

Marxist Leninist

New Democracy

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Poems: S Krishnapriyan, S. Sivasegaram

Theoretical Organ of the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party

The Song of Liberation of the Hills

S Krishnapriyan

Early one morning while sunshine intensified
Victor Jara and I were having coffee
on the crowded market street of Santiago.

“It would have been nice
if Neruda was with us” I said.

“Yes” he agreed.

“Jara, my friend,
can you play for me
the song for the liberation of the hills
that you played when in prison?”

Jara played on his guitar mightier than a gun
his song for the liberation of the hills.
The song spread like a wildfire



Failures are mostly by error, accident or default. The string of failures of the government seems by design, with mistakes resembling those by President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the UPFA from 2010 to 2014.

Bungling by the UNP-led 'good governance' regime, its corruption, nepotism and highhandedness made people forgiving of UPFA's worse misdeeds. A notable attainment of the regime was the 19th Amendment (19A) that curtailed presidential powers, but fell short of eliminating the executive presidency. It denied Mahinda chance for a third presidential term. Clumsy handling of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings atop poor performance doomed the government which failed to protect Muslims from attacks by Sinhala Buddhist mobs using Easter bombings as pretext.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019, like Mahinda in 2010, had much going for him and could have worked to unite the country. But he, like Mahinda, preferred to please Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. He relied on his circle of chauvinistic allies like the rabidly anti-Muslim Bodhu Bala Sena and think-tanks like Viyathmaga comprising likeminded academics, professionals and businesspersons. They isolated him even from saner sections of the SLPP and, more worryingly, from independent scientific and technical personnel supportive of the government. Thus priorities got confused, with disastrous consequences.

Gotabaya's governance seems a bad replay of Mahinda's between 2010 and 2014. He was quick to protect members of the Rajapaksa family and political cronies charged with malpractice between 2010 and 2014 and to harass political opponents. Corrupt practices continued unabated. His Commission of Inquiry appointed in January 2020 to look into "political victimisation" had on it a retired Supreme Court judge as chair and another retired Supreme Court judge and a retired inspector general of police as members. Many doubted their neutrality and integrity. He went

the extra mile to pardon political allies detained for serious contempt of court and pending verdict in murder trials. Government meddling with law enforcement and the judicial process hit new heights.

The SLPP government acted fast to pass the 20th Amendment (20A) to the constitution, killing 19A and enhancing presidential powers. Uncertain of loyalty within its ranks, the government bought into opposition MPs to ensure a 2/3^{rds} majority for the passage of 20A. Executive Presidential power, a 2/3^{rds} majority, and rift ridden opposition parties could not, however, protect the support base of the government.

Bungling began with bravado about ability to control COVID-19. Harsh social restrictions were imposed to contain spread of infection, while power was abused to humiliate Muslims by requiring cremation of the remains of reported COVID-19 dead, despite scientific opinion rejecting claims of infection spreading from buried carcasses. A few 'scientists' and 'doctors' did back the government claim so that the farce went on for months. Even afterwards, the government hurt Muslim sentiments by insisting on isolated burial grounds. There is now the "One country, one law" campaign to deny Muslims their right to Muslim Law, which they had since the country had a modern legal system. In the name of internal security, it is proposed to ban the burqa and niqab for Muslim women. These ideas are likely to be enshrined in the proposed new constitution.

Placing an army commander in charge of prevention and control of COVID-19 led to heartburn among medical and health professionals, and clumsy management led to faster spread of infection than likely for an island state like Sri Lanka. Overreaction to the 'pandemic' swung from severe social restrictions until mid-2021 that failed to deliver to hard push for vaccination, now insisting under threat of penalty that people should have a booster dose of an American vaccine with risk of myocarditis.

The slowly recovering economy was hit by local and global overreaction to the pandemic. Tourism, a key component of the economy, was hurt

and overseas remittances were also affected. Shortfall in foreign currency reserves became an issue, but thoughtless import control to save foreign currency worsened matters. Steps to forcibly convert inward remittances to rupees and to restrict outward remittances, even from foreign currency accounts hurt confidence and inward remittances thereby. Restrictions on import caused shortages of essentials including medication and hurt industrial production chains. But the worst import policy blunder was to ban import of chemical fertilizers and agrochemicals on pretext of change to organic farming, ignoring scientific advice against overnight transition. Fertiliser and pesticide shortage hurt paddy and vegetable crops and led to soaring food prices. Sabotage of import of organic fertilizer by insiders caused loss by way of payment of damages to the Chinese supplier and hasty purchase of untested nitrogen fertilizer from India causing crop damage. Protests by cultivators across the country forced the government to drop the import ban, but too late to contain the damage. Plans to import rice to tide over near term shortage of rice will hurt cultivators whose yield will be low amid prices depressed by imports.

Amid all agony arrived serious environmental damage due to sinking of a burning ship, MV X-Press Pearl carrying inflammable and hazardous substances, let into territorial waters, knowing fully the risks. As reckless was import of unacceptably volatile liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), that caused gas leaks causing fatal domestic fire accidents and explosions. A national shortage of LPG followed for two months.

Persecution of Muslims continued amid economic and health pains. Most notorious was the harassment of Dr Shafi Shihabdeen, a gynaecologist of repute, on false charges of forcibly sterilizing Sinhalese women. Other Muslims detained under false charges included writers and lawyers. Dr Shafi was exonerated after 2½ years in December 2021. Some of the other detainees too were released recently for lack of evidence. Government meddling with the judicial process suffered a blow in February 2022 when the Supreme Court discharged the former CID chief and former

Defence Secretary detained without justification in connection with the Easter bombings.

The government is in a quandary and is yielding to pressure from the US as evident from a backdoor deal allowing a New York based company to acquire a 40% stake in the Yugadanavi Power Plant, and near monopoly to supply LNG. The JVP brought to light the shady deal, now before the Supreme Court. Politicizing of the Easter bombing inquiry miscarried and led to bad blood between the government and the Catholic Church spilling in the open. Squabbles among ruling partners threaten to deny the government of its steamroller 2/3rds majority.

The economic crisis put the government under pressure to seek IMF help, whose terms will have harsh implications for the country. Meanwhile the government scrambles for currency swaps with friendly governments.

The popularity of the government, the President mainly, has plunged of late while the government is torn between its chauvinist ideology and economic reality. Its big consolation is a pathetic opposition without an alternative to offer but desperate to score on the unpopularity of the government to capture votes at the next round of elections. The minority nationality parties are bankrupt. Muslim and Hill Country Tamil parties are at each other's throats for parliamentary seats and ministerial posts. Amid bitter rivalry, Tamil nationalists bend over backwards to please India and the US, pretending that they will deliver their goods.

Amid this farce the country faces a serious fascist threat besides a bid by US imperialism with Indian connivance to make the country an arena for its bid to curtail Chinese influence. The genuine left needs to awaken to the country's situation in the context of global reality, unite and arrive at a programme for social justice and economic liberation of the country. The key is to cast aside differences that obstruct principled unity for a common goal in the long term interest of the people.

Afghanistan: Progress Deterred

Deshabakthan

The Context

The US has got away with nearly all of its crimes against humanity. It starts by painting its target as absolute evil threatening the survival of the US, to put the minds of the public at ease about the crimes that the US plans to commit in their name. With this anticipatory spadework under the belt, the US carries out subversion, invasion and occupation of countries in the name of defending American lives, way of life and security, with an altruistic image as defender of democratic values, human rights and global peace for bonus, even at the cost of a cruel war.

US aggression follows a fairly consistent pattern irrespective of resistance within the target country. Afghanistan was presented to American public as a tribal backwater where despotic tribal leaders control clans and hold a diverse people together by recourse to an archaic religious ideology. British imperialist failure at conquest is explained in terms of the ferocity of a tribal people going back two millennia. Roots of the modern Afghan state may be traced to the 18th Century. To appreciate its painful recent past, one cannot rely on oversimplified pre-colonial history.

Regardless of hostile terrain and tribal defiance that made conquest hard and ruling over even harder, the notion of an invincible Afghan state is a myth. The geographic region covering the country was part of foreign empires with varying territorial boundaries. Afghanistan itself was an empire between 1747 and 1842, to which historians trace the present

state, with boundary as defined in late 19th Century in the context of its being a buffer state between imperial Britain and tsarist Russia.

British Colonial Ambitions

Britain fought three wars with Afghanistan. In the first (1839–42), it took Kabul in 1839, intervened in a succession dispute and installed former emir Shah Shujah in power against Emir Dost Mohammad Khan. But the occupying British Indian force was effectively annihilated during retreat from Kabul in 1842 amid surging public resistance to Shujah. Dost Mohammed returned from exile to resume rule.

The second war (1878–80) was during the rule of Sher Ali Khan (son of Dost Mohammad) amid rising Russian influence in the country, and comprised two campaigns. In the first, in November 1878, about 50 000 British forces, mostly Indians, invaded. Sher Ali Khan fled, and his successor Mohammad Yaqub Khan sued for peace, signed the Treaty of Gandamak in May 1879, and let Britain control the country's foreign affairs. Afghanistan ceded substantial territory before British withdrawal.

An uprising in Kabul led to the slaughter of the British envoy Louis Cavagnari and his staff in September 1879. British forces occupied Kabul by October. In December, a 10 000 strong force of Afghans attacked them unsuccessfully near Kabul. Suspected of complicity in the killing of Cavagnari and staff, Yaqub Khan was made to abdicate as emir in July 1880 in favour of Abdur Rahman Khan, who confirmed the Treaty of Gandamak. British colonial forces left after Britain achieved its aim of making the country a buffer between the Raj and the Russian Empire.

Rahman Khan, a cruel dictator with the patronage of the British colonial regime based in India, relied on a strong army, absolutely subservient officials, and an espionage network to control the country. In the 1980s he strategically displaced ethnic groups to avert uprisings, and harshly

punished any suspected of rebellious activities. In 1895–96 he ordered the invasion of Kafiristan and conversion of its people to Islam, and renamed the region Nuristan. The British turned a blind eye to his ruthlessness. Upon his death in October 1901, his son Habibullah Khan became emir and ruled until death in 1919.

The pragmatic Habibullah used Anglo–Russian rivalry to serve Afghan interests. He sided with Britain or Russia as appropriate, but kept Afghanistan neutral during WWI (1914–18) despite pressure from the Ottoman Empire which sided with Germany in the war. While he sought to play both sides to the conflict for the best outcome for Afghanistan at minimal cost, strongly anti-British tribal leaders acted to undermine British rule in India. With much of the British Indian Army abroad at war, Turkish agents inspired by Turkish success against the British stirred unrest among some tribal communities. Habibullah's opponents assassinated him in February 1919 for not siding with Turkey.

Habibullah's brother Nasrullah Khan proclaimed himself successor. But he was soon overthrown by Habibullah's third son Amanullah, backed by the Afghan army. Nasrullah, a leading conservative, was arrested and sentenced for life for Habibullah's murder. Amanullah pledged political reforms, rejected forced labour, tyranny and oppression, and wanted Afghanistan to be free and unbound by the Treaty of Gandamak. He took advantage of the rising civil unrest in India following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 1919, to wage the third Anglo–Afghan War. In May, Afghanistan invaded British India and fought a war-weary British Indian army. Armistice was declared in August.

Independent Afghanistan

In 1919 Amanullah sent an emissary to Moscow. In May 1921 the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship. The Soviet Union provided aid in cash, technology and military equipment. Despite Amanullah keeping

a distance with the Soviet Union, the British resented Afghan–Soviet amity. Inflamed by Amanullah’s support for Indian nationalists, Britain imposed restrictions on the transit of goods through India.

His impressive domestic reforms apart, Amanullah is most celebrated for his contribution to full and lasting independence for Afghanistan. His father-in-law and mentor Mahmoud Beg Tarzi, while encouraging his social and political reforms, warned him against haste. Amanullah perhaps misjudged the potential of his enemies when he set up modern schools for both boys and girls and rejected the strict archaic dress code for women. He increased trade with Europe and Asia and, in 1923, set in place the first constitution for Afghanistan that asserted equal rights and individual freedoms. His wife Soraya Tarzi actively supported his policy towards women. Modernization too faced resistance, and a reactionary uprising, the Khost rebellion, was suppressed in 1925.

Despite formal ending of control of Afghan foreign affairs, Britain waited for a chance to strike at King Amanullah. During Amanullah and Queen Soraya’s travel of Europe in 1927–28, Soraya was photographed without a veil in public, dining with men other than her husband, and letting the French President kiss her hand. The photographs were distributed by British agents inside Afghanistan to arouse conservatives resentful of Amanullah’s reforms. A civil war (November 1928 to October 1929) ensued and Habibullah Kalakani, a warlord backed by conservatives, seized power as Amanullah abdicated in January 1929. Having failed to regain power Amanullah went into permanent exile in May. Habibullah annulled Amanullah’s reforms, closed girls’ schools and revived the veil. Muhammad Nadir Khan, Amanullah's former minister of war, ousted him in October 1929 to become king in November with British support.

Nadir Khan was assassinated in 1933, and his son Muhammad Zahir Shah who succeeded him lasted as monarch until 1973, when he was

overthrown in a coup d'état by his former prime minister, Mohammed Daud Khan who replaced the monarchy (with a continuity of over 225 years since 1747) with a single-party republic in 1973.

