

# Sri Lankan presidential candidates silent over the threat of WWII

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Sri Lanka's main presidential candidates—President Ranil Wickremesinghe, Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) leader Sajith Premadasa, and Anura Kumara Disanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) led by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—have made bogus and extravagant election promises. They maintain, however, total radio silence on the escalating danger of a catastrophic third world war.

The threat of world war is very real. The fascistic Israeli regime, with the full backing of Washington and its European NATO allies, has now expanded its relentless slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza into the West Bank, and is threatening war with Iran that would engulf the entire Middle East.

The US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, now entering its third year, is escalating with long-range weapons provided by the US and the European powers being used in Ukraine's invasion into Russian territory. Advanced discussions are underway about the direct deployment of NATO troops in Ukraine against Russia. The prospect of direct conflict between these nuclear armed nations cannot be ignored.

In Asia, US imperialism's foremost aim is to subjugate China, which it considers its principal rival. Washington's provocations in Taiwan and the South China Sea designed to goad Beijing into responding take place as the American military buildup and strengthening of alliances against China continues apace.

The silence of Sri Lanka's capitalist parties over these grave developments is not an accidental slip, but a deliberate policy to keep the masses in the dark and cover up their pro-imperialist policies.

In opposition to all capitalist party candidates, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its presidential candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena have made the fight against global war a central issue in the party's election campaign. Together with our sister parties internationally, we are calling on workers and youth to build an anti-war movement based on socialist principles to prevent world war.

The struggle of the working class in Sri Lanka against the

savage International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures is intimately connected to the fight against the imperialist war. That is why SEP's election statement centres on the fight for socialism against war, social inequality and dictatorship.

Successive Colombo governments have overtly and covertly supported the geopolitical machinations of US imperialism and India, its main regional ally, while trying to maintain relations with China, a major creditor to Sri Lanka. But this balancing act is becoming increasingly impossible as Washington intensifies its aggression against China.

While Wickremesinghe fails to mention any foreign policy issues in his manifesto, he and his rump United National Party have a long-standing record of subservience to Washington. In 2015, Wickremesinghe together with key figures of Sri Lanka's ruling elite, directly supported the US State Department coordinated regime-change operation to oust then President Mahinda Rajapakse because of his orientation towards Beijing, and to shift Colombo's foreign policy in favour of the US.

SJB leader Premadasa's election manifesto proclaims that "a rules-based order in the Indian Ocean" is in "the best interest of the population of the Indian Ocean region." The "rules-based order" is simply parroting Washington's propaganda centred on maintaining the post-World War II order in which it set the rules that China's economic rise threatens to upset.

The JVP/NPP manifesto is open in its support for India, declaring the party would not allow the use of Sri Lanka "land, sky or the sea for any activity that will threaten the region, including India." With India a crucial US strategic partner in the military encirclement of China, the JVP is lining up with Washington. JVP leaders have held several closed-doors meetings with Julie Chung, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka and senior US officials during the past two years.

The most glaring exposure of the pro-imperialist outlook of the Wickremesinghe government was its dispatch this year of naval ships to the Red Sea as part of Washington's

Operation Prosperity Guardian. The purpose of the US-led coalition was to fight the attacks on shipping to Israel by pro-Palestinian Houthi rebels.

How did the opposition parties react? SJB leader Premadasa lamented the cost of the Red Sea operation while the JVP/NPP kept their mouths shut about this pro-imperialist operation.

Successive Colombo governments have signed military agreements—the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)—with the US.

ACSA, which was signed in 2007 and extended and expanded in 2017, allows the US and Sri Lanka to exchange logistics, supplies, and services during so-called humanitarian operations, joint drills and peacekeeping missions: In reality, unfettered US access to Sri Lanka and use of its military facilities.

According to the US government’s Defense Technical Information Center, SOFAs “generally establish the framework under which US military personnel operate in a foreign country, addressing how the domestic laws of the foreign jurisdiction shall be applied toward US personnel while in that country.”

The first SOFA deal was signed in 1995, during President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s administration. The US has been pushing since 2018 for Colombo to sign a new SOFA pact with various “privileges, exemptions, and immunity” for US military personnel.

Joint military exercises with the US and Indian military, along with bilateral meetings with top-level US and Indian officials, are regular occurrences in Sri Lanka. This year US Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma and Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu and other senior officials visited Sri Lanka.

Indian Security Advisor Ajit Doval has also visited, holding closed-door talks with Wickremesinghe. They signed a Charter and Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of a Secretariat of Colombo Security Conclave, which also includes the Maldives and Mauritius, and is, in fact, a defence agreement. While in Colombo, Doval held talks with Premadasa and Dissanayake, as well as political parties from the North and trade union leaders from the central plantation districts.

These defence agreements—like agreements with the IMF and other imperialist agencies—are made behind the backs of Sri Lankan workers and the poor and in direct conflict with their class interests.

The SEP condemns and opposes the support of the ruling and opposition parties for these US-led imperialist policies and urges the working class to do the same. Workers and

youth must base themselves on the great traditions of the international working class, including the political experiences of the Sri Lankan working class.

During WWII, Sri Lanka, because of its pivotal strategic position in the Indian Ocean, became the headquarters for the Allied South-East Asian Command.

The Trotskyists in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) formed the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India (BLPI), opposed the war and fought to mobilise the working class across the Indian sub-continent against British colonial rule. While the British responded by jailing the top BLPI leaders, class-conscious workers maintained their support for this great struggle.

The so-called native bourgeoisie, the forefathers of the leaders of all the capitalist parties in the sub-continent today, with the backing of the Stalinist Communist Party and its trade unions crawled before colonial masters, supported the imperialist war, helping to impose the burden of the war on the backs of workers and the poor. The Trotskyists fought to expose these lackeys of British colonialism and the treachery of Stalinists and trade union bureaucracies.

Today, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie is utterly subservient to international capital and the International Monetary Fund. With the backing of the trade union bureaucracy, the ruling class is implementing these brutal austerity measures. The same people are lining up with US imperialism’s war agenda, keeping workers in the dark, ready to sacrifice the lives of millions of people.

We call upon the workers in Sri Lanka to recall these great historical traditions, unite with their class brothers and sisters throughout South Asia and internationally to build an anti-war movement based on socialism. This is the only way to prevent a third world war and a nuclear conflagration.

Workers and youth must demand:

The publication of all secret agreements with the US such as ACAS and SOFA!

The abrogation of all defence agreements with the imperialist powers, and other countries, such as India!

Join and build an international anti-war movement based on socialist principles!

These demands are essential components of the revolutionary program being advanced by the SEP and Pani Wijesiriwardena, the party’s presidential candidate in this month’s election.



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