

Tamil National Alliance in Sri Lanka ramps up support for anti-China campaign

P. T. Sampanthar
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The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Sri Lanka's main Tamil parliamentary party, is stepping up its involvement in the US-led anti-China campaign following a visit to Washington last November by a TNA delegation. Led by parliamentarian M. A. Sumanthiran, the delegation met with senior US State Department officials.

The ostensible reason for the meeting was Washington's concern over "human rights" and "reconciliation" issues following the protracted communal war in Sri Lanka that ended in 2009. The real reason was to intensify US pressure on the Rajapakse government to break its relations with Beijing and fully back Washington's geostrategic interests.

The TNA's latest denunciations of China, which are being echoed by other Tamil parties and the media, were made in a lengthy January 8 interview with Sumanthiran on the *Morning* website. Asked about potential Chinese projects and investments in Sri Lanka, the TNA parliamentarian bluntly declared: "[T]he Chinese are not welcome in the North or the East."

Sumanthiran's comment were in response to a two-day visit by Chinese ambassador Qi Zhenhong to the northern Jaffna and Mannar districts in mid-December. The trip was to investigate possible Chinese investment. That the TNA parliamentarian reacted in such a provocative manner to what would generally be considered a routine event, underscores the rising geopolitical tensions in the region between the US and India, on the one hand, and China on the other.

Sumanthiran said that he opposed China intervening in the North and East because the TNA's "political quest is based on human rights and democracy," concepts he said, that "are very alien to the Chinese."

Chinese influence in the area "will hinder progress" for political rights, he declared.

The North and East are "not located in the South China Sea," he continued, but close to the Indian coast and therefore not "the legitimate defence concerns of China... [A]llowing Chinese space in the North and East" would be a "hostile act towards India."

Sumanthiran's rhetoric is a repetition of Washington's and Delhi's aggressive propaganda against China. The US feigns concern over "democracy" and China's "human rights violations" while hypocritically concealing its own suppression of democratic rights, including its brutal repression of immigrants.

Sumanthiran's reference to the South China Sea echoes a key element of the US-led provocations against China. The US denounces Beijing for its "illegal" South China Sea claims and, on the pretext of "freedom of navigation," sends US warships into the waters around Chinese-controlled islets.

Sumanthiran ignores US war crimes and its escalating attacks on democratic rights along as well as the Modi government's violation of human rights in Kashmir and other states and its whipping up of anti-Muslim sentiments.

India's so-called defence concerns about China's presence in the North and East are part of its long-standing opposition to Chinese influence in what it regards as its backyard.

In order to pursue these ambitions, India has become a frontline state against China, joining the US-led quadrilateral military alliance (QUAD) with Australia and Japan. For its part, Beijing has sought to counter these moves by seeking to build its own relations with other South Asian countries.

The TNA's claim to be fighting "for political rights

based on human rights” is a sham. The main concern of this bourgeois party is not the democratic rights of Tamil workers and the poor, but securing privileges for the Tamil elite which it hopes to obtain by slavishly embracing the US and India and their geopolitical agenda.

The US and India endorsed Colombo’s 30-year war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which saw the military kill hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians. Washington only began raising concerns about war crimes and numerous human violations during the final months of the bloody conflict that ended in May 2009.

These concerns had nothing to do with human rights but the US used the issue to try and pressure President Mahinda Rajapakse’s government to distance itself from Beijing. To this end Washington sponsored several resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). When this and other manoeuvres failed, it orchestrated a regime-change operation to oust Mahinda Rajapakse and install the pro-US Maithripala Sirisena as president in 2015.

After Mahinda Rajapakse’s younger brother, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, became president in November 2019 and his cash-strapped government turned again to Beijing for financial assistance, the US, India and other major powers renewed the “human rights” campaign. Washington backed another UNHRC resolution calling for a war crimes investigation which was passed at its March 2021 session. The TNA and other Tamil parties supported the US moves.

In a December 27 interview with the Tamil Nadu-based *Puthiya Thalaimurai* television network, Sumanthiran declared, “If India is able to arrange the devolution of power in the North and East ... it can prevent the intervention of China in the region.”

Other Tamil parties have joined the anti-China campaign. Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) leader Suresh Premachandran recently declared that China was attempting “to change itself into the world’s policeman” and referred to Chinese support for Colombo’s war against the LTTE.

“Having given huge military logistics and war jets during war, China has made Sri Lanka its major indebted country,” he declared and criticised Beijing for opposing the US-backed UNHRC resolution against Colombo.

Like the TNA, the EPRLF cynically hides US and Indian support for the civil war.

Not to be outdone, Tamil National People’s Front leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam and Tamil People’s Alliance leader C.V. Wignesvaran have embraced the anti-China and pro-Indian campaign. Irrespective of the tactical differences between these capitalist parties, they all serve the interests of US imperialism and India.

Responding to Sumanthiran’s allegations and the anti-China campaign, Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong told a Colombo media conference on January 9 that his visit to the North was “related to economic investments, and not against India.” He pointedly added: “Jaffna is a city in Sri Lanka’s north. It is not a city in the south of any other country.”

These developments further underscore the deepening geopolitical rivalry in the region and the escalating attempts to bring Sri Lanka into line with the demands of Washington and New Delhi. They also bring into sharp relief the pro-imperialist degeneration of the Tamil nationalist parties and danger of catastrophic military conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

The democratic rights of the Tamil masses will not be won through these bourgeois organisations but only through a united struggle of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers, leading the oppressed in the fight for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic and based on an internationalist anti-war program. The Socialist Equality Party is the only organisation that fights for this perspective.



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