The Process of Modernization

Amir Sher Ali's (1863–79) modernization efforts led to an administrative system, the country's first postal service, military reform and promotion of Pashto language. The second Anglo–Afghan war (1878–80) hampered further progress. Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), the British-backed tyrant who succeeded Sher Ali opened schools for members of the aristocracy, bureaucracy and their families, and selected army officers. Servants had enough education to serve the king loyally.

Modernization returned in the 20th Century with Amir Habibullah (1901–19) acting to modernize the educational system and offer free school education. The prestigious Habibia Lycee (founded 1903) which followed the curriculum of British Indian high schools produced the country's leading intellectuals. Some students studied in British India. Teachers were formally trained, textbooks were published for the modern schools, and there was much progress in social literacy and public discourse. A Department of Education established in 1913 took steps to modernize and broaden traditional school curriculum. It was King Amanullah, encouraged by his father-in-law Mahmud Tarzi, who laid the foundation for a national educational system in independent Afghanistan.

Tarzi, exiled by Abdur Rahman Khan in 1882, returned in 1905 under amnesty granted by Rahman Khan's son Habibullah (1901–18) to those exiled by his father. Having spent most of his years of exile between Damascus and Istanbul, Tarzi had a sound modern education as well as exposure to progressive and pan-Islamist ideologies. He believed that progressive interpretation of Islamic precepts would help to modernize Muslim countries. He also visioned advancement of education as an

engine for social reform. Known as the father of Afghan journalism, he spread his ideas through a forceful publishing campaign, and played a central role in the "Young Afghan" nationalist movement.

Amanullah was inspired by Ataturk's work to modernize Turkey, and his reforms owed much to the influence of Tarzi. Primary schools were started in major population centres including villages. Schools were also set up for nomads. Above all, education was free. The Amaniyya Lycee was established in 1922, aided by French curriculum and teachers, and followed a year later by Amani Lycee founded as a German high school. (The schools were renamed as Istiqlal Lycee and Nijat Lycee after Amanullah's overthrow in 1929.) The Ghazi Lycee founded in 1927 taught in English. Such efforts sought to elevate educational standards to match those in Turkey, Egypt and Europe.

Queen Soraya, daughter of Tarzi and wife of Amanullah, founded first Afghan women's journal Ershad-e-Niswan advocating gender equality. Other women's journals followed. These trends yielded the first girl's high school, Masturat, started in 1921 by Soraya. Amaniyya Lycee began co-education in the first and second grades in 1928. The impact of the reforms withstood obstacles placed by Nadir Khan (1929–33).

Nadir's son Muhammad Zahir Shah who succeeded Nadir in 1933 was encouraged by his cousin Muhammad Daud Khan to continue reforms. Girls' schools were re-established and a new university was founded. The second constitution with a democratic framework, adopted in 1931, granted women the right to vote. Urban women went to college, found jobs outside home, ran businesses, and some even entered politics.

Shah Mahmud, Prime Minister 1946–53, authorized free elections and a fairly free press in 1949. The 7th Parliament (1949–51) allowed criticism of government and traditional institutions, let rival political groups surface in society, and enacted liberal reforms including freedom of the press.

Even religious leaders backed Daud Khan to be made prime minister in 1953. Daud topped up educational reforms with far-reaching changes like making the veil voluntary and abolishing the purdah so that more women could join the labour force. He is best remembered, however, for the Helmand Valley project that boosted living standards in south west Afghanistan. But his rule was politically repressive and even intolerant.

Pashtuns comprise the biggest Afghan ethnic group and Daud as prime minister (1953–63) asserted historic Afghan claims to Pashtunistan, a part of Pakistan— thanks to the British imposed Afghan–British border (the Duran Line) that cut across Pashtoon territory leaving most of the Pashtuns in what became Pakistan. Given US alliance with Pakistan then, Daud Khan sought economic and military help from the Soviet Union, which later became Afghanistan’s major aid and trade partner. The West was further annoyed by Afghan refusal to side with it in the Cold War.

Daud’s stand on Pashtunistan strained ties with Pakistan, which in 1955 announced firming control over its tribal areas. Daud’s public criticism of Pakistan was followed by anti-Pakistan demonstrations and break of diplomatic ties. Diplomatic relations resumed in 1957, but friction lasted. The next crisis (1960–61) was when Pakistan protested border incursions. The conflict in 1960 was quelled by Pakistani air power, which again prevailed in the clashes of May and September 1961, after which Pakistan closed the Afghan border and formally severed diplomatic relations, with negative economic impact on both countries.

The US inherited UK’s role as external agency of reaction. But reforms persisted, almost without break between 1953 and 1992.

New Beginnings amid Big Power Rivalry

Notably, the US, in consideration of the US–Pakistani alliance frustrated Afghan moves in the 1950s to fortify ties with it. Afghanistan turned to

the Soviet Union for military help. The Soviet Union promptly provided jet airplanes, tanks, and artillery at a discounted price. The economic crisis due to border closure by Pakistan made Afghanistan rely even more on the Soviet Union to make it Afghanistan's main trading partner. Daud was forced to resign March 1963 amid resentment of his autocratic style, and the Pakistan border was reopened in May.

King Zahir Shah ratified a third constitution in 1964 with a constitutional monarchy with a 216-member House of the People and an 84-member House of the Elders. A third of the members of each were appointed by the king, elected directly by the people, and indirectly by provincial assemblies to be set up. Dari and Pashto were declared official languages.

Elections were held in 1965 and 1969. As conflicting ideologies strove for ascendancy, the political scene got polarised. Young activists, journalists, professors and military commanders influenced by Marxism stood in opposition to emergent Islamists desiring an Islamic state. Amid the growing political schism the king had five prime ministers between 1965 and 1972. His failure to act on key aspects of the constitution blocked implementation of the political processes pledged in the constitution, and led to tussles between the legislative and the executive.

The Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) founded in 1965 soon split into the People's (Khalq) and Banner (Parcham) parties. The conservative anti-left Islamic Society (Jam'iyyat-e Eslāmī) founded in 1971 was guided by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood's militant ideology.

The US and the Soviet Union competed to build infrastructure in the country to gain a foothold there to control central and south Asia. Influx of foreign aid made the government the main employer. Corruption became endemic and stage was set for a revolution.

With international aid declining and unemployment rising, a palace coup in 1973 ended the constitutional monarchy. Leftist military officers and

civil servants of the Parcham Party backed the coup. Many militant Islamists fled the country. Former premier Daud Khan was declared President of the government in July 1973. The constitution of 1964 was abolished, and the new constitution of 1976 announced the Republic of Afghanistan, which the Soviet Union promptly recognized. However, Daud Khan's socioeconomic reforms aimed at a shift from his socialist ideals. To curtail reliance on the Soviet Union and the US, Afghanistan strengthened ties with other Muslim countries. Besides, Daud Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, prime minister of Pakistan, reached tentative agreement on a solution to the Pashtunistan issue.

Despite promise of democratic government, Daud's rule was marked by a harsh land reform program and growing suppression, mainly of the factions of the PDPA. When he appointed a cabinet comprising cronies, including collateral relatives of the monarchy in March 1977, the PDPA factions reunited to oppose him, after 10 years of alienation. After many anti-government demonstrations, arrests of leftist leaders and political assassinations, insurgent troops led by the PDPA launched the *Saur Revolution* to overthrow Daud. While Daud's overthrow was pre-planned and the KGB probably knew of it, Soviet instigation of the PDPA to overthrow him is unlikely.

Assassination of a prominent PDPA member, Mir Akbar Khyber, on 17th April 1978, lit the fuse. The PDPA blamed Daud and the CIA for the death, and held a massive protest in Kabul. Daud reacted by arresting Taraki and Karmal, the leaders of the two factions. On 27th April, Khalq faction officers in Kabul mutinied. Fifty tanks, backed by air strikes by the Afghan air force, took the Presidential Palace. Daud and thirty members of his family were killed and buried in a secret mass grave.

The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was announced on 27th April 1978. On 30th April Nur Mohammad Taraki of the Khalq faction was

elected president of the Revolutionary Council, prime minister of the country, and secretary-general of the combined PDPA. Babrak Karmal, a Parcham leader, and Hafizullah Amin of the Khalq faction and organizer of the Saur Revolution were elected deputy prime ministers.

The constituency of the PDPA and the left as a whole was among the urban population, students, parts of ethnic minorities, women's rights groups, and people with Marxist leanings. The leaders of the new government insisted that they were not controlled by the Soviet Union and that their policies were based on nationalism, Islamic principles, socioeconomic justice, nonalignment in foreign affairs, and respect for all agreements and treaties signed by previous Afghan governments. The government launched land and marriage reform afresh besides building on reforms such as universal education and equal rights for women introduced by Daud. In 1980, besides Dari and Pashto which have been official languages since 1964, regional languages were granted official status in the regions where they were the language of the majority.

Costly Mistakes

Unity between the PDPA factions waned as the Khalq, with a power base in the military, became dominant. Karmal and key Parcham leaders were posted abroad as diplomats while potential foes of the government among Parcham members were systematically purged. The Taraki government worked to abolish usury, ensure gender equality, and implement land reform. But its language was rich in Marxist jargon to give the public the impression that the ruling Khalq was pro-Soviet.

Besides repression, the reforms themselves were resented by segments of the population to whom they seemed to challenge basic Afghan values. Yet, no major violent responses occurred until the Nuristan uprising in late summer 1978. Unconnected revolts occurred in all provinces, with

periodic explosions in Kabul and other cities. US economic aid ended with the killing of US Ambassador Adolph Dubs on 14th February 1979.

By 1978 a third of the army officers, more than half the air force and most professional and technical personnel were Soviet-trained. Despite close links between the PDPA and the Soviet Union, Afghan communists acted independently. Even with many politically initiated in the Soviet Union, and some KGB protégées, the KGB could not mend the rift in the PDPA.

Hasty to transform Afghanistan, the Khalq declared the equality of sexes, a minimum age for marriage (16 years for females and 18 for males), and restricted dowries so that girls had more choice. But deeply religious communities like the Pashtun saw the policies as an affront to religious and tribal tradition and attempt by the state to meddle in family matters.

The well-meant but badly executed land reform annoyed rural farmers comprising the majority of the population. State seizure of large land holdings alienated major local power brokers. The Khalq, having already alienated the Parcham, resorted to arrests of opponents of the reforms.

Resistance to the government soon followed the Saur Revolution. By September 1978 the government had lost control of parts of the country including Hazarajat in the central region with a strong Shia presence, the Tajik-dominated north-east, and Pashtun provinces bordering Pakistan.

Taraki's treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union in December 1978 allowed the entry of thousands of Soviet advisers to help the PDPA consolidate its power. Soviet military presence grew from 350 to over 3000 advisers and experts between the Saur Revolution and December 1979. That was besides several thousand elite paratroopers guarding the Bagram air base.

In short, three major blunders by the Khalq harmed the Saur Revolution:

(1) Practice of factionalism and putting personality above politics;

- (2) *Failure to win over the masses before implementing reforms;*
- (3) *Granting a foreign power a decisive role in the country's affairs.*

US Imperialist Initiative

When exactly the CIA got active in Afghanistan is uncertain. But US has been involved since the 1950s when Afghanistan undertook modernizing projects in its quest to become a modern nation-state, first under Zahir Shah and then under Daud Khan, in the thick of the Cold War, so that the Soviet Union and the US raced to build infrastructure. The US assisted with the costly irrigation and agriculture project in Helmand Valley in south Afghanistan. Its military role began much later.

Despite declared neutrality of Daud and later distancing from the Soviet Union, the US, resentful of his warmth towards Soviet Union, refused to help Afghanistan's military growth. When the Saur Revolution led to a left government, an angry US used Pakistani intelligence to funnel funds to some resistance groups to agitate against the government. That prompted the Soviet Union to increase its military presence. Its later invasion offered the US an excuse to overtly back the resistance.

The government was progressive, and boosted women's rights, enlarged literacy, and introduced agricultural reforms. But it was nevertheless repressive, and repression engendered sustainable pockets of resistance.

The mujahedeen was an amalgam of diverse groups that emerged in response to PDPA government's repression. Best organized of them was an Islamist faction led by persons steeped in jihadist ideology and known for horrific attacks on women. There were also those with an egalitarian vision of a representative Islamic republic. Ideology was no barrier to aligning against the government. Then there were revolutionary Marxist Leninists and leftists vexed by the attitude of the government towards

them. The bulk of the mujahedeen had no specific ideology but resented oppression and foreign intrusion. Soviet invasion swelled their numbers.

The CIA watched as the Saur Revolution unfolded, and covertly used Pakistan's military intelligence services (ISI) to access Afghan militants well before Soviet invasion in December 1979.

After the March 1979 uprising in Herat in west Afghanistan, local armed forces defected en masse to the insurgents. Although Soviet advisers and families were killed in the uprising, the Soviet Union resisted Taraki's plea for military intervention. Soviet response was an offer of more and better weapons, more advisers and experts, but not combat forces.

Soviet Military Intervention

The Afghan air force bombed Herat using Ilyushin Il-28 bombers, and an armoured force retook Herat in late March at the cost of thousands of lives. The calamity shamed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, a US-educated Marxist, became prime minister. The Soviet Union encouraged Taraki in a bid to oust Amin, who got wind of the planned coup and bested Taraki in a coup in September 1979, and expelled his allies from office despite Soviet appeal for intra-party unity. Taraki died in early October. Soviet leaders had doubts about the cause of death.

