

Is a Non-Aligned Defence Policy the best option for Sri Lanka's Economic Prosperity?

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Abstract—Despite international warnings on a possible ISIS attack, the 'Easter Sunday Attack' on Sri Lanka confirmed the fact that political agendas and state security must never be tangled. Though in 2009, Sri Lanka was a country capable enough to defeat the world's most brutal terrorist organization, right after ten years, in 2019, 'too much freedom, too much reconciliation and too much political compromises' led to ignoring the intelligence reports on State security. Unlike other countries, from ancient era, location of Sri Lanka has made it a 'hot spot' in geopolitical warfare. In this backdrop, even though ISIS took over the responsibility of 'Easter Sunday Attack' in Sri Lanka, it is imperative to answer, Why Sri Lanka? Therefore, the research problem of this paper is to mainly focus on why ISIS chose Sri Lanka to launch this attack? In order to find possible answers, the research methodology adopted focussed on secondary data sources of media and internet. It is pertinent to mention that this research is explorative rather than explanative, basically to secure Sri Lanka's future economic growth and geopolitical stability by pursuing a non-aligned strategy. Ultimately, it is the prime objective of the research outcomes to emphasis on policies and strategies for strategic defence of Sri Lanka in geopolitical realities and furthermore to introduce recommendations to the legal framework which is the need of the hour to support Sri Lanka's defence policy. This research has steered clear from not making conclusions, however the inferences been made could instigate a certain course of action which the author believes the national defence and economic experts are in the best position to consider.

Keywords— International Geopolitics, ISIS, Strategic Economic Growth, Sri Lanka's Future Defence Policy

I. SRI LANKA'S FUTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY

Sri Lanka's geopolitical location in the Indian Ocean has been of strategic interest to all key nations operating in the Asia-Pacific region. The key nations that have made their intentions clear are the U.S.¹, China and India. However, it must be borne in mind the geopolitical agendas of each of these nations are significantly different and more often than influence nations towards a strategic alignment to one of them. **This paper strives to present a**

case to pursue a non-aligned defence policy for Sri Lanka to achieve both strategic economic and geopolitical stability. As per Zukrowska (1999), "The link between economics and security was always rather obvious. Stability in this context can be seen in two ways: as political stability and as economic stability. A lack of stabilisation in one of the mentioned fields, let alone both, can be dangerous as has been proved by historical precedent"

II. BACKGROUND

On 21st April 2019, Easter Sunday morning, a wave of deadly bomb blasts hit Sri Lanka. Three churches and three luxury hotels in the commercial capital Colombo were targeted in a series of coordinated terrorist suicide bombings. Later that day, there were another two explosions at a housing complex in Dematagoda and a guest house in Dehiwala. "253 people were killed" (The Guardian 2019) including foreign nationals, and 03 police officers and at least 500 were injured. "Death roll revised down from 359 by authorities" (Aljazeera 2019). As reported by BBC (2019) "Government admitted a major intelligence lapse before the attacks as the Indian Intelligence warnings about planned attacks had not been taken seriously".

Location	Suicide bomber
St. Anthony's Church, Colombo	Alawddin Ahmed Muath (Local resident)
St. Sebastian's Church, Negombo	Mohamed Hasthun (resident from East)
Zion Church, Batticaloa	Mohamed Nasser Mohamed Asad (local resident)
Shangri-La Hotel, Colombo	Zaharan Hashim, (Leader of NTJ) Ilham Ahamed Mohamed Ibrahim
Cinnamon Grand Hotel Colombo	Insaf Ahamed (Ilham's elder brother)
Kingsbury Hotel, Colombo	Mohamed Azzam Mubarak Mohamed
Tropical Inn- Guest House, Dehiwala	Abdul Latheef (man who failed set bomb off in Taj Samudra Hotel, Colombo)
Housing Complex, Dehiwala	Fathima Ilham (wife of the youngest of Ilham brothers)

¹ U.S.- United States of America

Source: The Guardian (2nd May 2019) "Sri Lanka Police name all nine Easter Sunday suicide bombers"

On 23rd April, ISIS² claimed the responsibility of the attacks in Sri Lanka, by stating they were the work of "fighters of the Islamic State" via their Amaq News Agency (Guardian 2019). It also released a photograph showing the suicide bombers standing in front of an ISIS flag taking an oath of allegiance. "These attacks also suggest that ISIS had sub-contracted bombings to two local groups "National Thowheed Jama'at (NTJ)" and "Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim (JMI)" (Hoffman 2019), which were subsequently banned³ by the Government of Sri Lanka. NTJ is a previously little-known extremist Islamist group who had reportedly vandalized Buddhist statues in December 2018 in Mawanella (Indian Express 2019). Even less is known about JMI. In this backdrop, on 22nd April, Emergency Law⁴ came into effect, under Gazette No 2120/5 and on the same day midnight, police curfew was declared giving police extensive powers to detain and interrogate suspects. An overnight curfew and day time curfew also imposed in several days as appropriate to assist investigations as well as to minimize tense situations as occurred during the 1983 Insurgency. "On 24th May Emergency Law was further extended for a month". (Colombo Page 2019). Aftermath of the attack, Prime Minister (PM) had been reiterating the need for foreign intelligence support in his several statements from the time of the attacks. However, according to Kurukulasuriya (2019), "the government's response to this new crisis, with its dire security dimension, shows a level of internal dysfunction that has left citizens aghast". The confidence the average Sri Lankan had of the defence establishment has been completely shattered.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

Despite the fact that these attacks were locally planned or sub-contracted by ISIS, it is yet a mystery, why they chose Sri Lanka? Therefore, the problem statement, hypothesis and design of this research are as follows;

Research Problem- Mainly focus to answer the 'Easter Sunday attack' carried out by ISIS, WHY was Sri Lanka targeted?

