Sri Lankan president at the UN prostrates himself to Washington

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The UN General Assembly met last week amid gathering war clouds around the world produced by the deepening breakdown of global capitalism. Sri Lanka along with every country in the region is being drawn into the maelstrom of geo-political rivalries and the increasingly pronounced turn to militarism by the major powers, particularly the United States.

The whole behavior of Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena in New York, including his address to the UN on September 21, was a shameless expression of his prostration to US imperialism. The accolades that he received, including from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US President Barack Obama and others, simply reflected the fact that Sirisena has dutifully toed Washington's line since coming to power in January last year.

Sirisena met with former US President Bill Clinton at the plenary session of the Clinton Global Initiative then with US Secretary of State John Kerry, who declared: "The US government highly appreciates and admires the direction of the new government of Sri Lanka and extends every possible assistance towards the country." According to the Sri Lankan president's official web site, Secretary-General Ban also commended Sirisena's "commitment to reconciliation and good governance."

The fact that President Obama spoke with Sirisena at a UN luncheon for heads of state was highlighted in Colombo media. The Sri Lankan president was reportedly seated at the same table as Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when Obama walked over to Sirisena and said: "The positive transformation taking place in Sri Lanka at present is exemplary to the world. We assure [our] fullest support for the development of Sri Lanka."

Obama's remarks were also a deliberate diplomatic put down of Sharif. Pakistan, at the time, was embroiled in a war of words with India, after a terrorist attack that killed 18 Indian soldiers at an army camp in disputed Kashmir. In line with its support for its strategic partner India, the Obama administration is criticizing Pakistan for not doing enough to curb terrorist activities on its soil, including those militias opposed to the US-led occupation of Afghanistan.

Obama's praise of the transformation in Sri Lanka as "exemplary" is simply because, since assuming power, Sirisena has reoriented the country's foreign policy firmly towards Washington. As it ramped up the confrontational "pivot to Asia" against China, the Obama administration was increasingly hostile to former President Mahinda Rajapakse who had developed close ties with Beijing.

Sirisena defeated Rajapakse in the January 2015 presidential election in what amounted to a regime-change operation backed by Washington. His meeting with Clinton was not accidental. One of the key figures in orchestrating the ouster of Rajapakse was former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike who has close relations with the Clintons through the Clinton Foundation.

After Sirisena became president, he arbitrarily appointed Ranil Wickremesinghe, the leader of the pro-US United National Party, as prime minister, although the UNP was a parliamentary minority. Only after the general election in August last year was Wickremesinghe's party able to form a new "unity government" with the help of Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

With all these accolades pouring in from all sides, Sirisena responded in his brief speech to the UN General Assembly—delivered in the Sinhala language and steeped in nationalism.

"Before I came to power," Sirisena declared, "people

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in my country were living in fear and suspicion. I could end that period and lay the foundation for strengthening the rule of law and restoring democratic rights for the people of Sri Lanka to live happily in a free and democratic society."

What staggering hypocrisy! Prior to announcing his candidacy for the 2015 election, Sirisena had been a loyal senior minister in the Rajapakse government defending its atrocities in its brutal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He even stood in on occasions as defence minister in place of Rajapakse making him directly and immediately responsible for the crimes of the military and repression of any opposition.

Having held himself up as the model of democracy and the rule of law, Sirisena then proceeded with a lecture to the world on the need for moral virtues. "In many parts of the world, we see unfortunate proliferation of anger, hatred and brutality. I believe that the contemporary society is experiencing a crisis of morality. I believe that all states should pay heed to the cry for moral values."

And this comes from a man who has aligned Sri Lanka with US imperialism, which is responsible for the deaths of millions in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and other countries.

Returning to the current situation in Sri Lanka, the president boasted that "for the last 20 months, [he] has given the leadership to usher a new era of social, political and economic transformation in the country." This is an utter lie. What has actually happened under Sirisena and Wickremesinghe is the piling up more and more debt on top of already heavy indebtedness. Now these two "democrats" are increasingly using the police state apparatus built up in decades of war to suppress the opposition of workers, farmers and youth to the drastic austerity measures being implemented under intense pressure from the IMF.

Sirisena also bragged "the reconciliation process is now underway," saying "it will guarantee that the country will not see the cruelty of war and terrorism again." In a pitch for support from the US and other major powers, he declared that "for this noble purpose, Sri Lanka welcomes the collaboration and the blessings of the world."

The so-called reconciliation process being promoted by the US and India in particular has nothing to do with addressing the underlying causes of the island's savage communal war. It is nothing more than a bid for a power-sharing arrangement between the country's Tamil and Sinhala elites for the mutual exploitation of the working class. India has been particularly concerned both to open up economic opportunities in Sri Lanka via Tamil businesses and to stem the potential for communal unrest in Sri Lanka to flow over into the Tamil population in southern India.

For Sirisena, "reconciliation" is simply another catch phrase to demonstrate his groveling prostration to Washington and to appeal for aid and support. Not content with just one plea, he repeated himself, saying: "We trod each wise step with care, vigilance, patience and persistence. My beloved Sri Lanka has big dreams. I look forward to your blessings and collaboration to accomplish them."

And again on the issues facing young people, Sirisena declared: "I emphasise my commitment to empower our youth with the best knowledge in the world and to make Sri Lanka an exemplary democracy and I seek your assistance and blessings in this noble endeavor."

No one should give the slightest credence to this pathetic posturing.

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