Amin — a key player in building the PDPA and in enrolling army and air force officers in the party, who played a leading role in the Saur Revolution — could not halt PDPA's failing grip on the countryside or the spate of army defections.

PDPA's mishandling of state power endangered the revolution. Amin's efforts to save his position by widening his internal support base and invoking the interest of Pakistan and the US in Afghan security irked the Soviet Union, which in turn erred seriously in resorting to military intervention, for which it prepared in Uzbekistan as early as September

1979. As the country slid further into unrest Soviet troops invaded on 24th December. Amin and many of his followers were killed on the 27th.

Babrak Karmal, who returned from the Soviet Union to replace Amin, was unpopular, and Soviet military presence was widely resented. Urban demonstrations and violence surged amid rising resistance in all regions. By early 1980, the mujahideen had mobilized as a powerful resistance to the Afghan army and the Soviet forces within Afghanistan as well as in Peshawar, Pakistan. A broad-based mujahideen attracted financial and military support from sources as diverse as the US, Europe, Arab states (notably Saudi Arabia), Pakistan (in the context of Pakistan's resentment of Indo-Soviet alliance) and China (in the context of the bitterness of China and Marxist Leninists towards the Soviet Union, which they considered to be a social imperialism rivalling US imperialism for global hegemony at the expense of the oppressed nations and people).

In May 1986 Najibullah, former head of secret police, replaced Karmal as secretary-general of the PDPA. By November, Karmal was relieved of all government and party posts. Friction between the Khalq and Parcham factions persisted. A national reconciliation initiative endorsed by the PDPA Politburo in September 1986 met with little response inside Afghanistan and was rejected by resistance leaders in Pakistan.

In November 1987 a new constitution let the country revert to name of Republic of Afghanistan and allowed other political parties to participate in government. Najibullah was elected president with enhanced powers. Despite a series of cease-fires, resistance to the Soviet presence continued, as refugees flooded into Pakistan and Iran. Morale was low in the Afghan army and desertions caused the number of troops to drop from over 100 000 in 1978 to a quarter of it by 1987. The resistance was always a step ahead of the Soviet forces whose withdrawal became inevitable.

The course of events led to an alliance of reactionaries funded and armed through the Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI) of the Pakistan's military. Pakistan under General Zia ul Haq (1978–88) exercised control over the various resistance and refugee organizations and parties that it supported, in effect two rival alliances, one mainly Islamic conservative and the other Islamic radical. By 1985, the two sides set apart their differences to form a coalition under a Supreme Council that made the key decisions. Zia ul Haq denied secular groups any role in the struggle and no aid went to Afghan nationalists as they could harbour historical territorial demands on Pakistan's Pashtoon regions.

The CIA-funded Afghan opposition fought the Soviet troops and Khalq allies inflicting heavy losses in men and material upon the Soviet Union which eventually decided to withdraw. It was a heavy blow to the Soviet economy as well as to Soviet international prestige. By mid 1980s, the Soviet Union knew that it had to pull out, but avoid loss of face and not seen to abandon a client state. The inevitable occurred under Gorbachev who assumed power in 1985. The Soviet Union and the United States signed as guarantors of the Geneva peace accord of April 1988, formally between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The US agreed to end arming the mujahedeen, and the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw, which it did with no real support for the government, while the US provided some funds, but without talking any responsibility.

Soviet troops completed withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 1989. The peace accord and Soviet troop withdrawal did not end hostilities, and fighting continued until 1992 with rebel forces confronting the government for control of Kabul. The mujahideen which had set up interim government in Pakistan rejected Najibullah's efforts at reconciliation, while disunity among partners made it hard for the mujahedeen to dislodge the PDPA government which endured for three more years.

Meantime a civil war emerged between key mujahedeen factions with conflicting visions for the country. The Islamic State that was set up in April 1992 became vulnerable to the power vacuum, while the prolonged civil war engendered the Taliban, an altogether new force comprising a generation born and bred in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. The Taliban intervened in the civil war and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in September 1996.

That was the tragic outcome super power rivalry in Afghanistan. It rapidly undid what a century of social reform and defiance of imperialism had achieved for the country.

A remark in summary

The experience of the Afghan left has lessons for the international left as a whole. By identification with the hegemonic Soviet revisionists, an Afghan left government faced tragic consequences for not just itself but for the entire left and the people of the country.

While revisionist opportunism should be guarded against, sectarianism also poses a serious threat. Afghan sectarianism was notorious among what was seen amid rival sections of the revisionist left.

It is also important for the revolutionary left to steer clear of parochial religious nationalist forces. The revolutionary left paid a heavy price for deficit of vigilance including the loss of life of leading cadres at the hands of the extremist Islamic Party, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Struggles against oppressive regimes can be hijacked by the far right and religious and nationalist extremists unless the revolutionary left keeps the initiative. It is particularly wise to keep clear of forces sponsored by US imperialism and its allies,

Afghanistan:

Imperialist Sums Gone Wrong

Deshabakthan

Humiliation in Vietnam taught little to the US on the might of mass rejection of alien aggression. Besides, it was then obsessed with its desire for global hegemony and proxy wars with the Soviet Union.

The US resented African independence struggles as they risked a Soviet if not Chinese footprint in sub-Saharan Africa, where South Africa was still a bastion of White supremacy. Lacking pretext to put down anti-colonial struggles, it counted on South Africa to keep communism at bay. It backed the apartheid regime's efforts to suppress African liberation struggles. But, thanks to Cuba, South Africa failed in its bid to oust the MPLA government in Angola in 1976. However, the US won Ethiopia after the fall of pro-Soviet President Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–91). But the post Cold War global policeman lost in Somalia (1992–93), after which it turned to Ethiopia to be its proxy to fight the al-Shabaab.

The US, dismayed by the failure of its client military regimes in South America in the 1960s, drew inspiration from the successful CIA-backed fascist coup in Chile in 1973 to return to callous meddling in Latin America and the Caribbean, Its proxies subverted seemingly anti-imperialist governments— except in Grenada which it invaded in 1983. Its next humiliation after its setback in Cuba in 1959 was in Nicaragua where the Sandinista overthrew its client dictator Somosa in 1979. The CIA fought a decade long proxy war using Contra rebels, which it lost,

but the Nicaraguan economy was wrecked. Election of Hugo Chavez as President of Venezuela in 1999 was an important turning point for Latin America, which has since elected several anti-imperialist governments.

In Asia, not long after Vietnam, it was humiliated in Lebanon (1982–84). Efforts to subvert the Islamic Republic of Iran, including support for Saddam Hussain in his war against Iran (1980–88), failed badly. But its hold on most Arab states is still strong amid growing public resentment.

The fall of the Soviet Union boosted its dominance in Europe. Besides enabling regime changes in Eastern Europe to shun socialism, it cut up Yugoslavia and used NATO to separate Bosnia and further divide Serbia. “Colour revolutions” boosted the influence of the US, albeit temporarily, in former Soviet republics of Europe and Central Asia.

The next lot of US-sponsored regime changes were in the Arab World, but success was hollow in Iraq and Libya. The US, however, manipulated the “Arab Spring” well to retain control over Egypt and Tunisia.

Soviet failure in Afghanistan was the biggest of US gains from all recent wars and proxy wars, but the net benefit of the Soviet exit was negative.

Sowing and Reaping

The US and Soviet errors in Afghanistan were similar but not identical. US Afghan policy between 1973 and 1988 was obsessed with Soviet influence there until Soviet withdrawal. The impact of internationalizing the conflict, however, took time to mature. While Afghanistan itself was of limited value to the US, the region as a whole was crucial to containing Soviet power. Such concerns were looked after earlier by Pakistan and Iran. Until the Shah fell in 1979 Iran offered the US access to military bases and intelligence facilities and Soviet–Afghan relations did not trouble the US the way they did colonial Britain which saw Afghanistan as a buffer against Russia.

Unlike Khrushchev's (1953–64) revisionism that led to ideological clash and rivalry with China for support among the international Marxist Left, Brezhnev's (1964–82) expansionism posed an existential threat to China. While ideology dominated politics during the Cultural Revolution (1966–69), Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the Sino-Soviet clash on the Zhenbao (Damansky) island on the Wusuli (Ussuri) river in March 1969 alerted China to a possible Soviet military attack, more imminent than a US attack, given the US–Soviet rivalry. To the US, smarting from its defeat in Vietnam, limiting Soviet influence in Asia was important. Opportunity came in Afghanistan.

The CIA–Islamist alliance began in 1951 with anti-communist broadcasts in Central Asia to incite Muslim communities against the Soviet state. In 1952, CIA arranged Aramco-funded printing of religious propaganda in Riyadh. In 1953, it bribed Islamists to enable the coup it organized jointly with the British MI-6 to oust Mohammed Mossadegh, Iran's lawfully elected premier. Notably, even when US–Arab relations took a dip after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, Saudi Arabia remained an exception.

CIA sought radical Islamists who could curb communism in the Arab world. It emulated the Nazis in using Muslims against the Soviet Union. West German intelligence hands with a Nazi past helped the CIA in its search for Muslims who could credibly counter Soviet propaganda in the Third World [<https://www.npr.org/2010/06/05/127500908/cia-fight-against-communism-bolsters-radical-islam>]. The CIA recruited many for its covert activities in the Islamic Center of Munich which served as the Muslim Brotherhood's centre in Germany.

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered US interest in Islamist militancy and activated its cynical use of Islam to battle communism. The idea that the fall of an autocratic pro-Soviet government could lead to a nominally democratic pro-US government was profoundly flawed, as the presumed

agents of change resented Western capitalism as much as they did Marxist socialism. But the CIA still retains its bond with the Islamists.

Refugee camps in Pakistan produced the most active mujahideen youth recruits. Thousands of Muslim volunteers largely from Arab countries joined in the 1980s. Osama bin Laden of Saudi Arabia was among them in his youth and gave from his personal wealth to fund high-profile mujahideen activities and built a reputation among colleagues.

The fighting, which drew on the concept of Holy War, comprised mostly hit-and-run attacks by teams from across Pakistan. However, a resolute team led by Ahmad Shah Massoud operating from the Panjanshir valley northeast of Kabul fought the Soviet troops effectively. Massoud had links with the Pakistan-based terrorist outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed. Other Pakistan-based parties included Abd al-Rasul Sayyaf's Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan, supported by foreign Islamic groups and parties headed by traditional religious leaders, and the highly pragmatic National Islamic Front led by Ahmad Gailani. But the biggest beneficiary of the largesse of Pakistan military's Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI) was a fiercely anti-American Islamic Party, one of two by such name and loyal to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. An ethnic Shiite group among the Hāzāra received strong support from Iran.

Western sponsors saw in mujahideen resistance only an opportunity to bog down the Soviet army and bleed the Soviet economy. Prospects for the mujahideen brightened by late 1986 when modern weapons arrived from outside. US-made shoulder-fired Stinger anti-aircraft missiles were used to combat Soviet military helicopter gunships and jet bombers, and they cost Soviet and Afghan air forces many casualties.

The US has since 1970 used Islamists following strong radical strains of Islam, like the anti-Nasser fundamentalists of Egypt, the Islamic Jihad militant Shiite fundamentalists of Iran, and the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia

to reassert itself in the Middle East. It is thus likely that Zia-ul-Haq was encouraged by the US to back Islamic fundamentalists. Besides, during Soviet presence in Afghanistan, US officials in Pakistan relied more on Pakistani generals than on the Foreign Ministry. So the ISI could override the views of Pakistan's Foreign Ministry and convince US officials that Hekmatyar's Hizb-i Islami was the most useful. The CIA turned a blind eye to ISI's issuing of CIA-procured weapons to radical Islamists. Secular Pakistanis rightly feared that aiding Afghan fundamentalists would bolster conservative Islamists in Pakistan. All of this and reliance on pro-Western sources helped the US to lose touch with ground reality.

The Pillars of US Failure

When the US interfered in 1978, Afghanistan had hope and a progressive government worked to advance women's rights, literacy and place in society. But rural areas were still mostly illiterate and resentful of secular thought. The US put this backwardness to use to subvert the government and let religious fighters fight its battle with the Soviet Union at the expense of Afghanistan.

As Najibullah's government was more popular than its predecessor despite pursuing the same policy even after Soviet withdrawal in early 1989, the army held its own until US-backed radical Islamist mujahideen took over in 1992.

Bad sums: The US had its way in the mid-1990s, but without the desired outcome. The radical leaders who entered Kabul turned on each other, and Afghan refugees fled in flocks to Iran and Pakistan. The Taliban, a major force in Afghan politics when the PDPA government fell, drove out the Northern Alliance — a loose alliance primarily of Pashtun Islamic groups and close ally of the US — which seized Kabul in 1992. The Northern Alliance perished in 1993 and later revived in 1996 to win control of hardly ten per cent of Afghan territory between 1999 and 2001.

The Taliban, born of mujahideen groups and religious seminaries in Pakistan and Afghanistan, meanwhile, took Kandahar, pledging social order and security, which it fulfilled with its harsh version of Islam.