Hypothesis- The Nations pursuing defence agreements with Sri Lanka do so to achieve geopolitical dominance versus Sri Lanka's future economic prosperity and geopolitical stability.

Research Objectives- In order to answer the above problem statement an extensive study of geopolitics and disclosure of relationship between geopolitics and terrorism is required to establish if the Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka was geopolitically instigated. Therefore, this study aims to:

- Understand the strategic geopolitical importance of Sri Lanka
- Understand the new global geopolitical realities which guide India, Pakistan and China's influence on Sri Lanka from a historical perspective
- Understand U.S. strategic geopolitical agenda
- Ultimately, to analyse the background of ISIS and means of their intervention to Sri Lanka

IV. SRI LANKA'S STRATEGIC GEOPOLITICAL LOCATION AND CHALLENGES

Sri Lanka is located in the heart of the Indian Ocean, being a key geographical location which is a gateway to Africa and Latin America. Similar to Istanbul⁵ which bridge between Europe and Asia. According to Daniel (2019), "30,000 naval vessels, 45,000 air crafts and 4,500 oil tankers passed by our 200nm of EEZ every year. No trade can happen between the Middle East energy producers and energy consumers in far East without Sri Lanka being involved" Sri Lanka has faced many invasions due to its geopolitical location. It is also pertinent to mention the U.S. dwindling influence in Asia-Pacific especially, in the Philippines and Japan in terms of their defence bases. As per Koenig (2019), "As the world-geostrategic location of Sri Lanka, links the Arabian Sea with the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka may also have a direct, open-sea connection with the small British island of Diego Garcia, in the Chagos Archipelago, north-east of Madagascar. Diego Garcia hosts the US's largest Navy base outside the American Continent"

In this backdrop, understanding the geopolitical agendas of India, Pakistan, China, U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israeli are crucial.

A. India's historical influence on Sri Lanka

Though we assume India and Sri Lanka are two separate countries, there was a time in the distant past when India and Sri Lanka was a single land mass. "Even today, after the land mass has split, the distance between India and Sri Lanka is only 22 miles of the Palk Strait" (Goonethilake 2010). India's influence on Sri Lanka dates back to the Rama-Ravana War⁶ as a result by which the Adam's

² ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or IS (Islamic State) or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant)

³ NTJ and JMI were banned on 27th April 2019, under Emergency Regulations No 1 of 2019.

⁴ Emergency Regulations No 1 of 2019

⁵ Istanbul is the largest city of Turkey

⁶ Rama- Rawana war occurred as a result of Rawana who abducted Rama's wife Sitha from India to exact vengeance on Rama and his brother Lakshmana for having abuse Rawana's sister Surpanakha

bridge⁷ was built re-connecting the land mass of India and Sri Lanka. Later, in 1987 Indo- Sri Lankan Peace Accord was signed between two countries with regard to LTTE⁸ issue. These two are the important affairs took between the two countries from ancient history in defence perspective. The Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord 1987, permitted an Indian intervention to Sri Lankan Civil War through IPKF⁹, at a time, "LTTE leader Prabhakaran was at hand to be captured by Sri Lankan Security Forces" (Wickremesekera 2012) Despite that, Sri Lankan leaders let India intervene at this stage and this resulted the infamous "Air Drop" of supplies over the Jaffna region (De Silva 2018), which as per Weisman (1987), "aided the LTTE". According to Khan (2009), "the LTTE was also trained and supported by RAW¹⁰ of India and with the blessings of Prime Minister (PM) of India, Indira Gandhi". Therefore, it is not a surprise when they halted military advance on the LTTE leader. But Pakistan assisted the Government of Sri Lanka in supplying high-tech military equipment to the Sri Lankan army in the Civil War against LTTE further strengthening ties with Sri Lanka. Next, it is important to analyse how India turn out to be a main character in geopolitics. For that, it is imperative to focus pre and post Bin Laden incidents which occurred between U.S. and Pakistan. After Bin Laden was found in Pakistan in 2011, the "U.S.-Pakistan alliance split" (Ross 2011). Therefore, U.S. chose India over Pakistan to establish U.S. South Asian influence. National Public Radio (2011) reported that "The Obama administration's decision to suspend \$800 million in aid to the Pakistan's military signals tougher U.S. line with a critical but sometimes unreliable partner in the fight against terrorism". In 2018, The Economic Times stated, "The Donald Trump administration has barred scores of Pakistani military officials from training and education. The move comes a month after US suspended security assistance to Pakistan, worth USD 1.15 billion" [Emphasis added] As a result, Pakistan has strengthened ties with China. Further, China's economic influence in Sri Lanka in southern tip of Asia, seems becoming problematic to India's geopolitical agendas. Today, India's influence on Sri Lanka would not only confined to geopolitics and economics but also to natural resources, mainly for water, as "India currently faces worst ever water crisis in history". (Sri Lanka Mirror 2018).

To what extent will India be influenced by the U.S. to meddle in Sri Lanka's affairs to achieve its strategic influence in Asia- Pacific?

