

## **The Lessons of the Easter Sunday 2019 bombings of Sri Lanka for T&T**

On April 21, 2019, Easter Sunday, suicide bombers and bombings targeted Christian churches celebrating Easter and hotels in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa. The targets of attack were as follows: Colombo: St Anthony's Shrine, The Kingsbury, Shangri-La Hotel and Cinnamon Grand Hotel. Negombo: explosion at St Sebastian's church. Batticaloa: explosion at a church.

### **The Lessons Afforded:**

#### 1. The Attacks that preceded the Easter Sunday operation

The operational cell with its leadership undertook a series of operations preceding the main attack. The preceding attacks were in keeping with the Islamic code of Jihad. This then was the serving of notice to the kaffirun that there was now a group of Muslims in Sri Lanka now engaged in Jihad in/against this kaffir/kufr state. The choice of targets illustrated the discourse and worldview of Jihad that motivated this group of Muslims, namely that of the Islamic State (IS). In March 2018 there was the attack on Sufi Muslims by Muslims holding allegiance to the discourse of Jihad of the cell that carried out the attack. In November 2018 two police officers on duty, at the police station they were assigned to, were hacked to death and their service weapons stolen and in December 2018 Buddhist statues were desecrated. The cell in 2018 sent three potent messages: that the Muslim groups branded by IS as takfir are targets, that non-Islamic religions of Sri Lanka are targets and the Kuffar state is also a target. The final choice of targets for the attack are then instructive.

#### 2. An Attack driven by adherence to Islamic discourse

The suicide bombers included: the son from the wealthy tea family who detonated his bomb killing himself and two others. The two sons of the wealthy spice family and the wife of one the attackers who all died by detonating their devices. The wife of one of the bombers detonated a suicide vest when the police raided the villa she was at with her children killing herself, three of her children and three officers. The reputed leader of the cell Zahran Hashim blew himself up at the Shangri-La Hotel. On April 26, 2019 Hashim's parents, his two brothers and their families were all killed in an explosion set off when the family was cornered by the security forces. The commitment of specific families to Jihad, to which the suicide bombers belonged, is noteworthy, especially the Hashim family and the wealthy family who were spice producers and traders. This is an operation that falsifies the position that persons arising from social positions of relative deprivation were more acceptable to radicalization and embracing suicide attacks. How does this position explain the commitment of entire families willing to die and kill their children for the cause of Jihad? The families of and the attackers of Sri Lanka illustrate that commitment to wage Jihad to death is borne out by the relationship between Islamic discourse and the Muslim and a non-Muslim simply cannot understand this power

relation as they are not immersed in the discourse. In addition, these families were not located in the underclass and the working class of Sri Lanka they ranged from rich to middle class. There was then no single cell, but cells rooted in a family each motivated by their own commitment to the discourse and their own resources. Which means that there is a base in Sri Lanka that still exists and can spring to life when necessary. The family unit committed as a group to a discourse of Jihad is rare but when it occurs it presents a most potent threat of attack as it is bonded by blood ties and disciplined through the common discourse they adhere to. This is then the model of the cell that carried out the Madrid bombings evolved now to operationalise the Muslim family unit. When this operational unit is welded to family wealth and a wealth generation system then the final hurdle to be jumped is access to the means and technology of making war.

### 3. The technology of war assessed

The families/cells collected their nine suicide bombers for the Easter Sunday 2019 attacks but the pressing need was now to access the technology of war and the training to use this technology effectively. In January 2019 100 kilos of explosive and 100 detonators were found by the police in a coconut grove in the Puttalam district of the west coast of Sri Lanka. At the scene of the bombings on Easter Sunday traces of the explosive TATP were found which indicated that the families/cells possessed the technology to collect the inputs and cook batches of TATP locally, construct the back back bombs and suicide vests which were the basis of the attack and defense of the members of the families/cells. Islamic State utilized TATP in its 2015 attack on Paris and its 2017 attack on Brussels. In December 2018, an operational base was discovered by the police at Vanathavilliuwa and a training center was discovered after the attacks at Kattankudy, a city of some 60, 000 inhabitants. The links to Islamic State are obvious and the technology transfer between IS and the families/cells was a strategic input to realizing the attacks. The scale of operations on the ground indicated the operationalisation of a strategic plan to create a body of sleeping cadres who will be shielded from implication in the first attack on Easter Sunday 2019 to become sleeper cells. Easter Sunday 2019 was then planned to be the first wave of a series of attacks to follow in the future. These sleeper cells will then concentrate on building capacity until awakened for the second and successive waves. You don't create such extensive infrastructure to run just nine attackers who are now all dead.