Osama bin Laden, founder of al Qaeda and patron of mujahideen during Soviet presence, arrived in Afghanistan in 1994 after expulsion from Sudan. The Taliban welcomed him and let him set up his al Qaeda unit in Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban who took Kabul in September 1996 captured former president Najibullah from the UN compound where he sheltered since 1992, killed him and hanged the body from a lamppost. ["The Monsters that CIA Bred and Fed" <https://thegrayzone.com/tag/cia/>]

The Taliban, who by 1998 controlled most of Afghanistan, forbade work for most women and education for girls, and ruled harshly using means including beatings, amputations and public executions. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates formally recognized the regime.

Targeting Taliban: Based on information that bin Laden masterminded the bombings of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in August 1998, the US launched cruise missiles at suspected sites of bin Laden's bases in Khost, thus arrogating to itself the right to strike at will within Afghanistan even before it waged its 'War on Terrorism'.

Taliban's reckless deeds, including the blowing up of the 1500 year old colossal Buddha statues in Bamiyan in March 2001, were partly owing to its global political isolation and poor diplomacy. Taliban first annoyed the US by killing in early September its loyalist Ahmad Shah Massoud — the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance leader, a beneficiary of CIA largesse during Ronald Reagan's presidency and the last major commander to resist Taliban's allies in north Afghanistan — and again by refusing to hand over bin Laden whom the US suspected had instigated the 11th September (9/11) terrorist attack, in the aftermath of which, the US miscalculated to intervene again, this time to topple the Taliban.

Taking advantage of the wave of sympathy following the 9/11 attack, the US under George W Bush launched “Operation Enduring Freedom” — a bombing campaign against the Taliban — and cobbled up a coalition to continue its war. The US bulldozed supportive resolutions through the UN Security Council, and a NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established under UN mandate.

Taliban’s resistance fell under sustained bombing of Taliban positions by US missiles and aircraft. The Taliban fled south as the US-backed Afghan Northern Alliance entered Kabul in November 2001. Under US pressure, a UN-brokered deal was made between the Northern Alliance and leaders opposed to the Taliban, and in December Hamid Karzai became interim president. The deal also let some warlords alongside members of the Northern Alliance become cabinet ministers, provincial governors, and military commanders. Northern Alliance regional leaders remained powerful in the north, outside Kabul.

Not knowing the enemy: When the US waged war on Iraq in 2003 on false pretext of possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), it had to slightly ease war efforts in Afghanistan. That gave some respite for the Taliban and allies. The US declared an end to “major combat activity” in 2003. Hamid Karzai was elected President in 2004. Elections in 2005 let members of the Northern Alliance as well as old warlords and faction leaders enter parliament.

As Taliban seized territory in the south, NATO’s ISAF took command there from the US in 2006. This was most challenging to the NATO. Taliban’s fresh territorial gains had an impact on territory controlled by ISAF in the south, and Bush accepted the request of the US command in Afghanistan for more manpower in 2008, The Afghan government, however, held together and Karzai was re-elected in 2009. There were 48 500 US troops in Afghanistan by mid-2008. The trend lasted under

Barack Obama, elected President on a pledge to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. US troops surged to about 68 000 in his first months as president in 2009 to reach nearly 100 000 in December. Obama also set a deadline to reduce the number of US forces US in 2011.

In 2012 NATO announced withdrawal of combat troops and transfer of control of operations to Afghan forces by end of 2014 when the US and NATO forces formally cease combat missions. Afghan army accepted security operations from NATO forces in 2013, and Obama declared plans for peace talks with the Taliban. Ashraf Ghani succeeded Karzai as Afghan president after a disputed election in 2014, so that his rival Abdullah Abdullah was named Chief Executive. But peace was elusive.

In September 2014 the Afghan government entered into bilateral security accords with the US and with NATO so that only 12,500 foreign soldiers of whom 9,800 are Americans will be left when the NATO combat mission ceases in 2014. The NATO mission was replaced by an assistance mission dubbed, “Resolute Support” to aid Afghan forces. But security deteriorated as Taliban stepped up attacks on Afghan and US forces and took more territory. Meantime, an Afghan ISIS branch also emerged as ISIS gained in Iraq and Syria.

From early 2015, US troops had two missions: operations against al-Qaeda and training Afghan forces. Yet, when the Afghan army fought its opponents in October 2015, a US air raid bombed a Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) hospital in northern Kunduz province, killing 42 including 24 patients and 14 members of MSF.

In July 2016, Obama slowed US troop withdrawal, with 8 400 US troops remaining beyond 2016. With rising loss of life of Afghan security forces during 2016, newly elected President Trump approved further troop deployment adding 3 000 troops to make the total close to 14 000.

Taliban and Afghan government representatives met in Qatar in 2015 and agreed to continue peace talks. But the government cynically granted immunity in 2016 to former mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, known as the "butcher of Kabul" during the civil war. Thus fighting went into 2017 with attacks attributed to the Taliban and ISIS shaking the country. Data from United Nations, UNAMA, "Protection of Civilians" Annual Reports said that relaxation of rules of engagement for airstrikes in 2017 led to a massive rise in civilian casualties by air strikes.

Crossing Borders: The war for much of its duration spilled into Pakistan breaching Pakistan's sovereignty. The US used unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) to back forces in hot pursuit of the Taliban and other insurgents near the border to limit their ability to operate in Afghanistan.

US sources [<http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones>] estimate civilian deaths in just over 200 drone strikes in Pakistan at 1200 to 1700 civilians and 870 to 1280 'militants'. These make a small fraction of the admitted 9000 or so civilian casualties in Pakistan. Estimated total war deaths in Afghanistan and Pakistan exceed 170 000 and 65 000, respectively, with civilians at around 30% of the war dead in Afghanistan and 13% in Pakistan whereas the US and allies lost less than 5000 soldiers and contractors. The US also attacked the militants near the border to weaken their operations in Afghanistan and in suspected training camps in tribal Waziristan. At times the US assisted Pakistani forces against Pakistani Taliban. One of the worst violations in political and diplomatic terms was the killing in May 2011 of Osama bin Laden inside Pakistan.

War Crimes of US War on Terrorism: The US committed horrible war crimes in its 20-year war in Afghanistan, mostly denied or covered up by its Government and Armed Forces. The Brown University 'Costs of War' project estimated a war toll of 46 000 Afghan civilians. The London-based Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) reported in May 2021, that of 3 977

victims of US-led airstrikes in 2016–20, 1 598 were children. Thus, killing by an errant drone on 29th August 2021 was not the first such event.

The US cunningly shields criminals and treats them leniently even when evidence of wrongdoing stares in its face. In September 2020 the US arrogantly imposed sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) officials for initiating investigation into US war atrocities in Afghanistan.

The US was never truthful about its crimes against the Afghan people. Its war crimes, brought to light often by whistle blowers, include summary execution of captured combatants, mistreatment of prisoners during interrogation, use of torture, and violence against civilians and non-combatants. Several countries have been bullied to allow unlawful detention and torture of suspects on their soils by US officers. Much of US war crimes remain behind walls of secrecy.

Path to a Pathetic End

President Trump seemed more committed than Obama on pulling out, and named Zalmay Khalilzad, former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, as special representative to negotiate with the Taliban. But violent attacks surged in Kabul, for which ISIS claimed credit. Talks between US and Taliban delegations in Doha, Qatar on 28th January 2020 led to agreement in principle to a framework for eventual US withdrawal, and the parties signed a peace deal on 29th February 2020 for US troops to withdraw by 1st May 2021, in exchange for Taliban ceasing attacks against US forces and cutting ties with al-Qaeda. Terms were agreed for US troop withdrawal and Taliban's ending of attacks on Americans. But the Doha talks of September between the Taliban and the Afghan government stalled, never to resume seriously.

Ghani became president in February 2020 after disputed election with Abdullah as head of the government's peace negotiating committee.

In the final days of Trump in office US forces in Afghanistan had been reduced to 2500. The chaotic presidential election in the US and its aftermath meant that transition from Donald Trump to Joe Biden was not smooth. Thus follow-up was poor on details of withdrawal of US troops which also had implications for those who served the US and allied forces in the war and therefore seen as enemy by the Taliban.

Biden declared on 14th April 2021 that he will continue with Trump's withdrawal agreement, but pushed back the deadline for departure of US troops to 11th September 2021— the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. On 8th July, however, just after the US forces secretly slipped out from the Bagram Airfield, their largest military installation in Afghanistan, Biden announced complete withdrawal of US troops by 31st August. Advance by the Taliban accelerated and by 6th August at least 17 more government held provinces fell to the Taliban. On 15th August Taliban took Kabul with minimal resistance and President Ghani fled the country. Western intelligence agencies were stunned by the speed of the fall of the Afghan government and by the way US allies scrambled to evacuate citizens and vulnerable Afghans via Kabul airport, still under US military control.

For pandemonium, exit from Kabul resembled that from Saigon on 1st May 1975. Part of the reason was that neither the US nor the government were ready for the speed of northward advance of the Taliban. Amid the chaos, on 26th August a suicide bomb outside the international airport, claimed by ISIS-K, the Afghan affiliate of IS killed 200 Afghans and 13 US soldiers, making it one of the deadliest days for US forces since entering Afghanistan. The US compounded the crisis with a drone strike aimed at suspected ISIS-K suicide bombers on the 29th soon after the fall of Kabul to Taliban, but killed an Afghan family of ten. On the 30th the US Central Command announced the departure of its last aircraft. While the Taliban celebrated many Afghans — especially those who wanted to leave but could not — faced painful uncertainty.

The US hoped that the Northern Alliance or its remnants would keep Taliban out of Panjshir Valley. But the Western media hype that the National Resistance Front led by Ahmed Massoud will lead resistance to Taliban vanished into thin air when Massoud fled to Tajikistan as Taliban took control of the Panjshir Valley on 6th September.

Outlook for Afghanistan

The US is most unforgiving of opponents who win even a battle against it, and its attitude since withdrawal has been to deny recognition to the Taliban government, withhold Afghan assets in banks over which it has authority, and block aid or relief to address the humanitarian crises for which the US is mostly responsible, let alone rebuild the economy

A big concern for the US is that the countries that have come forward to help post-war Afghanistan are either its rivals (China and Russia), or defiant clients (Turkey and Pakistan) or declared foes (Iran). Much remains to resolve about the country's wealth stolen by former president Ashraf Ghani and associates with the knowledge of the US. But the US will not lift a finger, as it wishes a financial crisis and consequent social disorder that will give it another chance to meddle.

Western media pundits will ignore that it was the US that cynically and short-sightedly meddled in Afghanistan and helped the creation and growth of extremist and sectarian forces that got out of control to cause chaos in the country and thrive thereby. They will ignore how the US helped to import the Arab mujahedeen from among Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and extremists from Saudi Arabia and Yemen who became the 'al Qaida'. They will blame the ISI of Pakistan for cultivating foreign fighters to join the organized Islamist groups of the mujahedeen. They will not concede the role of the US in plunging the country into civil war to the joy of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, whom the US funded, armed and even trained.

The US has repeatedly made horrific blunders: Its move to bolster the mujahedeen by bringing in foreign fighters (the Arab mujahedeen) from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and from Yemen and Saudi Arabia and funnelling money through ISI and its blind acceptance of ISI's judgment pushed Afghanistan into a civil war out which al Qaeda and the Taliban emerged and thrived. Al Qaeda and IS are outcomes of thoughtless meddling by the US in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and they have gone to affect much of northern and western Africa.

One may wonder how and why the US entices the worst imaginable anti-social forces like corrupt politicians, religious fanatics and mercenaries to serve it or why its allies are the worst reactionaries of any society or why it goes out of its way to protect criminals who turn against it eventually. (It compelled Egypt to release, among other arrested Islamists, Ayman al Zawahiri who later became be the second-in-command of al Qaeda.) Such conduct seems an inalienable aspect of US imperialism.

On the other hand, there are doubts about the true nature of the hostility between the US and Islamist outfits like IS and al Qaeda. There is evidence of instances of collusion that makes one wonder if the US War on Terrorism was mostly theatre meant for public consumption.

What the future holds for Afghanistan is uncertain. The US desires chaos while China, Russia and Iran wish stability. How Taliban would respond to external forces including IS will decide its ability to come to terms with forces of modernity than cannot simply be wished out of Afghanistan.

A Sane Voice from Afghanistan

The Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan on 23rd August 2021 welcomed the departure of the US-led invaders and the fall of the puppet regime, and rejected the hollow claim that the US imperialist aim was to defeat al Qaeda, which was fulfilled by Osama's death in 2011.

The statement laid the blame US imperialism for the 40 years of crisis and chaos, and drew attention to the scale of corruption of the US clients who ran the country and fought on the side of the invaders. It noted the reluctance of most of the recruits to the armed forces to fight and die for a bourgeois comprador class living like pharaohs that controlled the state, and observed that Taliban's rapid victory was made possible by the hollowness and rotteness of the puppet regime.

The statement was free of illusions about the Taliban, and noted that reactionary foreign powers like Pakistan that helped it to win the war, would dictate their form of political system on the country. It warned of the prospect of internal friction within Taliban arising from the need to strike a balance between the ideological commitment to re-establishing the Islamic Emirate and achieving international recognition. It took note of evidence of "political flexibility and the willingness to accommodate imperialists' interests and other forces of the ruling classes, possibly sharing political power with them".

Its assessment is that the Taliban has a monopoly on violence and the emerging political system, regardless of name, would be a Taliban dominated theocracy— a feudal bourgeois comprador class dictatorship implemented with the whip of authority that will enhance the social oppression of women, religious, and national minorities.