B. China's historical Influence in Sri Lanka and the OBOR strategy.

China's historical relations with Sri Lanka date back to the 4th century A.D., when the Chinese monk Fahian visited Sri Lanka. Even before diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, Sri Lanka and China entered into the historic Rubber-Rice Barter in 1952¹¹. It was significant because China entered into an agreement with a non-Communist country. Diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and China were established in 1957. The first agreement after establishing diplomatic relations was on Economic and Technical Cooperation, signed in 1962. In 21st century, Sri Lanka and China relations have seen robust growth. Sri Lanka and China upgraded bilateral relations to a strategic cooperative partnership during the Sri Lanka President's visit to China in 2013. (Asirwatham 2018). Most importantly, in China's economic strategy, One Belt One Road¹² (OBOR) initiative, Sri Lanka plays a pivotal role as a gateway to Africa and Latin America in its Maritime Silk Route. Therefore, Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City are key to China's OBOR. This close relationship with China led to allegations in Western media that China is practicing "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" on Sri Lanka which is both unfounded and untrue as China holds less than 10% of all Sri Lankan debt. Supporting that Sanderatne (2019) has quoted IPS Executive Director Dr. Dushni Weerakoon speaking at the Sri Lanka Economics Association (SLEA) annual sessions in January 2019, "Chinese loans amounted to only about 9 percent of Sri Lanka's total outstanding debt in 2017, while China's share as a bilateral lender was about 14 percent, an amount equivalent to India's share".

To what extent will the U.S. go to destabilize China's rising economic influence in the 66 OBOR Nations? To what extent U.S. suspects China converting its economic influence to defence agreements in Sri Lanka's maritime cities?

C. U.S. Geopolitical Agenda in Asia- Pacific

U.S. has been directly or indirectly involved in countering the perceived threat of the expansion of communism in many Asian Nations, which even led Wars against Vietnam and Korea. "U.S. main goal in Vietnam was to prevent a

⁷ Also known as Rama- Sethu Bridge or Rama's Bridge believed to be built by Hanuman's monkey army enabling the crossing of Rama's army. Investigations conducted by Indian National Remote Sensing Agency had suggested that the land connection could be a manmade structure built 5000 to 3500 years ago.

⁸ LTTE- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, world's most ruthless terrorist organization, defeated through a war victory by Sri Lankan government on 18th May 2009.

⁹ IPKF- Indian Peace Keeping Force

¹⁰ RAW- Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW)

¹¹ At the time, Sri Lanka was affected by a worldwide rice shortage as well as a severe drop in rubber prices due to the introduction of synthetic rubber. At the same time, China had a surplus in rice while being unable to purchase natural rubber due to economic sanctions from other nations.

¹² Also called as 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI)

communist takeover of the entire nation" (Study.com). "The Korean War was one of several military conflicts that occurred during the Cold War, as the United States and its allies attempted to stop the spread of communism" (Ohio History Central) However, the breakdown of U.S.-Pilipino relations in terms of U.S. Naval Subic Bay base and its dwindling influence in Japan has prompted U.S. to strengthen its alliances in Asia- Pacific. "On 24 November 1992, the American flag was lowered in Subic for the last time and this withdrawals marked the first time since the 16th century that no foreign military forces were present in the Philippines" (Whaley 2013). It is further pertinent to note that U.S. economic model hinges on its defence industry.

U.S. modus operandi: "On 19th March 2003, U.S. along with coalition forces primarily from the United Kingdom, initiated war on Iraq, under the false suspicion that Saddam Hussein possessed or in the process of building weapons of mass destruction" (History.com 2019). The U.S. with its Middle Eastern ally Saudi Arabia has forged ties with Israel presenting Iran as its common enemy. For Saudi Arabia, this involvement has been positioned as one of gaining influence for its Wahhabism Islamic radicalization agenda. Destabilization of the Kuwait, Libya and Syria were all part of a strategic clandestine operation to destabilize the Middle East and ensure the safety and security of Israel. Whilst the strategic goals of destabilizing Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Tunisia and Egypt were achieved Russia's intervention into the Middle East prevented the same happening to Bashar-al-Assad in Syria. "BBC expose with graphic visuals that US and British-led coalition forces enabled hundreds of ISIS Jihadists to escape from the Raqqa (Syria) after the headquarters of their self-declared Caliphate were bombarded out of recognition". (Ians 2017) In essence, Russia has a religious interest in Syria, where the two cities Palmyra¹³ and Maaloula¹⁴ are significant to Russian Christian history¹⁵. Truly, Syria is the entrance of Russia to the Middle East. The U.S. influence on Middle East has also drawn a wedge between cash rich Qatar and Saudi Arabia / UAE, on the basis that Qatar supports Iran which is perceived as a threat to Saudi Wahhabism expansion strategy. The relocation of the American Embassy to Jerusalem is a confirmation of U.S. led destabilization goals being achieved in the Middle East. This has now been achieved and the potential threat of a United Middle Eastern response has diminished. With all these, it is clear that U.S. has always intervened a country as way of lending a hand on sake of two reasons; terrorism and to overthrow dictators not support U.S. Through this

destabilization U.S. has been able to achieve both its political agenda of the safety of Israel and its military agenda of bases in the Middle East, in Saudi Arabia and Turkey and the sale of weapons.

