

Sri Lankan government and opposition greet US president-elect Joe Biden

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President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his brother Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse this week led the congratulatory messages from Sri Lanka to US president-elect Joe Biden. The parliamentary opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) joined the chorus, issuing their own greetings.

In a Twitter message, President Rajapakse greeted Biden's "historic victory" and said he hoped to work "closely" in "strengthening the bilateral relations between our two countries." Rajapakse expected an "even more robust, mutually rewarding partnership" under Biden and vice president-elect Kamala Harris.

Prime Minister Rajapakse remembered 72 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries and added that he looked forward to working with Biden and Harris "to further enhance Sri Lanka-USA relations."

Members of the ruling elite are particularly concerned about how the political changes in Washington could affect them, while they are seeking close relations with this major imperialist power. These anxieties have significantly heightened in the past decade as the geopolitical tensions in the Asia-Pacific region have mounted, with the US and India confronting China.

The battle between Washington, New Delhi and Beijing has increased the pressure on governments in Sri Lanka, which is strategically located astride vital sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. Washington wants Sri Lanka to line up with its strategic and military preparations against China.

Just a week before the US presidential election, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Sri Lanka and met with President Rajapakse and Foreign Affairs Minister Dinesh Gunawardena. Pompeo's visit was part of a tour of the region to strengthen the US

position against China.

In Colombo, Pompeo demanded that Sri Lanka directly support the US against China. He said: "[A] strong, sovereign Sri Lanka is a powerful and strategic partner for the United States." The country could be a "beacon for a free and open Indo-Pacific."

US governments are hostile to the cash-strapped Colombo regime increasingly leaning on financial assistance from China in the wake of the economic collapse triggered by the global pandemic. Pompeo thuggishly accused China of "bad deals, violations of sovereignty and lawlessness on land and sea." He denounced the Chinese Communist Party as a "predator," saying that the US had come to Sri Lanka as a "friend and a partner."

The previous Obama administration, in which Biden was vice president, pursued a "pivot to Asia" policy designed to diplomatically isolate and militarily encircle China. It opposed the then government of President Mahinda Rajapakse for its relations with Beijing in seeking financial aid. The US supported his regime's war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which killed tens of thousands Tamil civilians in the final weeks of the conflict that ended in May 2009.

Washington then hypocritically used the human rights violations to pressure Mahinda Rajapakse's government to distance itself from Beijing. Finally, the Obama White House orchestrated a regime-change operation, with New Delhi's backing, to oust Rajapakse in the 2015 presidential election and replace him with Maithripala Sirisena.

President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, who came to power last November, has continued the military relations with the US that were built up by Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe after 2015.

The *Sunday Times* has reported that Rajapaksa entered into a deal with Pompeo to bolster these relations with Washington. By sending his greetings to Biden, Rajapakse is demonstrating his loyalty to the US.

In his greetings, opposition leader Premadasa showered praise on Biden for standing “with the American people to uphold the values of democracy and justice,” saying, “your platform provided the world with an example of progressive democracy, pluralist patriotism and social equity.” Premadasa claimed that his party, the Samagi Jana Balavegaya, upheld those ideals.

In reality, Premadasa backed the 2015 US regime-change in Colombo. Until recently he was a leader of the pro-US United National Party (UNP) government, enforcing its repressive rule and the three decades of bloody war against the LTTE.

Notwithstanding all the lavish tributes, Biden is a reactionary representative of US imperialism who will ruthlessly pursue its interests if and when he takes office.

R. Sambandan, leader of the TNA, another servile pro-Washington party, was equally keen to hail Biden and Harris. He told *Veerakesari* on November 9 that: “Biden seems to be concerned over several issues, including justice, equality, fundamental rights, human rights and progressive [concerns].” Referring to Harris’s Indian origin, Sambandan said: “She is fighter for justice and voiceless people,” and said he hoped to “meet them in the future.”

The TNA leadership is issuing this sort of praise in the hope of advancing its own interests. It supported the bogus US human rights campaign after the civil war and fully aligned with Washington’s 2015 intervention in Sri Lanka. In aligning with US strategic interests, it is seeking support for its request for power-sharing arrangements in Sri Lanka’s north and east.

After Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, the TNA leadership kept close contact with the US and its diplomats, and supported the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government’s measures to integrate more closely with the US military.

However, a November 9 editorial in the Colombo-based *Daily Mirror* indicated some nervousness by factions of the Colombo ruling elite that the political changes in Washington will see the US again using the

war crimes in Sri Lanka as a means of intervening in the country.

The editorial stated that during the Sri Lankan war, “the US sanctioned arms sales to the country” but “when the War on Terrorism’ led to the successful defeat of the terrorist organisation, the US pursued a vigorous anti-Sri Lanka policy,” and began raising charges of “war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

While the US limited some arms sales, Mahinda and Gotabhaya Rajapakse are on record as repeatedly stating that the war against the LTTE could not be won without the logistic and other support from Washington and New Delhi.

The bloody conflict was not a “War on Terrorism” but a war to suppress the working class, dividing it on anti-Tamil ethnic lines, escalating the vicious communal policies Colombo has pursued for decades. The US has exploited the internationally documented war crimes to demand that Sri Lankan governments support Washington’s strategic manoeuvres against China.

While the Sri Lankan ruling class and the military want immunity for their atrocities, the *Mirror* warned, “it is difficult to see any change in the US attitude toward Sri Lanka under a Biden presidency.”

Amid these nervous calculations, the Rajapakse regime, in line with its promises to Pompeo, is pledging to maintain close relations with Washington.



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