

# Sri Lanka: On the Easter Sunday's Attacks

Monday 6 May 2019, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 24 April 2019).

**It is clear that the attacks on Easter Sunday were carried out by local radicals, under the pressure s of foreign fundamentalists. It is also clear that there is little support for this group from the wider Muslim community. While those involved could be swiftly INCLUDING identified and dealt with, the bigger question is how to check the spread of extremism.**

Some say violent extremism is a cult, not a religion. Then one can argue that all god believing religions are cults, except Buddhism. Hence treating violent extremism as a problem of religion or belief is a mistake. The process of radical, violent mobilization shows closer links to that of a belief in mythical irrational power. If "radical" beliefs produce terrorists, then why doesn't every political-Islamist mosque produce terrorists? Even more complicated, why have most of those providing material support to Islamic terrorist groups shown little understanding of theology, but instead seem to be attracted to the thrill of jihad adventurism. Then is it strong attraction to mythical adventure that effect modern young people to extreme actions?

If that is correct, counter strategies based on empowering rational, liberal voices by preaching mercy kindness and tolerance in more "extreme" mosques may not be effective, indeed even counterproductive. When confronted with countering evidence, committed extremist individuals may become defensive and cling on initial beliefs more strongly, driving fence-sitters towards extremism. It is therefore problematic to assume that countering discussions, showing extremists the error of their ways or debating theology would do anything other than produce hostility and even heightened aggression.

To deal with extremism, the focus should be on weakening the organizational ties within the movement in friendly manner, not on debate. In debate people tend to defend more on emotion and intuition than reason. If people are not working from clear ideological standpoints there is little possibility of making headway through discussion. On the other hand it may make more sense to counter the networks and personal ties between individuals and terrorist groups, using sensitive tactics. In that sense, this relief model maintains that since ideology fails to predict or suppress terrorist violence, other social factors such as alienation, mental health, or bonds with other affected actors explains violence. Of course ideology matters; but extremist ideological pulls exist within a social context. Hence it is the social - class context that counter strategies should be focusing on.

Extremist affective bonds grow around friendship, not Belief. Most recruits to extremists and new religious movements come from those who know one or more members of the group. The personal connection between recruiter and recruited is far more important than the content of the mythology as the testimony of former cult members shows:

*"The way the Jesus Army worshiped was a bit odd at first ... but I soon got used to it. What really attracted me was the sincerity of the people and the obvious love and bonding that they had with each other".*

Likewise, a participant in another cult reported that: "After his first visit to the ideology center, he thought members of the centre were crazy and decided not to go back. However, he thought about all the people he knew there, and he recalled what a great friendship and warm time he had with them. Subsequently he turned up for the rest of the course." Similarly, terror networks operate around bonds of kinship and friendship. One study found that 95% of foreign terrorists who joined ISIS were recruited by friends or family."

An extremist group is not simply a quixotic fringe group with unorthodox practices: they are a commune of practice. In a sense, it is reemergence of feminist commune of early human existence. For alienated, isolated individuals, these groups create affective bonds of love and attention received from nowhere else. The culture of jihad is more than ideology: a large literature collected has found that terrorist groups have cultures of practice that go far beyond doing terror. Terrorists read poetry, weep and hug, sing, eat, and have a culture that can be observed outside of the material threat they pose. This phenomenon of early commune spirit is the "soft power" of jihad and other extremists, which pulls recruits in not with force, but with social cultural appeal and interrelation ties.

Extremist groups thrive on intensive interaction between recruits and elites and forge social interrelation. On the other hand Ex. groups rely on exclusive and isolating bonding practices that forge the conditions necessary for violence. Social inoculates the recruits from outside influence, neutralizes the stigma frequently associated with participation in such groups, and masks their deviant behaviour. Conversely, the more civil connections a group has with others, the more engaged they become in the democratic process. Cohesion and overlapping, bridging ties between communities can prevent splintering, ideological isolation, and foster mutual respect. Thus they become fighters for an imaginary ideal.

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In a statement released by its propaganda agency, the ISIS group said it was targeting citizens of countries bombing its territories and Christians. It said the attack targeting the citizens of pro US-coalition countries and Christians in Sri Lanka were Islamic State fighters. The wording of this ISIS's claim is similar to that for previous attacks that were thought to be inspired by the group but not directly admitted by it. The statement contained no further information or evidence. It came after ISIS supporters circulated unverified photographs claiming to show three of the suicide bombers who targeted churches and hotels on Easter Sunday. They showed the men posing with a knife and guns in front of ISIS's black flag, captioned with the names Abdul Muktar, Abu Ubaida and Abdul Barra. On the other hand Sri Lankan authorities had attributed the atrocities to a little-known local Islamist group called National Thowheed Jama'ath, which was previously known for vandalizing Buddhist statues.