The statement called on the revolutionary camp to brace for the struggle ahead, with the principal contradiction being between the people of Afghanistan and the feudal bourgeois comprador classes and their imperialist masters. It also alerted revolutionaries to the reality that, despite internal contradictions, the new emerging semi-feudal/semi-colonial regime would be "subservient to Russian imperialists and Chinese social imperialists", while US imperialism and allies would continue to interfere in the affairs of the country and the region.

The statement summed up that the new emerging regime will be a lethal cocktail of class, gender, and national oppression, that the masses hate the Taliban and many people seek to get out of their authority, and that the Taliban's reactionary nature will further alienate the masses. It called upon the revolutionary camp to brace for coming challenges and opportunities in offering a revolutionary alternative.

A Concluding Remark

It will only be when Afghanistan is free of alien hegemony of any kind that conditions will emerge for a working class led state that will be the vanguard of socialist revolution. Current reality calls for a balanced approach to confront the reactionary Taliban while keeping out US imperialism and allies itching to deprive Afghanistan of resources to rebuild itself, including the country's own funds held by US banks and denied to the people of Afghanistan on pretext of punishing the Taliban.

Thus to reject assistance from Afghanistan's neighbours, including China and Russia, to rebuild the Afghan economy by attributing imperialist motives will merely serve the purpose of US imperialism. But that is not to throw caution to the wind in accepting any assistance. The left and democratic forces need to take stands that will appeal to the public as both principled and constructive, through critical assessment of all development projects and foreign assistance with a view to ensure an enduring self-reliant national economy for Afghanistan.

Inciting Sinophobia

US Mischief

Deshabakthan

From Underdog to Equal

Western capitalist powers will like to impede China on all fronts, even by marshalling lies and distortions in a ghastly information war. Its obliging media monopoly would most willingly fulfil that mission.

Foul mouthing socialism and communism was a joyful pastime of the West since the October Revolution and has survived the fall of the Soviet Union. China's 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' (in fact state-led capitalism) was the heaviest blow that the socialist cause endured since Khrushchev's dismantled socialism in the Soviet Union. His fall in 1964 rather than restore socialism made the Soviet Union expansionist. Soviet rivalry with US imperialism was about dominance over the Third World so that many Marxist Leninists called it social imperialism.

Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Sino-Soviet border clash of 1969 under Brezhnev persuaded China that the Soviet Union was an existential threat. Meanwhile, growing Soviet military might and rising Soviet influence in Asia and Africa bothered US imperialism.

Partly in view of the growing recognition of China by UN member states and partly to arrest growing Soviet global influence, the US moderated its hostility to China since China won its due place in the UN in 1971. But formal diplomatic relations took until 1979, with the US accepting the "One China" principle, i.e. that Taiwan was part of China.

Notably, both US and China accepted the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia to defend it against Vietnamese occupation (December 1978 to September 1989, longer than Soviet military presence in Afghanistan). The US seemed to act out of spite against Vietnam more than to resist Soviet influence in Asia. Soviet dominance in Vietnam troubled China and contributed to the brief border war in 1979. Despite shared interest in containing Soviet expansion, the US missed no chance to hurt China politically. Sino–Soviet Union relations thawed since early 1982 (before Brezhnev’s death later that year). But Russia and China got close as capitalist powers only after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Anti-communism to Sinophobia

The US was deceitful when it conceded that the People’s Republic was the sole legitimate government of all China. In order to keep its grip on Taiwan it encouraged independence activists. A pro-independence candidate won the first free presidential election in Taiwan in 1996. Such hypocrisy was seen on Tibet: the Dalai Lama was treated like a potential head of state, amid Chinese protest. The US also fostered tension during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests to shame China. However, China was called a threat to the US or to world peace only this century.

NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 during its war on Serbia. Chinese people took strong exception to this strange ‘accident’. But the government tactfully accepted US–NATO apologies. China–US trade grew after the US–China Relations Act of 2000. China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and by 2006 was the biggest trade partner of the US, after Canada. China’s trade with the US grew owing to the decline of the latter’s industrial production, and economic reality implied further growth. But US militarism persisted.

In April 2001 a US reconnaissance plane made an emergency landing on Hainan Island after collision with a Chinese fighter and the 24

member crew was detained. The face-off eased and the crew was freed, only after a US apology for the death of a Chinese pilot.

Even after 2005 when the US realized China's potential as a mediator between the US and states distrustful of the US like Iran, North Korea and Sudan, its China policy remained one of political containment.

China, encircled by US military bases and aware that the US will use any excuse to reinforce encirclement, raised its 2007 military budget by 18% as against earlier increases of nearly 15%, justifying the rise based on need to modernise defence, disregarding US objections.

Yet, the economies became even more interdependent. In 2008, China was the prime foreign lender to a US, choked by its worst post-WWII financial crisis. When China overtook Japan in 2010 to become the second largest economy, likely to overtake the US as the biggest by around 2030, the growing US-China trade imbalance caused alarm.

As China's rise impeded US hopes for total global dominance, the US began to assert itself in Asia Pacific. Obama called himself the "first Pacific president" in 2009 when declaring revived US interest in multilateral institutions of the region. US trade deficit with China kept widening even as Obama announced in 2012 his assertive policy of 'Pivot to Asia' (a phrase borrowed from Hillary Clinton) in East and South East Asia, following the Trans-Pacific Partnership (a free trade deal between the US and eight other nations).

China's Changing Global Role

In November 2012 the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China announced significant leadership changes, with Xi Jinping at the helm of the Party and the state. Xi set in motion programmes for the "rejuvenation" of China that added to worries of the US. China's growing economic partnerships in Asian and Africa have stunned the

US, struggling to cope with China's economic growth. Western media decry a fictitious Chinese debt trap, while the US is unable to prove charges of theft of intellectual property (really technology transfer by consent as precondition to set up production in China) and unfair trade practices. But these themes recur in their attacks on China.

Obama and Xi met informally in July 2013 and agreed on better cooperation on key bilateral, regional and global issues, but reality was otherwise. Desperate for scapegoats to explain its economic failure, the US piled charges of theft of information and intellectual property, without evidence of Chinese state involvement, amid mounting evidence of hacking by US agencies at home and abroad to gather personal, business, industrial and technological information.

In May 2015 the US Secretary of Defence accused China of placing military equipment on artificial islands, demanded an end to land reclamation in the South China Sea, and declared US opposition to "further militarization" of the "disputed territory" despite China's assertion that the work was for civilian purposes.

Escalation of Tension

President Trump set US-China relations on a shaky start in February 2017 by contesting the four decades old One-China Policy of the US. Though he endorsed the policy later, his conduct presaged US policy to come. A two-day summit in April 2017 between Trump and Xi with bilateral trade and North Korea as agenda items indicated some improvement, and the ten-part agreement signed in mid-May agreed expansion of trade in products and services, barring contentious trade issues like aluminium and steel.

Trump surprised China in March 2018 with tariffs on over \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports based on alleged theft of US technology

and intellectual property by China. Some Chinese investments faced constraints besides existing tariffs. China responded with tariffs on several US products in early April. In July the US added tariffs comprising 25% import tax on \$34 billion worth of Chinese industrial products and China imposed tariffs on food products worth \$34 billion. The US justified its move by charging China of swindling the US by exploiting free trade rules to hurt US firms in China. China called it “trade bullying” that could threaten global market stability.

Vice President Pence’s assertion in October that the US will compete more than cooperate and use tariffs to combat China’s “economic aggression” was in bad faith. He also accused China of ‘military aggression’ in the South China Sea, stealing intellectual property, censorship and religious persecution, and interfering in US elections.

US pushed Canada to arrest Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer of China’s telecom giant Huawei, in December 2018 for extradition to the US to face charges of fraud and flouting sanctions against Iran. China in response detained two Canadians for undermining national security. US officials called the incident apolitical, but Trump claimed that it will be a lever in US–China trade talks. US bullying bit the dust when after 33 months of litigation Canada released Meng in September 2011 and China’s released the Canadians in return.

As China outdid the US in key sectors of ICT and automation, the US resorted to obstruction. In March 2019, it forbade the use of Huawei equipment by federal agencies and urged others to avoid Huawei in building 5G networks, claiming that Huawei could spy for China.

Following failure of trade talks with China, the US raised tariffs from 10 to 25% on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods in May 2019. China hit back with plans to raise tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US goods. China dismissed Trump’s claim that tariffs will lead to a deal

favourable to the US. The US reacted by banning US companies from using foreign telecom gear that could threaten national security. The US Commerce Department blacklisted Huawei in May. When China, in response, let the Renminbi weaken in August, the US designated China a 'currency manipulator' for the first time since 1994. China warned that such designation will trigger financial market turmoil.

The US dropped China's designation as 'currency manipulator' and President Trump and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He agreed in mid-January 2020 that the US would lift some tariffs and China would buy a further \$200 billion worth of US goods over two years and enforce intellectual property protection. While most tariffs remained, China's extensive subsidies, an old concern of the US, were not referred to.

Wielding the Democratic Rights Weapon

Since November 2019 the US has passed laws targeting individuals it called violators of human rights in Hong Kong to encourage protest. That inspired anti-China militancy and demands for 'independence'. Protests begot chaos and China acted to restore order, using existing laws. Later in 2021 it passed new laws to pre-empt recurrence of such events by denying secessionists room in the Hong Kong legislature. That saw the end of US backed mischief in Hong Kong.

The Virus and the Blame Game

Although informed of the fast spread of COVID-19 very early in 2020, the US failed to inform its public of the real risks or develop plans to minimise harm. It chose instead to blame China. In late January, the US claimed that the virus escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan and Trump deceitfully called the virus a Chinese virus and blamed the Chinese government for its spread. While the Chinese government was guarded in its response, a junior foreign ministry official hinted

that the virus originated in the US. By April, the acrimony subdued amid recognition of need to cooperate. But Trump who heaped praise on China in January for efficient control of COVID-19 turned on the WHO and froze US funding to the WHO in April for siding with China and criticising US handling of COVID-19.

The laboratory leak theory was cheap US propaganda to fault China not only as the source of the virus but also its creator. It helped to divert public criticism of US government failure to control infection and mortality. Diplomatic ties were strained. In March 2020 the US limited the number of journalists from Chinese state-run media, and China responded in kind, leading to closures of consulates. The US even accused Chinese hackers of stealing COVID-19 vaccine research.

Trump was desperate to pin the blame on China for creating the COVID-19 virus. His regime tried hard but failed to fiddle the report of the WHO investigation report which came in early 2021 dismissing the China origin theory. Efforts to blame China went on under Biden, with scant evidence and few takers amid continuing failure to control infection under his presidency.

Trump's legacy as a Sinophobe hit its peak in his last weeks in office. In December 2021, the Director of National Intelligence named China "the greatest threat to America today". The Commerce Department blacklisted dozens of companies including China's biggest chipmaker SMIC. The State Department tightened visa rules for members of the Communist Party of China in the name of human rights. Investment was banned in Chinese companies considered to have ties to the People's Liberation Army. On 20th January 2021, Trump's last day as President, Secretary of State Pompeo asserted that China was committing crimes against humanity and genocide against Uighurs.

Hate-driven Human Rights

China had little better to expect from Joe Biden who used the term genocide while campaigning and raised concerns about abuses in his first call as president with Xi. Under Trump China faced economic attack based mostly on US–China trade issues and to obstruct technological rivals (mainly Huawei) on pretext of ‘national security’. Human rights issues were first used for economic attack in May 2020 by slapping sanctions on 33 technology-related companies— nine for alleged roles in human rights abuse in Xinjiang. Alleged use of ‘forced labour’ of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities was invoked in July to selectively sanction eleven textile companies.

Charges of human rights violation in Xinjiang rely on dubious data from US-backed groups like the “East Turkestan Islamic Movement” (once dubbed a terrorist group in the US). The narrative of repression of Uighurs and the other Muslim minorities also uses baseless or wildly inflated charges by Adrian Zenz, an anti-communist fanatic. [<https://thegrayzone.com/2021/02/18/us-media-reports-chinese-genocide-relied-on-fraudulent-far-right-researcher/>]

The US has effectively banned cotton products from Xinjiang, while the EU issued its sanctions against Beijing in March 2021, its first since 1989. A transatlantic media campaign accusing China of gross human rights violations went into full steam to build public support at home and abroad in support of the sanctions.

Notably, the onslaught on China by US and allies for alleged human rights abuse, forced labour and ‘genocide’ in Xinjiang began in 2017, after Xinjiang overcame US backed terrorism to be free of the terrorist violence seen during 1990–2016, with terrorism at its peak in 2009 following deadly attacks in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

China's control of terrorism, even in direct armed conflict, was unlike the methods of the US' "war against terrorism" commencing 2001.

In March 2021 China hit where it hurt by removing from its major e-commerce platforms products of companies refusing to buy Xinjiang cotton so that once thriving brand names faced a market backlash.

The US and UK planned a massive boycott of the Winter Olympics in February 2022 in China using alleged human-rights abuses as pretext. But competitors and sponsors would not buy it. To save face, US and seven allies announced a diplomatic boycott. China took the wind out of their sails by not inviting their government delegates.

In June 2021 the US Senate passed legislation to counter and compete with China. China introduced an anti-sanctions law for retaliation against various foreign sanctions. US pressure on the International Olympic Committee failed to block the supply of staff uniforms for Tokyo Olympics by a Chinese company using Xinjiang cotton. At the end of 2021, US electric car maker Tesla announced opening a showroom in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, defying US sanctions.

