

Sri Lankan government enforces UN sanctions against North Korea

Nanda Wickremasinghe
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On October 6, the Sri Lankan government issued extraordinary gazette notifications enacting the September 11 UN Security Council measures against North Korea. This announcement also followed US President Trump's September 21 executive order imposing further crippling sanctions on Pyongyang.

The decision is an expression of the Colombo government's backing for US intervention in the Korean Peninsula and for Washington's aggressive policies more broadly. Like other countries in the region, Sri Lanka is under intense pressure to fall into line with US war plans.

The government issued the sanctions gazette without even notifying the parliament. It prohibits Sri Lankans from providing or receiving assets, financial services, technical training, advice, services or assistance related to North Korea's nuclear program.

Also banned are bunkering services, supplies, servicing, leasing or chartering of vessels or crew services of vessels to North Korea. Moreover, North Korean financial institutions cannot open new branches, subsidiaries or offices in Sri Lanka.

A government-appointed Competent Authority (CA) will oversee the implementation of the regulations and may recommend the expulsion of North Korean diplomats. This authority has the power to freeze funds and other financial resources belonging to persons or institutions of the North Korean government and the ruling Korean Workers Party.

On September 15, the government sent its implementation report on sanctions imposed last November, noting its tough visa requirements on all North Korean nationals. Colombo refused to allow four delegates from North Korea to attend a Sri Lanka-North Korea Friendship Association meeting in March.

The government had been under pressure to take

tougher measures. A UN report early last month noted that Sri Lanka was among several countries that allegedly violated sanctions by importing commodities from North Korea, including coal and iron. Other countries cited included China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, France, Pakistan and Ireland.

The new UN sanctions intensify restrictions that have already compounded North Korea's economic problems and the suffering of the masses. They have banned North Korea's exports of coal, iron ore and seafood. A US official said more than 90 percent of North Korea's reported exports are now blocked.

The increasing military pressure on North Korea is part of a US strategy to encircle China, which Washington considers a major obstacle to its global domination. This week, US supersonic bombers, joined by Japanese and South Korean fighter jets, flew near North Korea, threatening to trigger a conflict that would draw in China and Russia.

The government of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has increasingly moved Sri Lanka into line with Washington's war preparations against China and North Korea.

Sirisena was installed in office in January 2015 via a Washington regime-change operation to replace former President Mahinda Rajapakse. The US supported Rajapakse's war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and his anti-democratic rule. However, Washington wanted him removed because he developed close relations with China to procure arms and finances for his war.

Since Sirisena took office, there has been a pro-US foreign policy shift, including on North Korea. In 2008 and 2009, Sri Lanka abstained when a resolution against North Korea's "human rights violations" was

presented in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Again 2014, Sri Lanka voted against a similar resolution.

In 2015 and 2016, however, Sirisena's government voted for UNHRC resolutions directed against North Korea.

In September last year and July and September this year, the government condemned ballistic missile tests by Pyongyang. Echoing the US, a September 13 Colombo statement declared that North Korea's sixth missile test violated UN Security Council resolutions and was "a threat to peace and stability in the region and beyond."

After the government imposed sanctions on North Korea, the leader of the opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Anura Kumara Dissanayake, criticised the procedure involved. He declared that foreign ministry officials had failed to inform parliament and called for a "detailed account on why the government arrived at the decision to impose sanctions."

In reply, Foreign Minister Thilak Marapana said the country's legislation required the foreign minister to promulgate regulations when the UN Security Council ordered sanctions on a particular country.

The JVP, which at times resorts to radical sounding phrasemongering, falsely claims that North Korea is socialist. The regime in Pyongyang, was never socialist but was based on the reactionary Stalinist perspective of "socialism in one country" from the outset. Its chief aim for decades has been a rapprochement with the US so as to open up the country as a cheap labour platform for foreign investors.

Dissanayake's procedural criticism was simply to obscure the fact that the JVP did not oppose the substance of the government's sanctions or its lining up behind the US preparations for war against North Korea. He was silent on another serious step, which directly ties Sri Lanka to the US military.

Before the government's decision on sanctions, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe announced in parliament on July 22 that the government would extend the Accession Cross Services Agreement (ACSA) with the US without specifying a time period.

The original agreement was signed by the previous Rajapakse regime in March 2007 for a period of 10 years. The ACSA allows the US and Sri Lanka to

transfer and exchange logistics supplies, support and re-fuelling services, either in kind or at cost, during peacekeeping missions, humanitarian operations or joint exercises.

Wickremesinghe said: "Extending the agreement with the US will be of the utmost importance given the global situation today ... considering the current international political situation and developments it [the agreement] would be favorable to the country."

The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government is dragging the country into Washington's war plans, with potentially catastrophic consequences for workers in the region and internationally.



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