

Sri Lankan government fails to condemn US strikes on Iran

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On June 23, the day after the massive, unprovoked US airstrikes on three Iranian nuclear energy facilities, the Sri Lankan government issued a cowardly and perfunctory statement calling for “de-escalation” in the Middle East. About the direct involvement of US imperialism in the war of aggression against Iran that threatened to engulf the entire Middle East and set the world on fire, it had nothing to say.

The brief three-sentence statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was carefully worded to avoid even mentioning the US and Israel, let alone making the slightest criticism of their illegal and unprovoked war against Iran. While expressing “grave concerns about the latest developments in the Middle East,” it called upon “all parties to take concrete steps to de-escalate the situation” and “all concerned parties” to return to dialogue and engage in intense diplomatic efforts to establish peace and stability in the Middle East.

The failure of the ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) to criticise, let alone condemn, the naked aggression of US imperialism against Iran is to lend legitimacy to this criminal US-led war.

It is a continuation of the JVP/NPP’s response to Israel’s huge air strikes on Iran, including on its military, nuclear and economic infrastructure and the assassination of top Iranian officials. A foreign ministry statement issued on June 13 simply called for restraint, dialogue and de-escalation by both Israel and Iran. In doing so, it has placed the aggressors, the US and Israel, and the defender, Iran, on the same plane.

Within Sri Lanka, the JVP/NPP is attempting to suppress any debate on the attack on Iran. It carried out a series of manoeuvres in parliament last week designed to prevent any discussion of the issue.

Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and several other MPs requested time in parliament to raise questions and debate Israel’s war against Iran. Premadasa’s party—the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB)—and its parliamentary allies are staunchly pro-US imperialism and have no genuine opposition to US and Israeli aggression.

On June 17, Premadasa attempted to raise a question in parliament on the issue. He was blocked by Health and Media Minister Nalinda Jayatissa, who declared that Premadasa could not raise questions without adhering to parliamentary procedures and without prior notice. Parliamentary discussion on the consequences of the “Israel-Iran conflict,” he said, was unnecessary because the issue was already scheduled for discussion later that day. Opposition MPs led by Premadasa walked out of parliament in protest.

Later that evening, government MP Geetha Herath raised four scripted questions for the government: on the security of Sri Lankan migrant workers in Israel and Iran, possible oil shortages and the impact on the country’s foreign reserves. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath’s brief answers avoided any reference to the government’s attitude to the war itself.

On June 18, a debate was scheduled on an adjournment motion proposed by SJB MP Ajith P. Perera to discuss the attacks on Iran. Perera was not present, saying he had been involved in a minor accident, but the opposition attempted to move the motion saying the conflict was a matter of “national importance.” Twenty opposition MPs endorsed the resolution.

Like the government, however, the opposition wanted to debate the impact of the conflict on Sri Lanka, not the criminal character of the war on Iran. It pointed out that 15,000 to 20,000 Sri Lankans were working in Israel and highlighted the importance of tea exports to

Iran. Premadasa warned that the conflict could lead to oil price shocks and severely affect Sri Lanka's economy.

Vijitha Herath and Leader of the House Bimal Ratnayake both rejected the motion, declaring that it "could not be moved by an MP on behalf of another." The government was "open" to holding a discussion, they declared, but procedural integrity must be upheld. An attempt to move the motion on the following day was simply ignored.

President Dissanayake and his government are determined to prevent any parliamentary debate on the issue. For decades, the JVP railed against imperialism, but its anti-imperialist demagogic is a thing of the past as the government lines up with the US. The last thing that it wants is a parliamentary debate, no matter how innocuous, in which it is compelled to explain its stance on the war.

Like governments around the world, Dissanayake is deeply concerned about the potential for the emergence of an anti-war movement of workers and youth, not only in response to the US-led conflict in the Middle East and against Russia in Ukraine, but also the accelerating US build-up to war with China. At the same time, the potential economic impact of the Middle East war on Sri Lanka threatens to plunge the country once again into deep crisis, intense social tensions and trigger widespread protests.

The government is already implementing the IMF draconian austerity demands following the country's default on foreign loans in 2022, and is facing the prospect of huge tariffs on exports to the US coming into force next month. The entire Colombo political establishment fears the eruption of a mass movement as occurred in 2022, which forced the president to leave the country and resign.

The JVP/NPP government's response to the US-Israel military onslaught closely mirrors India's stance, underscoring its deepening alignment with New Delhi. The extreme-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India has refused to condemn Israel's attacks on Iran and also the US missile attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar distanced India from the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) resolution that condemned Israel and criticised the US for its support. Jaishankar said

that India did not agree with the SCO resolution and that there had been no consultation with New Delhi.

After coming to power last year with the backing of sections of the bourgeoisie and US imperialism, the Dissanayake government has increasingly lined up with the US and India. Prior to winning government, the JVP condemned the Gaza genocide to try and win Muslim votes. Now it issues toothless statements about Israel's murderous operations while covering up US involvement.

Diplomatic relations between Israel and Sri Lanka began in the early 1980s, when President J.R. Jayawardene sought Israeli support in its brutal communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Israel supplied advanced military systems, including Kfir fighter jets, patrol vessels, drones and missiles and provided specialised training programs, particularly during the final phase of the conflict.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on the working class and young people in Sri Lanka to reject the Dissanayake government's pro-US policy and oppose the US-Israeli war against Iran. As the WSWS Editorial Board explained on June 21:

"The working class in Iran and globally must oppose the US-Israeli onslaught, but they must do so through their own class struggle methods. This means developing a global working-class counteroffensive that ties the fight against imperialist war and the ever-widening assault on the social and democratic rights of the working class to the fight against capitalism. This requires the struggle for the building of sections of the ICFI in Iran, throughout the Middle East and internationally."



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