Since June 2021 the US banned the use of key solar panel material, alleging forced labour in Xinjiang, to hurt Chinese exports. In July it blacklisted companies it suspected of link with human rights abuses there. It passed a bill that could ban goods from Xinjiang by presuming forced labour unless certified otherwise by US authorities. They make part of the new China policy of the US, as put across by Secretary of State Pompeo in July 2021 asking Chinese citizens and democracies worldwide to urge China to mend its ways to obey the international order.

Persuaded by the US the EU in November 2021 announced a ban on forced labour products, clearly directed at China. The EU, however, did not go so far as to place the onus on companies associated with Xinjiang to establish that there is no forced labour component in their products.

Dancing to the Tune of the US

G7: The G7 comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and US, supposedly the leading capitalist economies, has been an ineffective alliance to deal with global issues. Yet it suffers the illusion of being a grand alliance that bears responsibility for the planet. To the G7 China is the biggest tyrant, even bigger than Russia not long ago.

NATO: The NATO which was founded in the context of the Cold War between the US and its transatlantic allies had lost its last justification for existence after the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, and in fact the Warsaw Pact months earlier. It serves only one serious purpose, namely bullying Russia into submission to the US. Now it is ruffling its feathers about the threat posed by the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and Chinese advances in information and communication technologies (ICT).

The US also uses other instruments to encircle Russia and China. Newly announced military alliances also indicate US suspicions of its allies, especially after the US-led alliance bit the dust in Afghanistan.

Mainstream media: Imperialist control over the print and electronic media is overwhelming and the campaign of lies knows no bounds. Media that pose as unbiased and liberal have been more cynical than establishment media in matters they consider to be of national interest. Thus it is important for anti-imperialist forces not to believe mainstream media news or comment without question on sensitive issues and share information from sources defending imperialist victims. Even there, it is wise to cross check information with other sources to ensure reliability.

The rise of China as a global economic power created new concerns for the US in the Third World, especially Africa, which to the West was little more than a source of minerals whose supply was assured by friendly regimes. China built on its modest African presence in the south of the

continent during the anti-colonial struggles to invest in infrastructure and in economic sectors long neglected by the West.

The US stirred trouble in Hong Kong in 2019 after its failure in Tibet and Xinjiang, but failed again. The Indo-Pacific concept is a ploy designed to draw India into an anti-China alliance.

Hostility towards Russia revived as it re-emerged as a military power. Efforts to encircle Russia by further enlarging NATO pushed Russia to assert itself in Georgia and later Ukraine. Russia, which erred in letting the US have its way in the UNSC to attack Iraq and Libya, took a defiant stand against US inspired subversion in Syria. The imprudence of using Islamic terrorism and later the Kurdish nationalists to topple the Syrian government led to a strong, but not necessarily enduring, geopolitical alliance of Russia and Iran, and later, Turkey.

Iran has been in the crosshairs from 1979. US sanctions expanded in 1995, intensified since 2006, continued despite the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of October 2015, and deepened with US quitting the JCPA in May 2018. Sanctions have badly hurt Iran's economy but not its resolve. Frustration in Syria seems a motivation for the assassination of Iran's Major General Qasem Soleimani on Iraqi soil in January 2020. Global repercussions apart, Iran by striking back with precise missile attacks on two US air bases in Iraq demonstrated its military potential.

Inability of the US to coerce Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua has a clear message for the Third World: A firm stand based on mass support is a bulwark against imperialist bullying.

Sustaining global presence costs the US heavily, and it has recently demanded of host nations to contribute more towards the cost of keeping US troops on their soil.

Moves to Recapture

The US lacks the economic might to dominate the global economy, and its political influence is waning. Trapped by consumerism, the US is a

major debtor nation with a huge trade gap. It thus relies on military might and strong military presence to defend its global dominance.

From the foregoing sections it is clear that any country failing to defer to US imperialism becomes a target for attack or subversion. Targets in order of importance are China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela and North Korea. But other targets in the Third World can be as significant.

China is a prime target for its fast growing economy and influence across the Third World, and capability to resist aggression. Among important post Cold War projects to contain and encircle China is the failed Pivot to Asia bid by President Obama in 2011. The Blue Dot Network initiative of Japan and US, and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) of the US, Japan, India and Australia target China's Belt and Road (B&R) project. Regional destabilization and creating obstacles to infrastructural development would play a supporting role.

Stirring trouble within China goes on despite failure in Tibet, declining success in Xinjiang and impending failure in Hong Kong. China has increasingly prepared itself against military threats. But the economic war will persist and dominate the anti-China strategies. Rhetoric about China's intellectual property theft and unfair trade practices are aimed to justify to the American public the trade war waged by the US.

Russia can no longer be bullied by the US, and Russia's growing military power and global influence worry the US. Meddling in elections and stirring dissent are still pursued, mostly through NGOs. However, the clumsy foreign policy of the US has pushed Turkey closer to Russia, and the post-Afghan context has cemented an alliance.

Recent developments in Ukraine confirm that the coup of 2014 was to make Ukraine a pawn in the hands of the US to expand NATO to Russia's doorstep. That move failed with Ukraine paying a heavy price of voluntary secession of regions with a majority of speakers of Russian.

Inciting Sinophobia

Sri Lankan Echoes

Mohan

Prelude

The US uses various agencies to harm China's foreign relations. The communist threat is dated now as very few governments outside Latin America face a left challenge. US aim in Asia and Africa is to discredit China's Third World trade and development partnerships by attributing motives to Chinese development loans and mock them as 'Debt Traps'. The objective is mainly to undermine the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative of China and build an Asia Pacific based anti-China alliance.

The US succeeded in stopping Australia from joining OBOR in the near future. Despite US warnings and threats, many countries in Asia and Africa desire partnership with China. Strategically located Ethiopia and Thailand now face destabilization for collaboration in the OBOR project: the US politically backs Tigray rebels against the Ethiopian government and encourages anti-government protesters in Thailand. It is known that the stand of the US on democratic and human rights and on war crimes anywhere relies solely on what US hopes to gain from it.

Indo-US Rivalry in Sri Lanka

The US resented Sri Lanka for its anti-imperialist stand between 1956 and 1977, but for a five-year break under a UNP-led government. Trade with

China irked the US in 1952 when the US-friendly UNP government, out of necessity, signed a rubber–rice trade agreement with China. That led to friendship and establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957. The changing political mood locally and in the Third World amid surging anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles further reinforced ties. Sino-Lanka friendship was, however, not an issue in global politics but for India resenting Sri Lankan neutrality in the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962.

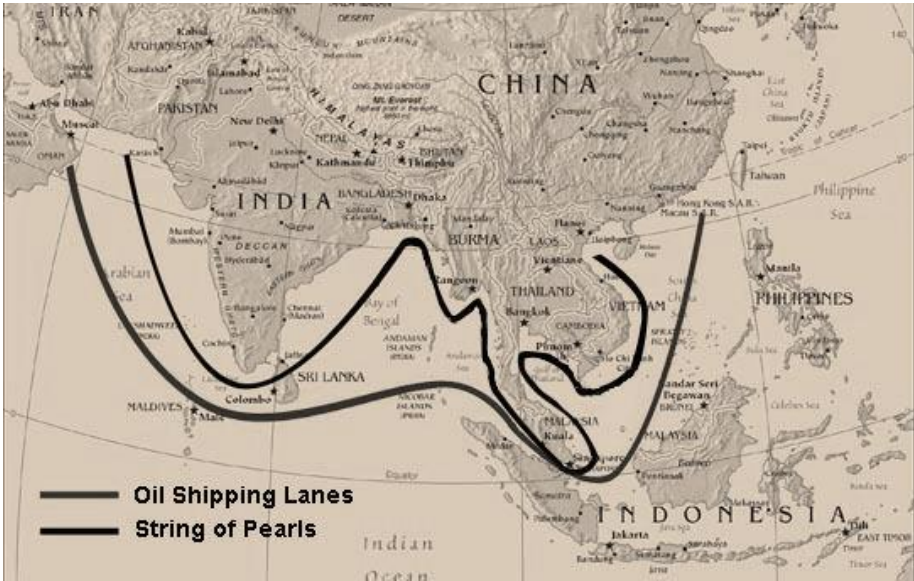
Hegemonic rivalry in South Asia and thus in Sri Lanka was between the US and India, a Soviet proxy in the eyes of the US. Indo–US rivalry was stamped on India’s dealings with Sri Lanka even after the Soviet Union fell in 1991 and an Indo–US alliance was in the making. Rivalry peaked when the JR Jayawardene government sought to steer Sri Lankan foreign policy away from non-alignment and close to the US with friendship with Japan in the process. India, imagining Sri Lanka as its ‘backyard’, was wary of US intentions and thwarted Jayawardene’s bid around 1980 to let the US control the ‘oil tank farm’ in China Bay, Trincomalee.

Another aspect was the conflicting approaches to peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE during 2001–06. India worked to wreck the talks so as to keep the LTTE out of power while the US sought settlement under its watch. After the LTTE fell in 2009, India rejected US hostility towards the Mahinda Rajapaksa government and acted to tame the wording of each UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka. They saw eye-to-eye only in 2015 to ensure defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa, in order to curtail Chinese influence in Sri Lanka.

China and the Indian Ocean

China asserted itself long after the US and India sought a foothold in the island (the US from the 1960s and India the 1970s). Aware of US’ desire for hegemony in the Indian Ocean zone, China and realized by early 21st Century the need to protect its shipping, mainly oil from the Middle East.

It took steps to pre-empt stranding of its ships by a regional conflict or a US naval blockade. It identified harbours that can help to avert disruption to shipping and/or facilitate alternative land routes. The route linking such harbours was closer than usual oil sea lanes to the continent.



Calling this a Chinese “String of Pearls” to encircle India was mischief. The “String of Pearls” theory, offered in 2004 by the US consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, held that China sought to expand naval presence by building civilian maritime infrastructure along the periphery of the Indian Ocean. While several US researchers accept Chinese concerns for security of shipping in view of potential blockade by US and/or India at the Malacca Strait, Sinophobic analysts preyed on Indian fears by hyping the notion of China’s naval encirclement of India. China acted to ensure access to sufficient harbour facilities to face potential disruption. These steps dovetailed into the “Maritime Silk Road” to make greater economic sense than harbour facilities from a defence perspective by building trade

links in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, in tandem with its “New Silk Road” across Asia and Europe that superseded the US plan of 2010 aimed to integrate Afghanistan with Central Asia, announced by Hillary Clinton in 2011 but never took off. The Chinese “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) venture partnering Asian and African countries and open to Europe, announced President Xi in 2013 stunned the US and allies by its progress.

Both China and the US seek global influence. The US won superpower status by asserting its military might and offering security to its allies. China, having rejected such approach long ago, found a less expensive but more feasible route of offering connectivity with equitable relations.

The West had been negative about the OBOR. When forecasts of doom failed, the US resorted to a frantic campaign to wreck OBOR with vicious anti-China propaganda. It tried pushing governments to distance themselves from China and OBOR, and launched a vicious mass media campaign of anti-China falsehoods that penetrated the Internet and is propagated by local news media as well, besides whisper campaigns.

China and Sri Lanka

Since the Rubber Rice deal, China has much goodwill among Sinhalese. Chinese diplomatic conduct contrasted sharply with the assertiveness of India and the US, even fringing on bullying during trying times, and helped maintenance of warm Sino-Lankan relations.

The US is at an advantage with the anti-Left, anti-Soviet and anti-China Tamil nationalists. Surge of Tamil nationalism and the decline of the left in the North in the 1970s helped portrayal of communists and socialists as traitors and China as enemy of Tamils. Warmth of China towards the Sri Lanka is shown as support for Sinhala chauvinism. Despite China’s avoidance of involvement in internal affairs but for urging peaceful resolution of the national question, Tamil nationalists of all shades saw

China as anti-Tamil. China's supplying arms to the government during the war against the secessionist LTTE made them openly hostile.

Tamil nationalist attitude towards India and the US was more forgiving towards their helping the government logistically, besides by supply of armaments, besides blatant betrayal of the Tamils on several occasions. This is an extension of an implanted faith that the US (in place of the former colonial master, UK) and India will side with the Tamils. Tamil leaders thus hoped to exploit differences that the West or India had with Sri Lanka. Such views still prevail among rival Tamil nationalists who trust that a visibly anti-China line will please the US and India, and persuade them to prefer Tamils to Sri Lankan governments that display neutrality when not pro-China in international issues. Their illusion is buoyed by China's consistent generosity towards Sri Lanka.

Muslims have little reason to love a Hindutva controlled India or to trust a West that wages murderous wars against Muslims. But relentless portrayal of China as anti-Islamic based on lies about state response to terrorism in Xinjiang affects Muslim attitudes. A crusade of hate towards Chinese visitors is also slowly gathering momentum.

Persuading the Sinhala was hard. The UNP tried in its election campaign in 2015. Some UNP politicians pledged that the UNP-led government to come will scrap the Port City, the Colombo International Financial City (CIFIC) now. The UNP-led alliance, once elected, suspended work at the site. China drew attention to contractual obligations on delays and cancellation, and the opponents beat a retreat. For years, Dr Harsha de Silva, a UNP personality, actively campaigned to reject Chinese projects, and quoted liberally from vicious anti-China articles on the 'Chinese Debt Trap' in 'The Namibian', a notoriously anti-China website.

