank and decorations. He was promoted to field marshal in March.

On May 7, Sirisena appointed Major General Jagath Dias as the army chief of staff. Dias was in command of the 57th division of the army during the war. Rajapakse appointed him ambassador to Germany and

Switzerland after the war in 2009.

At the end of 2011, Dias faced war crimes charges in Switzerland. The European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) produced a report accusing Dias of committing grave violations of human rights and of suspected involvement in torture and extra-judicial killings.

By supporting a government consisting of such figures, the TNA has made itself complicit in allowing the crimes of the civil war to go unpunished.

During the 2015 presidential elections, it supported Sirisena on the grounds that he would carry out a “democratic transformation” in Sri Lanka. The TNA hailed the US resolution in 2014 proclaiming the international inquiry was the prelude to a political solution. Its concern is not the democratic aspirations of the masses, but working behind their backs for a deal with imperialism to benefit the Tamil capitalists.



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