

Condemn US sinking of Iranian vessel in Indian Ocean! Oppose US-Israel war against Iran

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The US sinking of Iran’s naval frigate, IRIS Dena, off Sri Lanka’s southern coast in the Indian Ocean on Wednesday is a criminal act of mass murder. Some 140 Iranian sailors drowned at sea; 32 sailors were rescued, not, as required by the Geneva Conventions, by the US submarine that torpedoed it, but by the Sri Lankan navy.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka condemns this war crime and the illegal war of aggression by US imperialism and Israel against Iran.

We condemn both the Sri Lankan and Indian governments for their complicity in this war. We call on the working class of South Asia to unite with their class brothers and sisters internationally to build an anti-war movement based on socialist policies to halt this war.

In Washington, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth celebrated the mass murder, claiming: “Yesterday in the Indian Ocean, an American submarine sunk an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters... Quiet death.”

IRIS Dena was not on a military mission but had been invited by the Indian government to take part in India’s International Fleet Review and the MILAN 2026 exercises at Visakhapatnam in the Bay of Bengal. On February 17, India’s Eastern Naval Command welcomed the ship on social media via X, hailing “long-standing cultural ties” with photos of the vessel and crew. No comment followed the sinking of the vessel.

The IRIS Dena was sunk in the full knowledge that it was unarmed. The rules of the Indian exercise included a prohibition on carrying ammunition. The US Navy, which also participated in the same drills, knew that it posed no threat. The atrocity once again demonstrates that Hegseth’s “total war” is a declaration of complete lawlessness by the fascistic Trump administration.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government has maintained a criminal silence on the sinking. The Indian Navy claimed it responded to the distress call relayed by Sri Lanka by deploying maritime patrol aircraft and naval assets, but stressed that the IRIS Dena had already left Indian waters and that India bore no responsibility for the sinking.

Since day one, New Delhi has neither criticized the war nor so much as mentioned its authors—the United States and Israel—but has simply made empty calls for “restraint”. On the eve of the war, Modi made a two-day visit to Israel and was undoubtedly informed of the impending bombardment of Iran. New Delhi’s silence on the sinking of an Iranian warship, which was its guest just days before, confirms its full support for US imperialism’s war of aggression.

The Sri Lankan government’s response is just as duplicitous. Its navy, in compliance with international maritime obligations, launched a search and rescue operation after receiving a distress call from the IRIS Dena. Of the 180 aboard, it managed to save just 32 Iranian sailors and recovered some 87 bodies.

In a Thursday press conference, Sri Lankan President Anura Dissanayake made no criticism of the submarine attack or protested the criminal role of the United States. In a hollow posture of independence, he told the media: “We do not act in a biased manner towards any state, nor do we submit to any state.”

The government’s refusal to initially allow a second Iranian naval vessel, IRIS Bushehr—a supply ship that had accompanied the IRIS Dena in the Indian naval exercises—to take refuge in Colombo harbour on Thursday speaks to the contrary. After the sinking of the IRIS Dena, it was clearly another potential US target.

Only after a flurry of diplomatic activity did the

government take “custody” of the IRIS Bushehr on the basis of “engine failure”. Most of its crew of more than 200 were taken off the ship in Colombo and, while not formally detained, are being held at a naval camp. The vessel itself was then moved under Sri Lankan navy supervision to Trincomalee harbour on the other side of Sri Lanka.

In coming to power for the first time in 2024, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) government abandoned what little remained of its socialistic and anti-imperialist demagogy—that had in the past been directed against the United States.

The Dissanayake government’s response to the murderous US-Israeli war on Iran is no different to that of the far-right Modi government in India. The foreign ministry issued a statement of “deep concern” over the threat to regional stability and international peace and called for “maximum restraint” and “de-escalation”. It did not name the aggressors—the US and Israel—nor the victim of the unprovoked war—Iran.

The government took the same stance over Israel’s US-backed genocidal war in Gaza against the Palestinians, issuing impotent calls for de-escalation, restraint and ceasefires, without naming the US and Israel.

Dissanayake’s claims to an independent foreign policy are a fraud. Since coming to office, his government has integrated Colombo even more closely into US war planning against China and strengthened ties with Israel—continuing the policies of his right-wing predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Barely a week before US and Israel launched war on Iran, US Navy Admiral Steve Koehler, Pacific Fleet Commander, visited Sri Lanka on February 19–21 for a second time, meeting with ministers and military commanders. Nominally about counter-piracy, humanitarian and disaster response, the timing reeks of a US mission to ensure Sri Lankan backing for the impending assault.

Now, the war criminals in the US and Israel have assassinated Ayatollah Khamenei and all other top Iranian leaders. Thousands of innocent civilians have been slaughtered, including over 150 children in a targeted attack on a girls’ school. An unarmed Iranian naval vessel has been sunk approximately 40 nautical miles from the southern city of Galle in an act of mass murder.

And the JVP leaders, who once shouted against US imperialism, cannot mouth the word “United States” let alone criticize or condemn its war crimes.

The illegal US-Israeli war on Iran and its people has

nothing to do with nuclear facilities, alleged internal repression or support for “terrorism”. US imperialism in its desperate attempts to reverse its historic decline, is intent on nothing less than the destruction of the Iranian state. The Trump administration regards the subjugation of Iran and its vast energy resources as an essential step in its preparation for war against China—the chief threat to US global hegemony. A catastrophic Third World War is looming.

World Socialist Web Site chairman David North explained yesterday:

The torpedo that sank the IRIS Dena did not only kill 140 sailors. It announced to the world, without apology, that the United States government is not bound by any law, any convention, or any standard of civilized conduct. The only imperatives that it recognizes are those dictated by the capitalist system and the accumulation of profit.

Every day, every new crime adds increased urgency to the warning of Leon Trotsky: ‘Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.’

The working class in South Asia has a mighty anti-imperialist tradition—from its struggles against British colonial rule to its opposition to US-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. That heritage must be revived in the fight to halt the US-Israeli war on Iran and the descent into a catastrophic new global conflict.

Workers in India and Sri Lanka should denounce the sinking of IRIS Dena and their governments’ complicity in naked US-Israeli acts of colonial brigandage and war. They must unite with their class brothers and sisters across South Asia and internationally in an anti-war movement based on socialism policies to overthrow the capitalist system and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states—the root cause of war.



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