Mischief makers spread stories that China has secured one or another development project by pushing the Mahinda Rajapaksa government.

The Hambantota Harbour, Nuraicholai coal power plant and CIFC were not solicited by China; the government for lack of options asked China to help. Some governments were even hostile to the projects.

UNP's hostile approach hurt relations with China, which thus stuck to the letter of the agreement on projects. As the government was unable to pay back the loan secured for developing the Hambantota Harbour it settled for a 99 year lease of the Harbour with the government holding a minority share in the business. The project was not designed to grab the harbour with a 'debt trap'. Nor is it a white elephant that Sri Lanka was talked into. The harbour has picked up business fast during the past year.

There are instances where attempts to wreck Sino-Lanka relations seem possible. Highly regarded for its coal power expertise, China has built many plants that run trouble free. But the Lak Vijaya plant had technical problems far sooner than likely in such projects. Chance of sabotage is high as the plant has subsequently functioned smoothly. Hostile mass media still report even routine maintenance shutdown as plant failure.

More recently the government ordered a shipment of organic fertiliser from Qingdao Seawin Biotech Group (Seawin) in China. In September 2021 Sri Lanka barred entry to the vessel "the Hippo Spirit" carrying the fertiliser, based on claim by the National Plant Quarantine Service (NPQS, Department of Agriculture) that tests revealed harmful *Erwinia* bacteria in samples. Seawin contested it and demanded retest by a third party. While government indicated consent, NPQS refused.

Seawin argued that the rejection breached the terms of bidding and the contract and added that the Schutter Group of Germany, appointed by Sri Lanka Standards Institute (SLSI) had affirmed that the product was free of *Salmonella* and Coliform (including *Erwinia*) and that subsequent testes by the SLSI confirmed same. Seawin then had samples tested by an international renowned Swiss third-party testing institute and by the

China National Plant Quarantine Service (CNPQS), which too cleared the fertilizer. But as NPQS was still adamant Seawin moved for international arbitration in Singapore, which was averted by Sri Lanka agreeing to pay damages to Seawin, which meantime complained to the FAO urging it to seek publication of the detailed test record of NPQS.

NPQS's dislike for third party investigation, its rejection of the findings of four reputed institutions and keenness to block payment raise doubts about its deeds which achieved no more than the blacklisting of People's Bank by the Chinese Embassy, payment of penalty to Seawin, and denting Sino-Lanka relations. It caused import of inadequately tried out Indian nitrogen fertilizer whose inexperienced use caused serious crop failure. But reference to "toxic" Chinese fertiliser persists in the media.

US imperialist agents to conduct their anti-China campaign now use issues that the Sinhalese are sensitive to, namely foreign conquest of territory and presence of foreign troops. They insinuate that China was seizing large tracts of land in order to station troops, whereas such intentions have been evident only in the conduct of US and India.

The attackers capitalise on the unpopularity of the government which is shown as pro-China, despite the government going out of its way in the past year to please the US and India, in secrecy and against the country's interests to agree on projects like the contract to supply liquefied natural gas (LNG) and agreement to sell 40% of the Yugadanavi power plant in Kerawalapitiya to the American company New Fortress Energy Inc.

Campaigns against the Port City and Hambantota Harbour have faded away, but moves persist to stir hatred among Sinhalese about China.

China's Coup in the North

Senseless hostility to China has been the hallmark of Tamil nationalism since the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and part of the anti-left legacy of Tamil

reactionaries. Siding with the West and India in conflicts with China is routine. Leaders of the FP (later TULF/TNA) wantonly vilified China in 1968 during the Vietnam War and just after the JVP insurrection of 1971.

Hostility gained impetus during 1983–2009 as China rejected secession and liked a peaceful settlement, unlike India which fostered secessionist Tamil youth who took refuge in India in the late 1970s. Indian actions including armed intervention by the IPKF in 1987–91, action to ruin the peace talks of 2002–06, and helping the government in the revived war of 2006–09 are now forgotten. The guile of the US which feigned support for the LTTE until its talks with the UNP government, a US client, stalled and its logistical support for the government when war resumed in 2006 are seldom recalled. But China and Pakistan are still blamed for arming Sri Lanka when the US and allies only briefly paused supplying arms.

The Government offered China a project to build 40 000 houses in the North and East for the homeless. It was approved in April 2018 after a team of four TNA MPs inspected a model Chinese house in March and expressed approval to the government. But India objected vehemently in June, and the forever loyal TNA promptly found flimsy reasons to reject the houses. The suppressing the project sent the TNA on overdrive in its anti-China campaign.

Tamil nationalists expressed dislike of a 40-day excavation mission to Sri Lanka by archaeologists from the Shanghai Museum starting in August 2018. Hatred blinded their eyes to the fact that Tamil was once the prime link language for China's trade with the island. The negative attitude deprives several Tamil archaeologists of opportunity to benefit from site investigations leading to the discovery of many items of ceramics related to China from ancient harbours in Mantai, Jaffna, Trincomalee and Galle.

China's Sino Solar Hybrid Technology Co. won a contract to install hybrid wind and solar power on three islands off Jaffna peninsula in

February 2021. India objected and even offered to build the plants at its own cost, just to stop China. The TNA joined the chorus.

In July 2021, TNA MP Sritharan charged that land in Jaffna is being sold to China and G Kasilingham, Co-ordinating Secretary to the Prime Minister promptly rebuffed him. TNA MP Sumanthiran, who arrogantly repeats his boast that they will not let China set foot in the North and East wantonly repeated the same at a meeting with US State Department officials in December 2001 held in the interest of US support for ‘human rights’ and ‘reconciliation’ in Sri Lanka. On return, he boasted that the outcome of their visit will be seen in January 2022, but January passed with nothing to show.

China’s ambassador and colleagues visited Jaffna and Mannar between December 15th and 17th 2021. His gestures of warmth impressed the public to the fury of the TNA. Some contrasted his praying bare chested as per tradition at the famous Nallur temple in Jaffna with the 2015 visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi, who avoided that temple for need to take off his shirt and jacket. What won most attention was his pledge of assistance to the fishing community— a cruel victim of poaching of fish by Indian bottom trawler vessels and damage to their fishing equipment.

The visit sent a neat message to India and the TNA, who had for nearly a quarter century ignored the pains of the fisher folk and sided with the poachers. It was also a sharp snub to the TNA leaders who declared that the Chinese will not be allowed to enter the North and East.

Provoked by the visit, some TNA politicians resorted to further offensive remarks. TNA MP Shanakiyan Rasamanickam boasted that the North and East did not want “China to have a footprint” there. He added that all these years the Chinese didn’t see nor think of the interest of the Tamil people and questioned their sudden interest— forgetting that nearly four years ago, it was the TNA that stopped China from building houses for

the needy in the North and East. Also, TNA leaders who are reputed for hang around foreign embassies to win favours had never asked China to help the victims of war or sought the friendship of China.

Anti-China analysts read evil motives in the ambassador's visit. But what China had achieved was the delivery of a graceful blow that demolished the myth that the North of the island is India's backyard.

Concluding Remarks

Clearly the US and, of late, India are in the middle of a vicious anti-China propaganda war in Sri Lanka which reached a peak in 2020–21. The US is using the impression that an increasingly unpopular government is close to China while trying its best to increase its say in the country's affairs.

India is after its pound of flesh and its rivalry with China is explicit and its methods to pressurize the government nauseating. Its dilemma is that it cannot simultaneously play good Samaritan to its narrow nationalist Tamil clients and the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist government.

Both US and India wish to be rid of the government, but their problem is that they cannot say so openly. The vulnerability of the government has, however made the country fair game for international players in their respective bids for regional hegemony.

Desperation has pushed the government to seek credit lines and currency swaps that will soon lead to an even worse financial crisis. The IMF is almost begging the government to get rescued by it, and other predators push Sri Lanka to run to the IMF. They fear China coming to the rescue, although it is not an immediate possibility. They pin their hopes on prolonged economic agony that will keep the government reined in by a complex debt trap until, hopefully, a friendlier government takes charge.

Debt Restructuring and Structural Reforms

Ahilan Kadirgamar

The Sri Lankan economy is sinking deeper and deeper into crisis. The economic establishment and their policies that reduced the country to this state of affairs are screaming for more of the same. They are calling for restructuring the external debt along with structural reforms, disregarding the fact that it was similar policies that in the past that pushed the country into the debt trap.

What can be gained from so-called restructuring of external debt? And what will be the impact of the so-called market reforms? Hidden under these assertions of about debt restructuring structural reforms is class, the interests of the wealthy class as opposed to the working people.

Debt Fix

By restructuring debt, bankers and economists mean lengthening the time of repayment: that is to find ways of paying interest and delaying the payment of capital on accumulated debt. Furthermore, to gain the mercy of the lenders, they claim, there is a need there is a need for structural reforms to give confidence that the debt will be repaid. Those structural reforms include austerity measures including cuts to social services and privatization of state enterprises. However, cutting social welfare and privatizing public services will reduce the little support that working people receive and force them to pay more for public services.

The issue is that even if the lenders restructure Sri Lanka's debt — either through a guarantee of the IMF or through negotiations on a piecemeal basis with the actors to whom debt is due — with imports exceeding exports, the country will in a short time accumulate more external debt. So why is it that the mainstream economists never talk about restricting imports? Because the economic policy packages that Sri Lanka has been following for decades, the acceleration of which is called structural reforms at the current moment have at their core the idea of trade liberalization. The result is the free flow of goods into the country, regardless the import bill.

In this way, rising external debt that eventually turns into a debt trap as we are facing now, has been a useful tool for the powerful global capitalist forces and their local comprador agents: that is to restructure economies towards the accumulation of capital by cutting the entitlements of working people. Similar to the crisis of the 1970s leading to the open economy reforms, the current crisis is seen as an opportunity by right wing ideologues to carry out dispossessing structural reforms linking them to debt restructuring

Public Distribution System

We are told that there are no alternatives to painful structural reforms. However, there are in fact other counter paths. First, given the debt trap, support from external actors to boost foreign reserves is necessary, but that has to be combined with not just restructuring the debt, but also restructuring the import bill.

Sri Lanka earns US\$ 1 billion a month in exports and it needs to bring the import bill down to US\$ 600 million per month to have close to a total of US\$ 5 billion per year to make the repayments on external debt. The import bill should be brought down and limited to the bare essential of medicines, food, fuel and the intermediate goods necessary for exports.

And that can only be done if a public distribution system run by the state takes charge of imports. If debt can be restructured, then, there will be more room to say increase imports to US\$ 800 million per month, but ensuring imports are limited to essential goods will require a public distribution system in the medium term. Non-essential imports should only be considered after exports radically rise.

Relief and Social Investment

Next, with the mounting economic crisis there is going to be increased poverty and social suffering, so visibly evident with increased begging on the streets. At the very moment when relief and state support are most needed, cuts to social welfare will be disastrous. Where will the Government find the funds for such relief? Indeed, having cut taxes for the wealth over the decades, and most recently two years ago, Sri Lanka has abysmally low state revenue now of 9% of GDP.

The solution that some of us have proposed and conveniently ignored by the Government is a wealth tax. That is a tax on property of the wealthy, with redistribution benefitting the working people. Indeed we should be using revenues from such wealth taxes to beef up social welfare, rather than increase the social burden on working people during these times of crises.

Next, such wealth tax revenues should also be channelled towards state investment to increase domestic production capable of substituting imports and to create a virtuous cycle of production that can contribute to increase exports. These are times when domestic actors are unlikely to invest with the economic depression, and increasing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that did not even materialize during the best of times remains a pipe dream. Therefore state investment to increase production, employment and effective demand are crucial for rejuvenating the economy.

Global Turbulence and Class Struggles

The Global economic winds are also unfavourable for Sri Lanka. With the US Federal Reserve on the path of increasing interest rates, capital flows and international loans are going to become tighter for developing countries. That is all the more so for a country like Sri Lanka on the verge of default, and restructuring debt, much less getting foreign investment, is going to be more challenging.

According to FAO's Food Price Index, global food prices increased by 28.1% over the last year and the index is at a ten year high, just when we need cheaper foods, our import bill for foods is also rising. Unfortunately, the same is also true with rapidly rising global crude oil prices as well, which is a large share of our import bill.

In these worrying times survival is of utmost importance and that needs to begin with food. Without a public distribution system and relief for the working people, we may face famine type conditions. The anger of the working people and the protests out on the streets are revealing. What is keeping the economic establishment and our ruling classes from understanding this dire reality?

Is it not class and class interest?

[Reproduced with a few minor textual changes from the regular feature titled "Red Notes" by the author in the Daily Mirror of 24th January 2022 by kind permission of the author.]

The following is a summary of statements issued by the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party on recent events.

12th February 2022

Asking for Indian pressure to implement the 13th Amendment

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the joint letter from six political parties including the Federal Party (Ilankaith Thamilarasuk Katchi) petitioning Indian Premier Modi seeking Indian government pressure on the Sri Lanka government to implement the 13th Amendment. The letter was sent through the Indian High Commission in Colombo last month. Meantime the Tamil National People's Front led All Ceylon Tamil Congress rejected the 13th Amendment arguing that it came within the framework of a unitary government and placed it on a coffin in its rally.