### 4. The strategy of war and its discourse of target acquisition

The attacks were launched whilst the Sri Lankan political order was gripped by a power struggle between the legislature, the President and the government rooted in the legislature. The impact of this political crisis on the will and capacity of the national security apparatus and its political overlords to accept and deal with the threat posed is now embroiled in the said political struggle. The Islamic extremists clearly utilized the discourse of Jihad of the Islamic State to choose soft targets that flow with this discourse of Jihad. This was the choice of attacking expressions of the Crusader's Cross in Sri

Lanka and Westerners and Western interests in the hotels, all presenting soft and opportune targets for attack on Easter Sunday 2019. The attacks on Christian churches enabled sanctioned attacks with the least possible blow back from the race/ethnic composition of the population of Sri Lanka. Target acquisition was then informed by a political discourse of the demography and the politics of race/ethnicity in Sri Lanka and its impact on Jihad.

#### 5. The abysmal failure of the State to preempt the attack

What is clearly apparent is the failure of the national security apparatus of the State to do its job enabled the success of the attack on Easter Sunday 2019. There were too many signals sent by the attackers before the grand attack that an attack was imminent. There too many interdictions of key material and operational bases before the attack that indicated that an attack was imminent. Most of all the resistance that came from sections of the Ummah in Sri Lanka to the attackers, the repeated warnings that these Muslims made to the State warning of the coming attack exposed the existence of a group of Muslims intent on doing harm. The attempted murder of Razack Taslim in March 2019 from the town of Mawanella, where the Buddhist statues were desecrated in December 2018 failed to evoke any action from the State. Taslim in response to the attack on the Buddhist statues entered into a struggle against extremist elements in the Ummah and repeatedly indicated his willingness to report to the State on the activities of the extremists. The hit was placed on Taslim to silence an informer and as a message to other informers and would be informers. The extremist were now locked in battle for hegemony over the Ummah of Sri Lanka and Taslim is now a victim of this battle and the incompetence of the State. Taslim survived the bullet he received to his head but his body is shattered. The attacker made brave strategic mistakes which should have compromised their operation allowing the State to intervene and preempt it by dismantling the cells and collecting prisoners from which to gather further intelligence. The criminal failure of duty by the Sri Lankan state enabled the attack where some 250 persons were killed and the network of cadres trained and placed in deep freeze remain a mystery with the key players of the attack with the vital information, all dead.

#### **Trinidad and Tobago (T&T)**

In T&T the connection to Islamic State is much more organic and resilient than that of Sri Lanka. The network that recruited, facilitated and certified those undertaking Hijrah as fit and able for entry into IS, exists to this day as it has never been dismantled. The crucial issue is if as in Sri Lanka, T&T will evolve the operational mode of the family/cell? Profiles of those who undertook Hijrah to die as Shahids for IS show Muslims of the major races and classes of T&T and these fighters in a majority of cases were accompanied by their wife/wives and children. The Ummah of T&T has then the potential and capacity to evolve the model that has appeared in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines. The key to this evolution is the commitment to the discourse of Jihad of IS and the motivation to act upon this commitment. The repeated insistence in public by

Ministers of government, leaders of the protective services and US military and civilian personnel on the fact of an Islamic extremist threat on Carnival 2018, changes the entire threat horizon of T&T at present. The supply of the necessary technology of war and personnel by Islamic State remains a distinct reality and in the event of such an intervention by IS the dynamic of the attack will change to deeply reflect the IS discourse of Jihad in the West. This will dramatically change the target acquisition process where an attack on premier Western interests becomes paramount and in T&T this places the energy industry and its infrastructure as the prized, primary target. Secondary targets will become primary targets only when the prized target is hardened to the point where any attack can only result in a degraded outcome. These secondary targets are: the foreign Western population or allies of the West in T&T, Western institutions, missions, embassies present in T&T and when the preferred list is denuded, the churches of the Crusader's Cross and public expressions of the state of Kaffirun Jahiliyyah. Attacks on Christian churches and cultural events by Muslim will gravely impact the politics of race in T&T, destabilising the political and social order to the point of possible race conflict.

The duty of the State of T&T is then to preempt any move to act, ever mindful of the failure of the State in 1990 to preempt, in spite of all the signals sent, the events of July 27, 1990. In the terrain of action of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century one must expect that no signals will be sent. The action will be premised on the strategy of a stealth attack at a time of intense distraction of the populace as they focus on a single event which engages the full attention of the national security apparatus.