U.S. commitment to sovereignty of Israel at any cost "The Arab-Israeli War grants Egypt control of Gaza. Before Israel became a nation, the majority of people dwelling in the region were Palestinians. On 14th May, 1948 Israel was officially declared a State, marking the first Jewish State in over 2,000 years. U.S. President Truman recognized the new nation on the same day. Israel regularly seeks help from the U.S. to reinforce its regional security and defence capabilities. During 2018, Israel and Iran have clashed over Iran's presence in Syria, fuelling speculation about the possibility of broader conflict between the two countries and how Russia's presence in Syria might affect the situation". (Zanotti 2018). However, it is a well-known fact that U.S. is the godfather of Israel and will spare any intervention to secure the nation at any cost. The recent announcements to moving U.S. to Jerusalem is also seems as an authorization to Israel to annex all Palestinian lands in the future.

Destabilization of Asian and Middle East was occurred through al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Al-Qaeda: Arabic for "the Base," is an international terrorist network founded by Osama Bin Laden. The origins of Al-Qaeda can be traced to the Soviet War in Afghanistan in terms of cold war around 1979. But it is believed that it was formally founded in 1988. Osama Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri are the leaders of this organization. It is considered the top terrorist threat to U.S. confined Al-Qaeda story to U.S. funding and weapon sales, and finally able to withdrew Russian troops from Afghanistan. However, this strategy backfired on U.S. as Al-Qaeda has then created havoc in U.S. in 9/11.

ISIS: It was started as an Al-Qaeda splinter group at the inception to destabilize the Middle East in order to secure Israel. They aim to create an Islamic caliphate¹⁶ across Iraq, Syria and beyond. The group is implementing Sharia Law, based on Saudi concept of Wahhabism, rooted in eighth-century Islam, to establish a society that mirrors the region's ancient past. ISIS is known for 90 attacks in 21 countries that have killed nearly 1,400 people carrying out public executions, crucifixions and other acts. "Its Leader is known as, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is reportedly based in

¹³ Home to some of the Christianity's oldest churches. Today, St. Petersburg of Russia is known as the Palmyra of the North.

¹⁴ Only place in the world that speaks the language of Jesus. The ancient churches of Maaloula has been destroyed by ISIS were rebuild by Russian Government's charity.

¹⁵ Russian Orthodox Church

¹⁶ Caliphate means an area rule by Caliph or a Chief Muslim Ruler.

Syria. He was detained in US run prison Bucca in Southern Iraq and has been released in 2004". (CNN 2019). "The Israeli authorities have provided significant amounts of cash, food, fuel and medical supplies to Sunni rebels (ISIS) fighting against Bashar al-Assad's government" (McKernan 2017). It is evident that ISIS cleverly use the Islamist sectarian clash of Sunni and Shia to initiate conflicts, for example, for regional rivals of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and fear psychosis of Shia domination was built up by the ISIS in order to attract Sunni support and further. According to Jayasuriya (2017) "they use this propaganda for three purposes; to export its terror and also to recruit fighters from the West; to influence vulnerable and willing orthodox Muslims to radicalize and for likeminded militant Islamist in other parts of the world to independently form ISIS support cells" [Emphasis added]. Most importantly, as Dissanayake (2017) has pointed out, "with the passage of time, ISIS encourage the use of the particular tactic called 'Do-It-Yourself Terrorism' (DIY) - where anybody, regardless of age, race, geographic location, and background, could easily become a 'soldier of the Caliphate' to execute attacks in the name of ISIS. ISIS is notorious for its 'slick' online strategy. This has attracted a significant number of foreign fighters and 'jihadi-brides' to travel from all over the world to join the movement. Those who were unable to travel were given an alternative solution to become a proactive supporter of the outfit, by carrying out attacks in their home countries as 'lone-wolves'. In this manner, ISIS effectively pioneered 'crowd sourcing' its jihadist movement". [Emphasis added]

Scholar perspectives:

- "US troops and allied Sunni militias defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq during the 2007 "surge" — but didn't destroy it. The US commander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, described the group in 2010 as down but "fundamentally the same." In 2011, the group began rebuilding, and in 2012 and 2013 it freed a number of prisoners held by the Iraqi government, who then joined its ranks. Meanwhile, the group saw an opportunity in Syria, where peaceful protests descended into violence in mid-2011 and 2012. It began establishing a presence in Syria in mid-2011 in order to participate in the fight against Bashar al-Assad's regime, a move that helped it gain fighters and valuable battlefield experience. In 2013, the group once known as al-Qaeda in Iraq — now based in both Syria and Iraq — rebranded as ISIS. Tension grew between ISIS and al-Qaeda, and they formally divorced in February 2014". (Beauchamp 2015)
 - "ISIS is entirely the creation of NATO and the West and it remains in control of the organization. Even when US
- is funding extremists in order to destroy Assad in Syria, it is clear that, ISIS itself, is also being directed by Western intelligence, the GCC¹⁷, and Israel"*(Turbeville 2018) [Emphasis added]
- "Beginning in 2011 – and actually even as early as 2007 – the United States has been arming, funding, and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and a myriad of armed terrorist organizations to overthrow the government of Syria, fight Hezbollah in Lebanon, and undermine the power and influence of Iran. Billions in cash have been funneled into the hands of terrorist groups including Al Nusra, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and what is now being called "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria". ISIS was harbored on NATO territory, armed and funded by US CIA agents with cash and weapons brought in from the Saudis, Qataris¹⁸, and NATO members themselves. The "non-lethal aid" the US and British sent including the vehicles we now see ISIS driving around in." (Cartalucci 2014)[Emphasis added]
 - "Even as the US fights Islamic terrorism, it is accused at other times of using ISIS as an asset. Analyst Saeed Naqvi in a comment on the Easter Sunday attacks published in The Economic Times, refers to a New York Times interview with Barack Obama, where the then US president admitted to having delayed bombing ISIS when it reared its head in Iraq, so as to put pressure on Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki to sign a SOFA agreement. "In other words, ISIS was an American asset at that juncture," Naqvi noted". (Kurukulasuriya 2019)
 - "According to former Afghan President, ISIS is the brainchild of the US and its allies which introduced this terrorist group to the world" (Ians 2017)

