

# US State Department holds talks with Sri Lankan Tamil leaders

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In a significant move last month, the US State Department invited a delegation from the pro-US Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in Sri Lanka for talks with senior officials in Washington.

A delegation from the Global Tamil Forum (GTF), another pro-imperialist outfit, mainly operating from the US, Canada and the UK, was also invited for these discussions.

The TNA delegation included its spokesman and member of parliament, M. A. Sumanthiran, prominent lawyer K. Kanag-Isvaran and professor Nirmala Chandrasan, while the GTF delegation included E.V.K.S. Ilangovan, Suren Surendiran and two others.

Senior US officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu, were involved in these meetings.

During their stay in Washington from November 15 to 22, TNA and GTF representatives also met with senior members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In New York, they talked to the UN representatives of the US, Norway and Irish Republic, among others.

The public cover for these talks was Washington's support for "human rights" issues and "reconciliation" in Sri Lanka. Reconciliation refers to devolving powers to the Tamil elite in the north and east of the country where majority of Tamils live.

However, the real purpose was to intensify pressure on President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's government to break its relations with China and fully line up with US geostrategic needs.

Reports are scanty about what the US officials actually discussed and what the Tamil leaders conveyed to them.

A State Department tweet noted during his meeting with the TNA and GTF delegations, Assistant Secretary Lu said: "Human rights are central to US foreign policy in Sri Lanka... The US joins Sri Lankan Tamil people in search for lasting peace and full voice in deciding their country's future."

Sumanthiran told the *Hindu* on November 27, the return

of the US to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was important because it "advocates a political solution to the Tamil national question" and "issues of accountability and justice."

He added: "Without powers adequately devolved to the provinces, we cannot take on the [government's] massive plan to change the demography of the Tamil-majority north and east by settling Sinhalese people."

A similar GTF statement urged the "continued leadership" of the US in the UNHRC.

Lu's claim that the US supports the Tamil people's search for "lasting peace" is utterly false. Likewise, TNA and GTF claims that the US is a champion of human rights are ludicrous.

Washington is the number one war criminal and responsible for countless violations of democratic rights around the globe. In the US, successive administrations increasingly have attacked democratic rights of the working class, brutally suppressing immigrants. The Biden administration is continuing these attacks.

The US is using "human rights" in other countries as a weapon to further its geopolitical and economic interests. Washington simply manufactures human rights violations, as in the case of China, which it lyingly declares is carrying out the "genocide" of ethnic Uyghurs in the province of Xinjiang.

In Sri Lanka, Washington is exploiting the war crimes and human rights violations committed under former President Mahinda Rajapakse. As defence secretary, the current president, Mahinda's brother Gotabhaya, oversaw these operations.

The nearly 30-year-long bloody war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended in May 2009 with the killing of at least at least 40,000 civilians, including surrendered LTTE leaders. Around 300,000 Tamils were incarcerated in camps in northern Vavuniya, monitored by the military. The Tamil masses are still demanding that Colombo provide information about the hundreds of young men who disappeared after surrendering

to the army.

Washington backed Mahinda Rajapakse's anti-democratic rule and the war. It only began raising human rights concerns during the final months of the conflict as Beijing emerged as the major supplier of weapons and source of financial assistance to Colombo.

The US was concerned about China's rise, and developed the "pivot to Asia" policy to diplomatically isolate Beijing and encircle it militarily. Washington was thoroughly hostile to the Rajapakse regime's relations with China. It sponsored several UNHRC war crimes resolutions to pressure Colombo to support the US agenda.

In 2015, the US orchestrated a regime-change operation with the support of New Delhi to oust Mahinda Rajapakse and replace him with the pro-US Maithripala Sirisena. Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe then shifted the country's foreign policy towards Washington.

Since Gotabhaya Rajapakse came to power as president in November 2019, Washington has expressed concerns about his renewal of relations with Beijing. Facing an economic crisis triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Rajapakse regime increasingly has sought loans and investment from China.

In April this year, Rajapakse made operational the Colombo Port City Project (CPC), built by a Chinese construction company with a loan from Beijing, on reclaimed land near Colombo Harbour.

The project is a component of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes a strategic plan to ensure the free movement of its imports and exports through the Indian Ocean in the case of US-led military blockades.

As part of the intensifying US pressure on Rajapakse to break relations with Beijing, then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Colombo last year and publicly demanded that the Sri Lankan government distance itself from Beijing.

Washington renewed its bogus "human rights" campaign this year. It backed a resolution submitted to the UNHRC by a "core group" comprised of the UK, Canada, Germany and several other countries. This resolution was passed by a majority in March. It paves the way for the collection of evidence of war crimes in Sri Lanka that can be used to prosecute those implicated.

The US pressure on Sri Lanka comes as the Biden administration takes provocative actions against Russia and China, increasing war tensions. In the Indo-Pacific region, it hypocritically accuses China of violating "freedom of navigation," threatening Taiwan and suppressing human rights.

By fuelling war tensions, Washington is seeking to divert developing domestic working-class resistance to the massive devastation of the pandemic.

Adding to the pressure on Sri Lanka, US House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Gregory W. Meeks and ranking member Michael McCaul sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging the administration to prioritise its Sri Lanka policy. The letter stated that "the US-Sri Lanka relationship is a critical one for US foreign policy and national security interests in the Indo-Pacific region."

Washington is coordinating its efforts with India, one of its principal strategic partners against China. Sumanthiran told the *Hindu* that "Washington has kept New Delhi informed of our discussions" with them.

The TNA and GTF are well aware of the criminal record of the US around the world and have no concern for the democratic rights of Tamil people. In fact, they support the US war preparations against China.

The TNA formerly acted as a mouthpiece of the LTTE, which appealed to the US for its support for its separatist cause. When the war against the LTTE ended, the TNA joined Washington's bogus human rights campaign, cultivating close relations with the US. The TNA backed the 2015 regime-change operation sponsored by Washington.

The TNA and GTF are acting as quislings of imperialism, serving US interests and seeking, as crumbs, its assistance in obtaining privileges for the Tamil elite. Like the Rajapakse regime, they are also in mortal fear about the rising struggles of workers, across Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethnic lines, as part of the international resurgence of class struggle.

Having been already subjected to a regime-change operation, Rajapakse knows the implications of the US deepening pressure. In recent months, Colombo has sought to appease Washington by inviting more investment from the US.

Colombo is also seeking a rapprochement with India. Last week, it sent Finance Minister Basil Rajapakse to New Delhi, pursuing a closer relationship, including investment.

These developments indicate the advanced stage of global geopolitical tensions and their sharp impact on the political crisis in Sri Lanka.

The working class in Sri Lanka must break from every section of the capitalist class and unite across ethnic lines with its class brothers and sisters internationally to fight for its independent interests, that is, for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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