

Sri Lankan media covers up danger of nuclear war over Ukraine

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12 October 2022

The Sri Lankan media, like its international counterparts, is deliberately keeping people in the dark about the mounting threat of nuclear war between the US/NATO and Russia. If the media mentions anything about this real and present danger, their remarks end with futile appeals to the imperialist powers and Russia to halt the war.

The threat of nuclear war has been acutely present since the Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February in response to the increasingly provocative military encirclement of Russia by the US and NATO. Seizing on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Washington and its allies immediately instigated their long-planned war against Russia, providing billions of dollars in modern weaponry to the Ukraine government of President Zelensky.

There is nothing progressive about Russia's actions which are based on reactionary Russian nationalism and hark back to Czarist traditions. On September 21, following a series of military reversals in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that he was ready to "use all weapon systems available to us" to defend his country, indicating his readiness to use nuclear weapons.

US President Biden responded by pouring oil onto the fire, taking the threat of a catastrophic nuclear conflict to a higher level. He declared on October 6, "We have not faced the prospect of Armageddon since Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis."

Thus far, the Sri Lankan media has simply republished reports from news agencies that mention in passing the nuclear war danger. Colombo's English-language *Sunday Times* reproduced one article by US defence analyst Ted Galen Carpenter who directly discusses the danger of nuclear war.

In February, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the Sri

Lankan media wrote numerous articles about the war, many of them blaming Putin. This included several reports about the destruction caused by the war, with particular attention paid to the deep impact that the conflict was having on the Sri Lankan economy.

Overall, Russia and Ukraine accounted for 2 percent of Sri Lankan imports and 2.2 percent of exports in 2020. Both countries are vital sources for Sri Lankan wheat imports and major export destinations for Sri Lankan black tea. In fact, Russia and Ukraine purchase about 18 percent of Sri Lanka's tea. Likewise, 45 percent of Sri Lanka's wheat imports are sourced from Russia and Ukraine. Sri Lanka also imports potassium chloride, a vital agricultural fertiliser, from both countries.

On October 5, the *Daily Mirror*, Sri Lanka's leading English-language newspaper published a lengthy editorial entitled "Power hunger and war in Ukraine." It says nothing about the nuclear war threat but notes that falling exports of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and corn from Russia and Ukraine were impacting on "the wellbeing of people around the globe," and particularly the poor.

"[T]he root of the problem," it admits, "has been the enlargement of the NATO and attempted encirclement of Russia" but that Moscow is "equally responsible." The US and its allies, and Russia are a "battle for supremacy" and motivated by "power hunger."

The editorial concludes: "Despite the collateral damage inflicted on the people of Ukraine, despite the rising cost of living and food shortages inflicted on the poorest sections of the global population, no efforts are being made to bring the war to an end" as "billions of dollars are being spent" on the war.

By claiming the conflict is a result of "power hunger," the *Daily Mirror* is covering up the real

factors behind the US-led NATO war against Russia. Driven by the insoluble economic and social crisis of capitalism, Washington and its allies are attempting to subordinate Russia and ultimately China to its economic and strategic interests. For its part Russia, which is not an imperialist power, is seeking to reach an accommodation with the US.

A September 1 editorial in the *Island*, another Colombo-based daily, refers to the destruction in Ukraine and laments that “the big powers do not care to avert conflagrations which cause immense suffering to humans and could even lead to nuclear strikes.” The Western powers, it states, are “overreacting” against Russia, and calls “on the US and its belligerent allies to wise up and rethink their Ukraine strategy without behaving like a bunch of overgrown school bullies.”

Other English- and Sinhala-language media have published similar comments, insisting that escalating US-led war against Russia is the result of subjective factors. The ruling elites in Sri Lanka and in other backward countries, are being drawn into Washington’s geo-strategic agenda. As US imperialism has repeatedly told the Sri Lankan ruling elite, Colombo must fully endorse Washington’s military preparations for war against China.

One week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, then Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapakse declared that his government would not take sides in the conflict. The Rajapakse regime, which already faced an unprecedented economic crisis and was attempting to impose new burdens on workers and the poor, did not want to upset its trade relations with Moscow.

In April, popular anger erupted into mass anti-government protests, escalating into general strikes and demonstrations that forced Rajapakse and his government to resign. Rajapakse appointed pro-US stooge Ranil Wickremesinghe as acting president who was then elevated into the presidency by the discredited parliament.

Like his predecessor, Wickremesinghe has agreed to impose the International Monetary Fund’s austerity measures on the working class and the rural masses, but also officially maintains Rajapakse’s position on the Ukraine war.

In July, Wickremesinghe told an international panel discussion on Preventing Hunger and Famine that, “[Western] sanctions won’t bring Russia to its knees,

but it will bring the rest of the Third World to its knees... That cannot go on. It’s not only the fault of the European Union. Russia has a responsibility too. They must call for a ceasefire and should not put the world for further sufferings.”

While Wickremesinghe is a long-trusted ally of US imperialism, Washington is stepping up its pressure on Colombo, demanding that his government fully align itself with the preparation for war against China.

The international working class, guided by the international Trotskyist movement, is the only social force that can stop the imperialist drive towards a third world war and the nuclear war threat. This requires putting an end to capitalism, the source of imperialist war and its replacement with socialism.

To this end, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), together with its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International, are fighting to build a unified anti-war movement of the international working class based on a socialist perspective.

On October 16, the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are holding an online public meeting—“Build an international working-class movement to stop nuclear war danger”—to discuss this perspective. We urge workers, students and youth to register and attend this crucial event.



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