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# SRI LANKA ATTACKS

NEW OPENINGS BY ISLAMIC STATE

CHANGING  
NATURE  
OF TERROR

A PROFILE OF  
ATTACKERS

THE INDIAN  
CONNECTION



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# PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

No political analyst can confirm that the chapter of the most dangerous and violent terrorist organisation of modern times has closed. Until the causes of its creation are eliminated, it will resurrect again and again. The wrong international policy of eliminating the effect without treating the causes will inevitably lead to the comeback of the organisation in a more cruel and violent way.

**A**t the end of last April, Sri Lanka experienced terrorist attacks that hit a number of churches during the celebration of Christian Easter, sacrificing the lives of 258 people. The international community has condemned these attacks, the responsibility of which was taken by the terrorist organisation, ISIS. Just a few weeks before, the International Coalition For Fighting Daesh had announced its complete elimination from the areas it controlled in the Syrian territory, the end of what is known as the Islamic Caliphate.

### Still Alive

The message that ISIS wanted to send out with these attacks was, first of all, that it has not faded and confirm its ability to terrorise the world from the West to the East, being always on pins and needles, waiting for the next terrorist attack. Was the attack on Sri Lanka the last breath of the terrorist organisation or the beginning of a new era?

In order to understand the details of what is going to happen and predict it, we have to go back to the beginning. In the 1980s, during the Afghan War against the Soviet Union, the Salafist *jihadists* found their first support in a number of Islamic thinkers, although they belonged to different streams. The most important of these were Abdullah Azam, Osama bin Laden, Egyptian physician Ayman al-Zawahiri, Syrian Abu Musab al-Suri. Nor should we omit the Egyptian Abu Bakr Naji. These were the thinkers who created what we call international Islamic *jihad*.

The establishment of “Al-Qaeda (the base) of *Jihad*” by the end of the last century was one of the most important developments in Salafist

*jihad* since it had a decisive effect on its reform from the local level, as was Afghanistan and Chechnya, to international, the globalisation of *jihad*. The audios and videos of those *jihadists* played a huge role in the spread of this ideology. For example, Saudi Arabian al-Khattab’s videos, under the title “The Russian Hell” from various *jihadist* attacks in Chechnya, had a catalytic impact in the encouragement of young Middle Eastern Muslims to adopt the *jihad* idea, or at least empathise with it.

### 9/11 Turning Point

Then, an event changed the world. On 11 September 2001, 19 young *jihadists* led by Egyptian Mohammed Atta attacked with passenger aircrafts the two towers of the International

**Al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden,** created the “Mujahideen Shura Council” and appointed **as leader Abdullah Rashid al-Bagdadi**

Trade Center in the heart of New York and the American Pentagon. Following these attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, triggering the next phase of the idea of international *jihād* and the emergence of the Islamic State organisation.

### Iraq 2003-2011

Washington and some of its Western allies declared war on the Saddam Hussein regime and within a few weeks they managed to impose their supremacy on the ground by controlling the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, marking the end of the Iraqi regime. But when Washington began to politically organise Iraq's interior, there emerged Iraqi *jihād*ist militias, some with the slogan of the nation, and others with the slogan of *jihād*. But all had as their main objective the resistance against the American occupation. These groups, made up

of experienced former members of the Iraqi army, were able to inflict painful blows to US forces and their allies, pushing them to reorganise and re-examine the scene. In the midst of this complex scene, in a few small Kurdistan cities in northern Iraq, an unknown person until that moment, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, created his first group named Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-*Jihad*. With the passage of time, a large number of fighters - mainly Arabs - from around the world have begun to join this organisation. Also, the support of the Islamic *jihād*ist community has increased, especially after heavy blows against US troops in Iraq and the targeting of major Shia leaders such as Baqir al-Khakim, whom they killed. The first battle of Fallujah in 2004 won great sympathy which was the main cause of the gradual expansion of this organisation in central and western Iraq.



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Al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and changed the name of the organisation to "Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia" and a few months later, along with other small groups of Salafists, created the "Mujahideen Shura Council" and appointed as leader Abdullah Rashid al-Baghdadi. Al-Zarqawi himself remained a mere member of the Council as if he wanted to give Iraqi character to the organisation.

### Sunni Discontent

At this stage, the success of the organisation was the result of two essential factors:

The first was the popular rage on the streets of Iraq against Washington and its allies. Its policy was based on giving the Shia full influence and power at the expense of the Sunnis. This pushed the Iraqi Sunni tribes in the western part of the country to seek vengeance, which made their region the incubator of the organisation. We see, therefore, that the elements used by the organisation were injustice and retaliation.

### Regional Equation

Both the Iranian and the Syrian regime needed to expand their hands within Iraq. The regime of Bashar al-Assad



Security forces standing guard as Iraqi Kurds take part in a demonstration outside the US consulate in Erbil, the capital of the semiautonomous Kurdish region.

in Syria was considered as the next theater of war. According to statements by US officials at the time, fear of the conflict prompted the Syrian regime to move toward a strategy that would make Iraq drain Washington's power. The mosques of the cities of Aleppo, Damascus and Homs announced the opening of their doors to openly organise the entry of young people wishing to fight in Iraq and the border between Syria and Iraq made a safe passage for *jihadists* from all over to participate in the organisation. This support of the Syrian regime enabled it to penetrate the organisation and even use it in the future if needed. This was confirmed in the address to the United Nations by the Iraqi President, referring to the role of the Assad regime in the repeated terrorist attacks within the Iraqi territory.

