

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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**Vested Interest or Blatant Interference**  
**US Foray into Sri Lanka**

It is reassuring that the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government has articulated a foreign policy of neutrality. This position of impartiality has added significance given the cold war that is being waged between the Quad (USA/India/Japan/Australia alliance) and China in the Indo-Pacific region. The enunciated neutrality has not allowed Sri Lanka to be used by either side to progress their political and military aspirations and provided Sri Lanka with the opportunity to maintain friendly relations with all countries near and afar.

Under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's leadership:

- National security has been given a very high priority,
- India has been reassured that Sri Lanka will not engage in any activity that could be seen as a strategic security risk to India,
- Sri Lanka will not cede control of strategic assets to foreign concerns; and
- Investments will be welcome from all nations provided they fit in with Sri Lanka's Vision articulated in President's *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour*.

It is reported that the US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper, in a recent phone conversation with the president of Sri Lanka had spoken of the need for Sri Lanka to make continued progress on reconciliation and human rights. This, in diplomatic parlance, is a veiled threat made against Sri Lanka along the lines of the UNHRC resolution 30/1 that was proposed by an alliance led by US in 2015. This threat was not referred to by President Rajapaksa in his tweet about the Esper phone call, which in diplomatic terms could be considered as a snub.

The Indian analyst Bhadrakumar states that USA is expecting Sri Lanka to finalize a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the US, handover Colombo Port's Eastern Terminal development to India and sign up to a US\$480 million Millennium Challenge Corporation grant that has been stalled due to wide public criticism. Furthermore, the Indian analyst has said that USA is pressuring Sri Lanka for an immediate response, so that US-Sri Lanka defence cooperation can be integrated into Quad strategies in the Indian Ocean region.

Bhadrakumar further states that under Indian PM Modi, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is the principal driver of India's regional security strategy and our analysis of the geopolitical moves by the quad, leads us to concur with this view. The most recent manifestation of India's regional efforts on behalf of the Quad is the September 2020 signing of a framework for defence and security relationship between the Maldives and the US. Details of the framework are not available at present but most likely, it will be opening the Maldives for US military presence. The Maldives, like Sri Lanka straddles what are referred to as critical sea lanes of communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean Region which are of strategic importance to China.

Pressure on Sri Lanka to be a part of the Quad has being intensified in the recent past with the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka warning Sri Lanka that it places its sovereignty at risk by engaging in financial dealings with China. Dean Thompson, the senior State Department official for South and Central Asian affairs has warned Sri Lanka about who it teams up with for their economic prosperity, without explicitly naming the significant presence of China in Sri Lanka. US sanctions placed on the parent company of CHEC, which is constructing Sri Lanka's billion dollar Port City remain an ongoing area of concern to Sri Lanka.

The current visit by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo needs to be viewed in the backdrop of these condescending and patronising statements made by US officials. Secretary of State Pompeo is a former CIA director and is on record boasting about taking steps to destabilise popularly elected



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governments challenging so called US interests and directions set for respective regions and has publicly admitted to the CIA lying, cheating and stealing to further US interests. The planned visit will no doubt be used to increase the pressure on Sri Lanka to side with the Quad in its endeavour to box-in China, constraining its ability to dominate maritime routs in the Indian Ocean Region that are of strategic importance to them.

However, we can see that the present Sri Lankan government is acting according to its stated foreign policy impartiality by not succumbing to the growing pressure from the Quad to favour the US led alliance. Sri Lanka has reaffirmed its foreign policy of welcoming no-strings attached investments from any country. The President has publicly refuted the narrative of the Quad that Sri Lanka is in a debt trap set by China. Whilst thanking the Chinese Government, the Prime Minister, in a recent visit to the Port City stated that Belt and Road Initiative projects in Sri Lanka are non-negotiable, and that the Colombo Port City project will be a key contributor to Sri Lanka's economic prosperity in the future. Furthermore, the withdrawing of the co-sponsorship of the UNHRC resolution 30/1 against Sri Lanka, the review of the MCC and the suspension of the MCC and SOFA processes are testaments to the government adhering to its policy of neutrality while giving national security the highest priority.

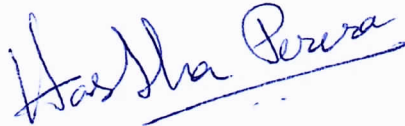
As an organisation that has as its core objectives the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka, SPUR strongly condemn attempts at overtly and covertly interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka by some members of the Quad, and consider this a gross violation of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. We request Quad members to abide by democratic practices cherished by these nations and respect the overwhelming mandate recently given to Sri Lanka's present government at elections. We remind Quad members' policies endorsed by the people of Sri Lanka which include stated foreign policy of maintaining neutrality.

The manner by which the Quad can respect the democratic will of the people of Sri Lanka is by respecting the sovereignty of Sri Lanka and by stopping their attempts at pressurising Sri Lanka to join the Quad or directly or indirectly prosecute their interests.

We thank the government of Sri Lanka for protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka under very trying circumstances. We also respectfully request the Sri Lankan government to unite the Sri Lankan people by meeting the expectations and fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Sri Lanka. It should also make it clear to USA and India, the main actors of the Quad in the Indian Ocean Region, that they must respect the sovereignty of Sri Lanka and that their persistent efforts to coerce Sri Lanka to follow an anti-Chinese foreign, defence and economic policy that suits their interests as opposed to Sri Lanka's national interests are insulting, patronising and not welcome.

We further respectfully request the Sri Lankan government to emphasise to the Quad that the pressure mounted on Sri Lanka since the defeat of Tamil Tiger Terrorism in Sri Lanka using unsubstantiated allegations parroted by LTTE friendly diaspora by way of UNHRC resolution 30/1, is deeply hurtful, is a gross violation of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, and is considered as an attempt at interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

It would bode well for the Quad to unilaterally act to withdraw resolution 30/1 at the UNHRC.



Harsha Perera

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