D. Saudi Arabia and its global geopolitical agenda

In the Middle Eastern geopolitical agenda currently Saudi Arabia and Israel are apparent U.S. allies. The geopolitical agenda of Saudi Arabia is the expansion of Islamist radicalism through Wahhabism in the Middle East and it is pertinent to mention it has now focussed its attention to Asia. "US foreign policy in the Middle East during Cold War tried to prevent Soviet Union influence by supporting anti-communist regimes and backing Israel against Soviet-sponsored Arab countries. Back in 1960s and 1970s, US came to replace United Kingdom as the main security patron of the Persian Gulf states, working to ensure a stable flow of Gulf oil. However, since 9/11 attacks in 2001, US policy has included an emphasis on counter-terrorism. History reveals that US has diplomatic relations with all countries in the Middle East except for Iran. Iraqi PM's statements on 21st May 2019 reveals that he intends to intervene to end tensions between Iran-US". (Abdul-Zahra

¹⁷ GCC- Gulf Corporation Council

¹⁸ Author considers that Qatar has been isolated by U.S. due to its alignment to Iran.

2019) U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia refers to the bilateral relations which began in 1933, where full diplomatic relations were established. Saudi Arabia is a strong U.S. ally and “according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the biggest importer of arms from the United States from 2009 to 2018 was Saudi Arabia” (Armstrong 2019). Presently, Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflict¹⁹ is the ongoing struggle for influence in the Middle East and adjacent regions to propagate Saudi led Wahhabism as an option to Iran’s Shia religion. In this backdrop, on 17th May 2019, “Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States have agreed to a request for a renewed deployment of US forces to deter Iran with the evidence grows that Iran is stationing missiles directed at Israel” (Jerusalem Post 2019). With all these, a connection between ISIS and Saudi Arabia was disclosed by Armstrong (2014), “ISIS roots are in “Wahhabism”, which a form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia. In July 2013, the European Parliament identified Wahhabism as the main source of global terrorism, and yet the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, condemning IS in the strongest terms, has insisted that the ideas of extremism, radicalism and terrorism do not belong to Islam in any way” [Emphasis added]. Saudi Arabia have found willing partners among the vulnerable populations in the Central Asian and Afghan-Pakistani regions, Africa, the Balkans and even in Europe. These funders indirectly assist ISIS and al-Qaeda-friendly organizations to fast-track their recruitments process on their behalf. As per Yayla (2018), “in the leaked U.S. embassy cables, it was openly addressed that Saudi Arabia was “a critical source of terrorist funding” where the money is mostly spent on training of Wahhabi clerics, production and distribution of Wahhabi textbooks, media outreach and donations to local schools or cultural centres”.

Is ISIS the Saudi Arabian vehicle to achieve its Wahhabism expansion in the world which then gives Saudi Arabians a strong rationale to invest in all clandestine ISIS operations anywhere in the world, thereby, joining the U.S. with a strategic purpose of its own?

V. ISIS’ STRATEGIC OPERATIONS IN SRI LANKA

As per Jayasuriya (2017), “the spreading of Wahhabism²⁰ in Sri Lanka took place after 1973 and avenues for the spread of Wahhabism opened with Sri Lankan Muslims traveling to Saudi Arabia for employment”. Majority of Sri Lankan housemaids employ in Saudi Arabia than in other Middle Eastern countries. As per Weeraratne (2014), “in 2013, a total of 293,105 Sri Lankans have departed for foreign employment and majority of their destination was Saudi Arabia”. According to Jayasuriya (2017), “in the 1980s, Salafist Islam, began to spread in Kattankudy, Sri