President Maithripala Sirisena asked for foreign assistance to track down the bombers' international links on Monday, because of intelligence reports "indicating that foreign terrorist organizations are behind the local terrorists". The targeting of churches and hotels popular with foreign tourists is a technique recently used by ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates. However, attacks organized or coordinated by Isis have been claimed faster, with detail and sometimes seen the group put out gory videos and footage from the scene. Security analysts questioned whether an attack of such complexity, seeing multiple perpetrators strike targets in different parts of the country almost simultaneously - with at least nine bombs - could be prepared in little over a month.

ISIS issued a call for its followers to take vengeance for Christchurch attacks in an audio recording

from its official spokesman last month. "The scenes of death in the two mosques are enough to wake the sleep and incite the supporters of the caliphate who live there, to take vengeance for their religion and for sons of their Ummah, who are killed everywhere in the world," it said.

It was Major General Shavendra Silva facing 'credible allegations' of violating international humanitarian law and resulting human rights problem, which was in the discussion in the civil society. During the last stages of the war in 2009, he was the Commanding Officer of the 58<sup>th</sup> Division which is accused of direct attack on civilian targets including hospitals and food distribution queues, of being responsible for the disappearance of several persons associated with the LTTE who surrendered in the last days of the conflict, and the summary execution of senior LTTE personnel along with their family during the 'white flag incident'. On an international platform, these allegations were most recently documented by the Report of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) Investigation on Sri Lanka in 2015, based on independent investigation and extensive witness testimony. However with the attack last Sunday, the civil society discussion turned towards the great negligence of the office of President Sirisena. It started with the press conference held in the National library hall Colombo 7. In that every body praised the consistent anti-racist stand taken by Ranil inspite of the mistakes of Presidents office.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has said that information about these attacks had been received in advance, but attempted to sidestep responsibility. "We must look into why adequate precautions were not taken. Neither I nor the Ministers were kept informed." The statement of PM shows that president office avoided producing valuable information given by the security division, and at the same time did not take any steps to counter the predicted racist extremist's violence. Latter is hidden collaboration with racist terrorists. Was this horror was allowed to happen in order to show yahapalana government is incapable protecting minority communities from racist violence? Clearly, Sinhala fascists are collaborating with Isis type groups to create such violence. Track record of Ranil in this event shows he is the only liberal leader to challenge the criminal activities of others in power. Democratic voice says 'RANIL MUST RISE TO OCCASION TO CONSOLIDATE POWER AND SAVE DEMOCRACY'. If not there is a great danger of country slipping into a fascistic dictatorship which could destroy 3000 years of Lankan civilization.

Compared to above mention action of President Sirisena, the promotion on 9 January 2019, - Major General Silva was promoted by President Sirisena to the highest position in the military Chief of Defence Staff - is a small problem. Yes, this promotion has drawn intense criticism from civil society and victim groups. However, it is not surprising at all. For years, Lankan State institutions have allowed and contributed to a culture of impunity. Individuals, who should be investigated for allegations of corruption and serious crime, are often promoted and given increased access to power and resources. Major General Silva's most recent promotion is only the latest in a series of such troubling promotions. But it is very small compared to what Sirisena did in the recent period described by Ranil.

Alarming pattern of collaborations with alleged criminals and terrorists by the state while anti corruption and anti drug campaigns conducted world over make the president's hope a fantasy. Secretly, communication also takes place on a lower stratum, tied to internal corruption. There are recent allegations that senior navy officers implicated in the 'Navy 11' cases were given promotions, on the recommendation of Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne, who is himself also implicated in this case. These were reportedly questioned by the CID, but there seems to be no further progress. It is widely accepted by legal and political academics and practitioners, that accountability is necessary for deterrence and rule of law, victim empowerment and reconciliation. It follows from this, that accountability significantly contributes to political and economic stability, strong international relations with liberal states and functioning democracy.

Despite this new situation, Lanka is yet to credibly investigate and prosecute allegations of mass atrocity crimes committed by both sides of the conflicts. Much of this is because of the general political opposition to accountability, and more specifically, to a special court with the involvement of international judges and trials under international law, as required by HRC Resolution 30/1. In the new situation with the explanation given by Ranil, although it will take time and continued advocacy, this must remain a priority demand in Lanka's transitional justice process. Thus we can go forward to autonomy and democracy.

**Vickramabahu (« Bahu ») Karunaratne**

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