Such quarrels between these two rival groups and tit for tat actions regarding the 13th Amendment suggest the continuation of the Tamil elite rivalry for political dominance in the period of GG Ponnambalam and SJV Chelvanayakam. This exposes their tendency to cheat the Tamil nationality with their conservative, reactionary Tamil nationalist stands and short-sighted policies.

The Party further commented on the debate among rival Tamil nationalists on the 13th Amendment to point out that the 13th Amendment entered the constitution of the country through the Sri Lanka-India Accord of 34 years ago. India took advantage of the national

contradictions of Sri Lanka to impose the Accord to serve its regional hegemonic interests. As the 13th Amendment had minimal powers and was not acceptable to the people, including Tamils, the Party refused to support the 13th Amendment. Nor did it participate in Provincial Council elections held under it at the time.

However, the parties of the Sinhala Buddhist ruling classes have during the past 34 years have in various ways sought to paralyze or even kill the 13th Amendment. In this context, the reality that the 13th Amendment remains a feature of the constitution that even modestly takes into notice the national question. Thus the powers that have been taken away from the 13th Amendment need to be restored and whatever that remain unimplemented should be implemented.

Besides, devolution of power should be expanded to suit the current conditions. Doing so will serve as the preliminary steps towards the basics of full regional autonomy that the Party has proposed as a long term solution to the national question. The party hasn't the faith that it can be secured from the ruling Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist forces by peaceful discussions. But the Party emphasizes the development of a programme based on firm principles to achieve that, and working together with a broad alliance of progressive, democratic left forces.

The Party has been urging the establishment of regional autonomies and inner autonomous structures and their constitutional affirmation as the appropriate political solution to the national question of Sri Lanka with four nationalities and other national minorities. As such a structure can be achieved only in the long run, it will be appropriate to call for the restoration, reinforcement and widening of the powers that have been taken away from the 13th Amendment instead of rejecting the 13th Amendment. To emphasize this mass struggles should be undertaken that will unite the people. It will be wasteful to kowtow to India or to

plead with the US or to bellow racist slogans and conduct politics to swell the vote bank by relying on the émigré elite organizations and their cash bundles.

Hence the Party challenges the Tamil nationality that faces chauvinist oppression to talk of its lessons from its experiences thus far and the younger generation should come forward to advance along the appropriate routes of thought and deed.

3rd February 2022

The just demands of the fishers must be fulfilled

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party endorsing the continuing mass mobilization campaign of the people of Vadamadachi demanding an end to the unlawful fishing by Indian bottom trawling vessels and their excesses and for justice for the death of two Vadamadachi fishers.

He also assured the unstinted support of the Party for the just demands put forward collectively by the Vadamadachi fishers' unions and all their struggles in their pursuit and that it will firmly stand by them.

The statement also pointed out that the cause for the decay of their daily livelihood, and ruin of their trade and trade equipment is the aggressive methods of unlawful fishing by bottom trawling boats owned by Indian businessman. The Sri Lanka's rulers are unprepared to stop them, and the India's rulers are unprepared to control its fishery capitalists or their excesses.

It further added that in this matter, apart from the Sri Lankan government, the representatives of the narrow nationalists with loyalty to India also turn a blind eye to the misery of the fishers and the deaths.

The reason why they hypocritically ignore the people who voted them to parliament is to proclaim their loyalty to India.

23rd December 2021

People should take to the streets to avert death by starvation

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party drawing attention to dangerous stage of great famine that the country is drifting towards. The statement pointed out that ordinary people will face the risk of death by starvation and that the Party is on the view that time has come for the entire working people who are being affected to take to the streets.

It is a lesson of history that only a militant mobilization of masses in unity that can challenge and arrest the current anti-people ways of today's rulers.

The statement added that the Rajapaksa family, while running the state amid much trickery in the name of the COVID-19 epidemic, subjected the country to severe economic crisis and heaped the burden on the heads of the people. As a result, the prices of dry goods like rice, sugar, wheat flour, pulses, milk powder and medicines as well as of daily consumables like vegetables fish and meat have risen to levels out of reach for the ordinary people. Besides, the price of a 12.5 kg cylinder of cooking gas had reached 4000 rupees. Besides, a shortage of cylinders was created following a series of explosions caused by gas leak from cylinders that killed at least seven.

The statement also drew attention to the haphazard increase in prices of petrol, diesel, and kerosene which will have implications for prepared food and other essential items, and to the increase in transport prices,

which will all be heaped on the heads of ordinary working people as deficits and loans.

Meanwhile, different ruling class forces that have taken turns in power to cause the current economic decline and social crises are living in comfort, unaffected by the crises. The billions of dollars that they had swindled at every turn when in power will be adequate pay back the foreign loans and secure an adequate foreign reserve as well as avert need to sell the country's resources to foreign powers.

Under the conditions, conditions cannot be rectified by bringing any of these gangs to power, and the Party urges that only united struggles undertaken by a broad based popular front can lead to a meaningful solution.

7th November 2021

Support the fair demands of teachers

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party in support of the struggle of the ongoing struggle of the teachers to persuade the government to resolve contradictions in the salary structure of teachers that has passed its 100th day. The government is using all the tricks in the book to deflect and suppress the struggle of the school principals and teachers.

He called for a fair resolution to the struggle of the school principals and teachers who are persisting in struggle despite state repression. He added that State and private sector employees are proposing to hold a national protest day on 9th November, putting forward demands such as:

Allocate 6% for education

Put forward solution for teacher – principal wage anomaly.

Withdraw the Kotelawela University Act

The Marxist Leninist New Democratic Party, while lending its fullest support to the protest, urges all working people to participate in the struggle to protect free education and urge resolution of the teacher – principal wage anomaly.

6th October 2021

Stop excesses by Indian fishing trawlers in the North

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party drawing attention to Indian trawlers encroaching the waters off the coast stretching from Manner to Mullaitheevu and practicing unlawful methods of fishing to catch vast quantities of fish and thereby depleting our fisheries resources and causing huge losses to our fishers and subjecting their daily livelihood to agony.

The statement further pointed out that the fishing nets, boats and other equipment are destroyed by those coming on the trawlers. Such agony suffered from the excesses of Indian trawler operators have escalated in recent months and that recently, there have been instance of excesses including attacks and damage to fishing nets. The Party strongly condemns these acts.

At the same time the Sri Lankan government, the Minister of Fisheries and the Tamil nationalist parties of the North turn a blind eye to such despicable acts by Indian trawler operators and are deaf to the desperate pleas of the affected fishers. All of them seem bonded to the Indian government and fishing trawler owners so that they are unable to point an accusing finger at the offenders. There is nothing that our fishers can expect of them, and for how long can the fishers bear such agony?

The Party points out that the fishers of the North have no way other than to unite and launch mas struggle, and urges them to do so.

2nd September 2021

Waive cremation charges in Vavuniya

The Secretary of the Vanni District Party, Comrade N Pratheepan has made a public appeal to the authorities that they should treat the situation that has arisen as a result of COVID-19 pandemic in the country as a state of disaster and take steps to waive the cremation charge of Rs 7000 for all deceased at the Urban Council crematorium located at Poonthottam, Vavuniya, by exempting all, instead of only those below the poverty line, in consideration of the economic difficulties faced by the public. The statement proposed that officials of the central government and provincial and local authorities, the Government Agent and the Department of Health should come together to evolve an appropriate mechanism.

28th August 2021

A Critical Assessment and Tribute to Mangala Samaraweera

Mangala Samaraweera who had been a prominent personality in the political scene of Sri Lanka over the past four decades died suddenly on 24th August 2021, reportedly of COVID-19.

His sudden death made an impact on the politics of the south of the country. Mangala was not known as a leftist or progressive. He lived as a capitalistic liberal democrat. Although he believed that the problems faced by the country could be resolved through the position taken by him, he could not succeed in that.

He was never one who endorsed Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism or used it to advance his parliamentary political career. He has instead expressed views in defiance of it. He has openly rejected that Sri Lanka is an Sinhala Buddhist country and stated that it is a country belonging to people of a

diversity of races, religions and languages, and faced the wrath of the Buddhist Mahanayakes who denounced him.

While he was hostile to the LTTE and its deeds, he could not be said to have been hostile to the Tamil people. When he was Minister of Finance, allocation of funds and development schemes for the war affected transcended sectarian considerations. Besides, he spoke up when democracy and human rights were violated in Sri Lanka and even crossed over to the opposition benches to expose the government side.

One has to sit up and take note when someone from the South speaks aloud about resolving the national question and the multi ethnic diversity of the country and a solution based on that reality in a context where Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and Tamil narrow nationalism were upheld in parliamentary politics and the Sinhala-Tamil contradiction was highlighted in order to obstruct working class unity.

Remarkably, Mangala Samaraweera kept urging that the 13th Amendment to the Constitution should be fully implemented for the resolution of the Sri Lankan national question.

In the current context of an upsurge in Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism joining hands with militarisation of the state to threaten democracy, human rights and the wellbeing of the people, the loss of Mangala Samaraweera is an adverse event.

24th August 2021

The Situation in Afghanistan

The General Secretary of the Party Comrade SK Senthivel issued a statement on behalf of the Party Politburo on post war Afghanistan.

The US waged a cruel 20 years' long war of aggression in Afghanistan in South Asia on pretext of combating Islamic terrorism, but really with the

intent of plundering Afghanistan's mineral resources and establishing its dominance in South Asia. It has killed over 50000 people before the US armed forces and the forces of the NATO withdrew in the face of strong public opposition and armed resistance. US imperialism which posed like a real tiger receive a severe beating from the Afghan people and is running away in haste. The puppet president Ashraf Ghani has escaped with his loot.

The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party joins the Afghan people in welcoming the defeat of US imperialism. But at the same time, it notes that the people of Afghanistan and of the world at large are anxious to see if the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban that is preparing to take power in the country will be rulers who can guarantee democracy, freedom and equality to the people.

Women, national minorities and people of different faiths had earlier experienced severe hardships under the Islamic Sharia laws of the Taliban. That condition should not return. But it is feared that the Taliban rule to come will become one by a comprador capitalist ruling classes.

The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party emphasizes that the Afghan people should join hands with the left, democratic and progressive forces to advance along the path for democracy, peace and harmonious life.

The Statue of the Dictator

S. Sivasegaram

He ruled his country for long .
It is not easy to rule a country.
So he ruled it at the muzzle of a cannon.
Even after his life ended his rule continued.
Although nobody loved him when he ruled the country
there were those who worshipped him.
His worshippers ruled in his name and in the way he did
to continue to rule the country at the muzzle of a cannon.

Statues erected for him in town after town
were damaged one after another.
As that was bad not only for his good name
but also for the regime bearing his name
they promptly repaired the statues .
But states continued to be damaged.
Besides
each repaired statue looked different from another.
As that was bad not only for his good name
but also for the regime bearing his name
they decided to cast all statues in bronze in a single mould
and set up a Statue Erection Committee.

The Committee debated for long and made some decisions.
As he was rather short and stocky
it was decided to make the statue slimmer and taller.
As his face was not very attractive

it was decided to make his nose a little sharper
his mouth a little straighter and eyes a little larger
and to chisel a smile on his stern face.

The decision to don a military uniform on him
and place a military beret on his head
was not by the Statue Erection Committee.

It was decided to inscribe his attainments
beneath the statue.

Hence, he who did not quite complete his schooling
was attributed various titles and honours.

Likewise he was assigned the rank of Army General.

In the end, his name posed an issue, for
the people knew him only as the rhinoceros.

Besides, the name given by his parents was unimpressive.
Hence they neaten up his name a little.

Responsibilities for casting the statues, erecting the statues,
maintaining the statues and protecting the statues
went to reliable contractors.

But not everyone in the country is a good and obedient citizen.

So, one day
everything went topsy-turvy, and
every statue was brought down and sent to the foundry.
His mausoleum too was pulled own.

But the dictator laughed saying
“What they destroyed were not my statues”—
Rotting inside a grave that had lost its identity.

The Elderly

S Krishnapriyan

*When an elder pass away
the objects he used and his thoughts are orphaned*

*His walking stick is abandoned as an orphan
It becomes support for a creeper or a piece of dry firewood
The hands to grip it are no more*

*His spittoon and the pestle to pound betel and arecanut
are cast afar
or hide somewhere hard to find.*

*The grandchildren are orphaned and the opening phrase
"Once upon a time there was a king"
spoken in the same pitch as theirs is orphaned.
The front yard dried by the morning sun is orphaned.*

*Daily narratives like
"Then coconut was five cents, gold seventy-five rupees,
monthly wage sixty rupees and how well we lived!" and
untold stories saved in the depths of the mind are orphaned.*

*The book of mythologies, Bhagavad Gita,
trade union membership card, payslip,
pair of spectacles— his valued treasures are orphaned.*

*His children are not orphaned immediately—
They get orphaned gradually as the time of this life marches on.*

*The cultural identity that he carried to his end
Is also orphaned*

Victor Jara

28.9.1932–16.9.1972

Chilean teacher

theatre director

poet, singer-songwriter

socialist activist

*tortured and killed by the
Pinochet dictatorship*

God feels alone

S Krishnapriyan

God
keeps looking at these waves
Loneliness eats him away

Confronting him are
prayers from millions
petitions from millions
profanities from millions
piled mountain high

Facing them
God feels deep loneliness