Lanka. An ultra-orthodox Salafi group is often referred as “Thowheed,” meaning monotheism and also written as “Tawhid.” There are six different organisations that the Muslims of Sri Lanka belong to; Thabliq Jaamath, Tharika, Ehewanu Muslims, Thawheed Jaamath, Jamithul e Islam and Jamathul Muslimeen”. [Emphasis added] It was identified that two organizations; National Thawheed Jamaath (NTJ) and Jamaathe Millathe Ibrahim (JMI) are responsible for Easter Sunday attack. “NTJ is an ideological offspring of the rapidly growing, Saudi-funded Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamath (TNTJ), which has a headquarters in Chennai, India. The TNTJ, a Wahhabi-based organization, helped establish the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath (SLTJ), from which the NTJ emerged as a splinter” (Sellin 2019). Therefore, it is pertinent that it is not that randomly ISIS has sub-contracted to launch these attacks to local NTJ and JMI, but those organizations itself were ISIS, rooted in Sri Lanka through Saudi Wahhabism under different designations. As seen in Sri Lankan attack, using wealthy families to achieve ISIS targets is a new trend which was also seen in suicide attacks on a church and police building in Indonesia last year (Ethirajan 2019). In February 2018, Tim Meko cited about a report by the Soufan Center has traced back 5,600 ISIS foreign fighters has returned home whereas with regard to Sri Lanka, only fighters who has left their home country to join ISIS were mentioned. “In Easter Sunday attack, at least one of the bombers, identified as Jameel Mohammed Abdul Latheef, went to ISIS recruiters in Syria in 2014, according to Wall Street Journal” (Arora 2019) but, was unsuccessful in his task and later suicided in a Dehiwala Guest House. According to Jayasuriya (2017), “a Sri Lankan ISIS fighter Mohammed Sharaz Nilam Mushin aka Abu Shuraih Seylani was killed in Syria on 12 July 2015”. These confirms the existence of Islamic State-linked jihadist networks in the country and that several other Sri Lankan nationals may also be fighting for the jihadist group in Iraq and Syria. “Subsequent investigations revealed that there are 36 Sri Lankans who have travelled from Sri Lanka to Syria and have joined the ISIS. One of the bombers had travelled to Syria. Another trained in Turkey. One man arrested hours after the attacks had commuted between Sri Lanka and Syria, leading investigators to identify him as a possible middleman between the Islamic State and Sri Lankan militants” (Gettleman et al 2019) However, it is clear that these groups could not have succeeded without a strong local support.

Saudi Wahhabism and the ISIS attack in Sri Lanka

- “After 1973, the Arab oil embargo that enriched Saudi Arabia greatly, the ultra-fundamentalist Wahhabi sect, which is the official religious interpretation in the Saudi

¹⁹ Also called as Iran- Saudi Arabia Cold War or Middle East Conflict

²⁰ Wahhabism is a Saudi Islamic radicalization strategy

Kingdom, began to penetrate Sri Lanka's adherents to Islam. The Wahhabis in Sri Lanka act through a movement called Thawheed or Monotheism" (Schwartz and Al-Alawi 2013).

- "Tawhid or monotheism, is the basic focus of Wahhabism" (Long 2009)
- "The 2007 Wikileaks exposed that Muslim leaders in Sri Lanka expressed concerns about growing Wahhabi presence in the East of the island, resulting in the rise of hard-line Salafi groups inciting sectarian clashes. Issue 12 of IS English online magazine Dabiq dedicated a feature article of a Kandy-born Muhamad Muhsin Sharfaz Nilam, nom de guerre 'Abu Shurayh asSilani', as their martyr. Facebook has also shut down a once-active public page called the 'Seylan Muslims in Shyaam' (Sri Lankan Muslims in the Levant), urging Sri Lankans of all ethnic background to join the jihadist bandwagon" (Dissanayake 2017)
- "Easter Attack was inspired by extremist Saudi ideology known as Wahhabi Salafism spreading through their mosques and schools around the world" (Gabbard 2019).
- "The NTJ is believed to have been formed sometime around 2014 after breaking away from the larger Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath (SLTJ), according to a report in The Hindu newspaper. Based in Kattankudy, a Muslim-dominated town in eastern Sri Lanka, the NTJ, much like the SLTJ, is believed to have been strongly influenced by Wahhabism - the official religious doctrine in Saudi Arabia" (Aljazeera 2019)

"ISIS and Al-Qaeda appropriate foundational texts of al-Wahhab, including The Book of Monotheism (Kitab at-Tawhid), in their curriculum, in their Sharia (ideological) training in military camps, online training and the school systems they control". (Yayla 2018) This was their hidden progress in Sri Lanka too. In Sri Lanka, Arabic schools and universities have built and has used to train NTJ terrorists, and those universities were not UGC²¹ registered. It is also important to cite about Jihadism²², to find out whether their ideology is similar to ISIS' Wahhabism. *"Moreover, most contemporary jihadist terrorists are not adherents of Wahhabism. The two categories, Wahhabism and contemporary jihadism, are not synonymous"* (Long 2009) However, *"the ideology of ISIS has been described as being based on Salafism, Salafi Jihadism and Wahhabism"* (Bunzel 2015). As per Yayla (2018), *"Salafist Jihadism is stemming from Wahhabism"*. Therefore, it can be summarized that Sri Lankan Thowheed or Jihadi or ISIS, all based on one philosophy though different terminology has been used.

²¹ UGC- University Grants Commission

²²According to Zalman (2019), it refers to a person who believes that an Islamic State governing the entire community of Muslims

Having achieved its destabilization objectives in the Middle East to secure Israel, is the U.S. refocussing ISIS on destabilizing the China OBOR economic strategy, on the pretexts that the China OBOR initiative is also a Chinese defence expansion strategy?

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS PERTAINING TO THE ISIS ATTACK ON SRI LANKA

"Historically, even a single successful suicide bombing requires a logistical "tail" involving many people, including recruiters to radicalize and maintain the resolve of the bomber-martyrs, skilled bomb makers, and operatives to surveil targets" (Hoffman 2019). Therefore, it is a challenging undertaking generally only could accomplished by people with considerable expertise and an organizational network.

Preamble- It is pertinent to mention that the purpose of this research is basically to secure Sri Lanka's future economic growth and geopolitical stability by pursuing a non-aligned strategy.

WHY was Sri Lanka targeted?

