

Stepping up US war preparations against China, Victoria Nuland visits South Asia

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US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland visited Nepal, India and Sri Lanka between January 28 and February 1, before travelling to Qatar. Her trip coincided with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's recent trip to South Korea for high-level meetings with President Yoon Suk-yeol and Defense Minister Lee Jong-seop.

Nuland, who served under former US presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush, is infamous for her aggressive pursuance of Washington's geopolitical interests. She played a key role in the 2014 fascist-led coup that overthrew the pro-Russian Ukraine government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

In 2013, Nuland bragged that Washington had "invested over \$5 billion" in the Ukrainian opposition, and in 2014, she was recorded on a telephone call with the US ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, selecting the head of a post-coup government and discussing US collaboration with neo-fascist forces like the Svoboda party.

Nuland spent January 29 and 30 in Nepal, where she met with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and several other officials. She was the highest-ranking foreign dignitary to visit the country since Dahal's election as prime minister on December 25.

In Kathmandu she denounced unnamed "autocrats" for "trying to change global rules by force"—a provocative reference to Beijing and Moscow.

Washington repeatedly and falsely promotes its political and military aggression against Russia and China as missions to defend "democracy."

Underscoring US efforts to enlist Nepal in the military-strategic offensive against China, Nuland declared: "It's enormously important for the US to have partners like Nepal." Sandwiched between China and India, Nepal is caught in the intensifying strategic

conflict between the US and India on one side, and China on the other.

Nepal is receiving heightened attention from Washington since Dahal, leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), became prime minister with the support of K.P. Sharma Oli, head of the pro-China Communist Party of Nepal—United Marxist-Leninist. It was expected that Dahal would become prime minister backed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, leader of the pro-India Nepali Congress. The US and India fear that the Dahal government will be closely aligned with Beijing.

On February 5, a few days after Nuland's visit, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) chief Samantha Power arrived in Kathmandu. Nepal is due to receive \$US500 million under the US Millennium Challenge Corporation project. Washington has also agreed to provide another \$659 million in economic assistance through USAID in the next five years. The aid is clearly aimed at undermining the influence of China, which remains Nepal's largest foreign investor.

On January 31, Nuland travelled to India where she met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and later Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra. Media reports said Nuland and Jaishankar discussed the Indian subcontinent, the Indo-Pacific, and the "many points of convergence" in the India-US relationship.

It was Nuland's second meeting with Jaishankar in the past two months. At their previous meeting, on December 15 at the UN headquarters, Jaishankar and Nuland discussed their efforts to support "security in the Asia Pacific and globally."

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden will meet three times this year—at the G7, Quad and G20 summits—while US Secretary of

State Anthony Blinken is to visit India next month.

India is Washington's principal military-strategic partner in South Asia. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has been transformed into a frontline state of the US war drive against China. New Delhi has bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral alliances with the US, Japan and Australia. New Delhi and Washington are collaborating closely to enlist Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Maldives into this anti-China military-strategic offensive.

As Nuland was visiting New Delhi, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval met with his US counterpart Jake Sullivan and other senior officials in Washington to inaugurate the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) dialogue between the two countries.

In an exclusive interview with *Mint*, former Indian envoy to the US Arun Singh said the ICET would provide mechanisms for the two countries to "explore and deepen collaboration in several critical and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, quantum, 6G, space, semiconductors and biotech." Singh said the "rise of China" was a factor in driving this collaboration.

Nuland visited Sri Lanka on February 1 where she met with President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Nuland declared that Washington supports the Colombo government's efforts "to stabilize the economy, protect human rights, and promote reconciliation" and that both countries were together for "an inclusive, prosperous and secure future for all Sri Lankans."

Nuland's call for a prosperous future "for all Sri Lankans" is totally hypocritical. The extreme economic and political crisis facing the country, which was worsened by COVID-19, was even more dramatically intensified by the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

Contrary to Nuland's bogus claims, the Wickremesinghe government, working in tandem with the US and the International Monetary Fund, is brutally imposing the full burden of this crisis onto millions of already impoverished workers, rural toilers and their families.

Nuland also used her Sri Lankan trip to further denounce Beijing. She declared: "We expect that China will provide credible and specific assurances regarding its readiness to join the rest of us in meeting the IMF

standards regarding debt restructuring. We are seeing the rest of Sri Lanka's creditors come forward with those assurances, and now all eyes are on China to do the same."

Nuland's comment is a reference to Sri Lanka's negotiations with its creditors on the restructuring of Colombo's defaulted loan repayments, as demanded by the IMF.

Immediately responding to Nuland's provocative remarks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning stated: "What was said by the US side does not reflect the truth. The Export-Import Bank of China has already provided Sri Lanka with the letter to express support for its debt sustainability. Sri Lanka has responded positively and thanked China for that."

Mao called on the US to, "Show some sincerity and actively do something to help Sri Lanka weather the current difficulties... rather than jabbing fingers at China's close cooperation with Sri Lanka."

Nuland's trip to Sri Lanka—the second within a year—further indicates the prominence Washington gives to the strategically located Indian Ocean nation and the intensification of US preparations for war against China.



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