### Iranian Element

Regarding the Iranian regime, according to the Abbottabad documents published by

Washington years ago, Tehran has been the ideal corridor for Al-Qaeda's financial support from Afghanistan and Iraq. In an audio message in early 2014, Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani[13], under the title "Sorry Al-Qaeda Sheikh", has confirmed that Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan has explicitly ordered its Iraqi branch not to attack the Iranian regime. Iranian companies have created the right environment to launder the funds of the two organisations. Iran's strategy was to keep the card of the *jihadists* in its hands to use it in its negotiations with the West and Washington, such as the nuclear agreement, or to send messages to regional forces.

Eventually, Washington, through the head of the multinational force in Iraq, David Petraeus and the Iraqi government, managed to communicate with the Sunni tribes of the country, form the

so-called Sahwat, and turn them against Al-Qaeda. They eventually managed to destroy nearly 90 per cent of its military and human capabilities, taking the US promise of greater Sunni participation in the Iraqi government. On the other hand, Washington's assassination policy against first-line leaders has weakened it considerably on the ground. Washington also came in contact with regional players in Syria and Iran and succeeded, through secret agreements, to close the border and stop its financial support. This time period ended with the deaths of most of its leaders, while most of its fighters were captured or hiding in the Anbar desert.

### From 2012 To 2014

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Iraq was one of the countries that saw peaceful demonstrations requiring a change of ruling regime. Iraqi Sunnis,



Police block the road near the shooting at a mosque in Linwood, Christchurch, New Zealand.

despite previous US promises, were blocked from the government dominated by the Shia and the Kurds. The Shura Council took advantage of this occasion to lead again. The spark of the new uprising was the battle of Mosul. The organisation succeeded in a few days and with a small number of fighters to control the second largest city in Iraq. It then expanded to the western part of the country and, exploiting the instability in Syria due to the Revolution, controlled a vast geographical area in eastern Syria, self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Sham in mid-2013, and later, as Islamic Caliphate.

This stage marks the beginning of the organisation's transition from regional to international. This had two aspects: the first was the announcement of the pre-existing militias around the world as its affiliates abroad, such as Boko Haram in Africa and a part of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The other side was the so-called "lone wolves". A person communicates via the internet with the center of the organisation in Iraq or Syria and carries out a terrorist attack in the country where he lives. We have such examples in the US, Belgium, France and elsewhere.

In September 2014, the International Coalition For Fighting Daesh, which involves dozens of countries, was created by Washington. Within four years, the Coalition succeeded, with the cooperation of the Iraqi forces and the Syrian Kurds, to recover nearly 90 per cent of the ISIS-controlled territories in Syria and Iraq and, in particular, to completely destroy its economic and media infrastructure.

Despite all the fluctuations and difficulties in addition to the rise and fall faced by this organisation in more than 15 years, in my opinion

## After September 11, **Western media continues** the same **misleading Islamophobic tactic**, widening the gap between **Muslims and other religions**

the causes of its emergence and strength still exist. This becomes clear if we read the political atmosphere, the security and the situation of the people in the country it originated.

### **Iraq Today**

The ISIS cells are still present in the Iraqi west, mainly in the Anbar desert. Over the past two months, it has carried out dozens of attacks on the army and secret services of Iraq. On the other hand, the Sunni environment has been in a worse economic and security situation since 2003. About 80 per cent of Iraq's major cities, such as Mosul and Ramadi, have been destroyed. The Kurdistan camps in northern Iraq are the only Sunni refuge, while the Iraqi government suffers from corruption and control by only one religious group. This tragic situation was and remains the argument that the Islamic State will use to revive itself.

### **Syria Today**

Reports in both the Syrian East and the Syrian Desert in the last two months confirm the existence of ISIS cells carrying out suicide attacks and bombings with improvised explosive devices against the Kurdish militias in eastern Syria and the Assad regime forces in the eastern countryside of Homs. Assad's success in persuading most countries in the world to be the best option for the country's leadership, despite his responsibility for the murders and displacement of millions of

Syrian citizens, while a large part of the Syrian people is in a state of despair, injustice and economic exhaustion, creates the same setting that encouraged ISIS to spread to Syrian territory in 2013 and will be the reason for its return.

### **International Implications**

After September 11, Western media continues the same misleading Islamophobic tactic, widening the gap between Muslims and other religions. This fires vengeful mood. The recent events of New Zealand prove the influence of the media. This attack was the perfect gift for organisations like ISIS which know how to use hate and revenge. As international media follow the same line, we will continue to witness more and more attacks whose victims will simply be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

### **Resurrection**

No political analyst can confirm that the chapter of the most dangerous and violent terrorist organisation of modern times has closed. Until the causes of its creation are eliminated, it will resurrect again and again. As long as international players have the need to use such an organisation as a tool to send their messages through its terrorist attacks, the Islamic State will always return. The wrong international policy of eliminating the effect without treating the causes will inevitably lead to the comeback of the organisation in a more cruel and violent way. 