As the U.S. influences in Asia-Pacific began to dwindle, it maybe needed a new base to compensate for its impending losses in Philippines and Japan further, for Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka offered an easy entry for destabilization due to the following factors. As per Kruglanski et al (2019), *"four distinct factors made Sri Lanka attractive for the ISIS strategy converged to enable the Easter bloodbath: (1) political developments in Sri-Lanka in the post war period, (2) dysfunctionality of the current government, (3) the regional penetration of the Islamic State in South and Southeast Asia, and (4) collaboration of the perpetrators with radicalized networks and groups"*. Considering all these facets, this research comes into five possible reasons as to why ISIS chose Sri Lanka;

- After the perceived losses to ISIS in Syria and Iraq it had to re-establish itself in order to secure the continuous funding from its sources.

The defeat of ISIS in Syria was announced by U.S. after the bombing of Bagouz in Syria. As per Dyer (2019) *"In the 40-second video Baghdadi vowed his militants would get revenge on the West for the group's defeat in Iraq and Syria and claimed the Sri Lankan Easter bombings were part of their 'battle of attrition'"*.

- Lapse in Sri Lankan State security measures

must be created and that this necessity justifies violent conflict with those who stand in its way.

DailyFT (2019) reported that *“according to the assessments of Jonah Blank, the attack was a result of the political negligence than its accounting as an intelligence failure by many parties and ISIS did not choose Sri Lanka, but Sri Lankan extremists chose ISIS”*.

As per views of Prof. Colonne (2019), *“it must be analysed if this was an attack against Christian religion or they anyhow wanted to commit a mass destruction? Maybe they had pre-planned to launch the attack anyway on 21st April without any religious interest, but in order to accomplish a mass destruction, they may have chosen crowded church locations (since it was Easter Sunday), to fulfil their objective. The main purpose in attacking hotels seems to commit a maximum damage to foreigners, despite the LTTE who never attacked foreigners, but ISIS had done such previously as done in France”*. [Emphasis added] Moreover, ISIS to secure a base in Sri Lanka it had to attack a Christian target and an economic target to appeal Western countries. This maybe the reason why luxury hotels were targeted too. It was mainly to gain attraction towards Sri Lanka by which maybe indirectly to justify U.S. intervention too. This even could be as a possible revenge attack on Christians as a retaliation to New Zealand attack.

➤ Drugs and terrorism

It is a well-known fact that drug trafficking, crimes and terrorism are constantly interconnected as drug trafficking is always among the top revenues behind all terrorists activities. This year, Sri Lanka has taken stern actions to fight against drug menace. In this backdrop, WHY was Sri Lanka targeted? , become complicated with drugs-terrorism nexus. It was reported that *“Indian security agencies suspected the recent terror attack in Sri Lanka was financed by a Pakistan-based drug cartel. Drug smugglers based in Pakistan have been using the Sri Lankan sea route for the last seven years to export drugs to Europe after a clamp down on the Central Asian and Russian drug routes”*. (Chaudhury and Tripathi 2019)

➤ Attacking Chinese and Indian investments

It is pertinent to point out that among three luxury hotels, Shangri-la Hotel, was the only one signified in merging the two countries China and Sri Lanka. Surprisingly, unlike other locations, but to bomb Shangri-La two suicide bombers took part, and most importantly, Zaharan Hashim, known as the leader of NTJ himself went to this target as a suicide bomber. This emphasis the fact that Shangri-La was the main target among all other locations. Fortunately, Taj Samudra, an Indian Icon in Sri Lankan tourism, was the hotel which the bomb blast was not successful.

➤ To counter China’s OBOR economic expansion strategy

“OBOR initiative is a massive economic extension which links 66 countries and beyond” (Chin 2016), which a gateway to Africa and Latin America opens through Sri Lanka. Also, the growing economic strength of China has raised it to the world’s second largest economy in world (IMF 2018) and as per Statistics Times (2018) *“China possess \$14, 172, 20 billion of GDP where U.S. is ahead of China by \$7310 billion in 2019”*. This poised China to become world’s first in a little time. This maybe the U.S. leading economic rationale to counter China. CT Web (2019) reported that, *“US Senate Armed Services Committee has unveiled a draft bill on 23rd May 2019 that targets China on several fronts, from stemming the erosion of the U.S. military advantage against Beijing to countering the growing Chinese influence around the world”*.

However, *“It was never a secret that China and U.S play the great game in South Asia, which became very clear since the dawn of December 2018, when US Navy using Sri Lanka to counter China’s growing Indian Ocean presence”* (Macan-Markar 2018) U.S. saw Easter Sunday Attack as an opportunity intended to cause in the guise of security stabilization and countering ISIS with a view to achieve their military presence in Sri Lanka, primarily to achieve the SOFA²³ to access Trincomalee harbor for U.S. naval presence in the backdrop of debacle in Philippine and Japan. According to Rutnam (30th May 2019), *“The US and Sri Lanka are attempting to seek a consensus on a controversial agreement. SOFA was initially signed in 1995 in Sri Lanka allowing the US military to be in Sri Lanka for military exercises or other official duties. The US has now sought to amend the 1995 agreement by including fresh clauses which give US troops’ additional privileges. However, the US Embassy insisted that the agreement will not permit the US to establish a base in Sri Lanka or station troops in the country”*. [Emphasis added] After Easter Sunday attack, it was seen that U.S. commenced high tension against China. This became more evident with US Military Update on 24th May 2019 that *“US Indo Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Chief denounces China and called for stronger US- Sri Lanka military relations”*. On the other hand, *“The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of the US Government has approved a five-year grant of \$480 million to Sri Lanka at its quarterly meeting held on the 25th of April 2019 in Washington D.C. The MCC Sri Lanka Compact is designed to expand economic opportunities and reduce poverty through economic growth”* (Colombo Page 2019)

²³ SOFA- Status of Forces Agreement

Should Sri Lanka consider any defence agreements which could indirectly be perceived as an alignment to a Nation?

VII. RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE STRATEGIC DEFENCE OF SRI LANKA

Preamble- It is pertinent to mention that the prime objective of this research is basically to secure Sri Lanka's future economic growth and geopolitical stability by pursuing a non-aligned strategy.

A. *Exploit China's economic influence through the OBOR and pursue Sri Lanka's non-aligned defence policy*

Sri Lanka on account of its strategic location is now in the radar of dangerous power games among super powers. Consolidating Sri Lanka's pivotal role in China OBOR, Sri Lanka be able to become a massive economic hub being a key gateway to Africa and Latin American countries. Therefore, Sri Lanka must work with China for economic growth in OBOR, but must ensure that China do not use Sri Lanka as a military base. Further, to counter the geopolitical influence of U.S. and Saudi Arabia, in achieving their twin goals of using Sri Lanka as a military base and as a tool for Wahhabism expansion respectively, it is pertinent that Sri Lanka must never be aligned with either China or U.S. by letting them fulfil their ulterior motives in geopolitical strategies. Consolidating Sri Lanka to the U.S. strategic goal in the Pacific and Indian Oceans is to counter China with the help of its allies. As a result, it is evident that India strives to keep China away from Sri Lanka, therefore, in our policies and strategies for the strategic defence of Sri Lanka, it is important not to grant India to have a legitimate reason to intervene to Sri Lanka. The point here is not to say that Sri Lanka does not need the help of other nations but, to pursue a non-aligned defence policy for Sri Lanka to achieve both strategic economic and geopolitical stability is pertinent.

B. *Sri Lanka's strategic defence and legal framework to support our policies*

It must be noted that existing laws are sufficient, especially existing anti-terrorism laws to counter ISIS involvements or any terrorist involvement in Sri Lanka and there seems no necessity of a new legislation to be passed. In comparison to the existing Prevention of Terrorism Act

(PTA), the newly proposed Counter Terrorism Act (CTA) is criticized for being negligent in respect of terrorists. According to Kurukulasuriya(2019), "*critics argue that the government's real objective is to get rid of the PTA in compliance with the Geneva resolutions and further such could help protect ex-LTTE elements or sympathisers domiciled abroad, also raises questions as to whether the drafting of this law had external inputs*". Further, following existing laws of Sri Lanka widely cover the involvements with foreign terrorists: the 1887 Penal Code (Section 2), the 1987 Prevention of Terrorism Act (Section 11) and the April 2019 Emergency regulations 2120/5 (Sections 26 and 27). It must be strongly asserted that political agendas and State security must never be tangled at any cost, because despite 'State Security' been concerned as a 'mere fact', it is recognized in the Constitution²⁴ under "Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties" in Article 27 (3)²⁵ with regard to national security and in Article 27(15)²⁶ with regard to international security. Moreover, in order to eliminate ISIS from Sri Lanka, it is imperative to cut down their finance flows, seizure their properties and penalize all supporters' who shields Saudi Wahhabi extremists. It is further recommended to consider Malaysia's counter terrorism strategy they implemented against ISIS. Most importantly, in order to fighting ISIS we must first counter Saudi Wahhabism ideology. As the late Singaporean leader Lee Kuan Yew stated regarding preventing terrorist attacks: "*You must use force. But force will only deal with the tip of the problem. In killing the terrorists, you will only kill the worker bees. The queen bees are the preachers, who teach a deviant form of Islam in schools and Islamic centers, who capture and twist the minds of the young.*" (Sellin 2019).

In terms of future economic growth in the national interest of Sri Lanka, it is pertinent to consider the legal stance with regard to foreigners' rights to own property in Sri Lanka. In 2014, repealing Part VI of the Finance Act²⁷, Land (Restrictions on Alienation) Act²⁸ came into effect stipulating restrictions on the alienation of lands in Sri Lanka to foreigners, foreign companies and certain institutions with foreign shareholders. Foreigners can buy apartments/condominiums from ground level up²⁹, however, lands cannot be purchased on freehold and can only be leased up to 99 years. These legal implications have further aided securing the non-alignment policy of Sri Lanka in global geo-economics as well as in geopolitics.

²⁴ Constitution (means 1978 Constitution with Amendments) is the supreme law of Sri Lanka

²⁵ Ar. 27(3) - The State shall safeguard the independence, sovereignty, unity and the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

²⁶ Ar. 27(15) - The State shall promote international peace, security and co-operation, and the establishment of a just and

equitable international economic and social order, and shall endeavor to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in dealings among nations.

²⁷ Finance Act, No 11 of 1963

²⁸ Land (Restrictions on Alienation) Act, No 38 of 2014

²⁹ Apartment Ownership Law No 11 of 1973

Finally, the purpose of this study being focussed to strengthen the economic growth and the geopolitical stability of Sri Lanka allowing a non-aligned policy, this research has steered clear from not making conclusions, however the inferences been made could instigate a certain course of action which the author believes the national defence and economic experts are in the best position to consider.

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