Recruitment Rhetoric: Media Strategies of the Islamic State and Al-Qa`ida

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Abstract-Salafi-Jihadi information operations are designed to manipulate, radicalize, and recruit from the global Muslim population. This paper examines the global outreach operations of prominent Salafi-Jihadi groups, in an effort to outline suitable responses to Islamic extremism in the Sri Lankan context. It draws from in-depth studies of media strategies utilized by the Islamic State and Al- Qa`ida, based on their online presence, media outputs, and captured materials. It also considers information and analyses of primary source materials such as magazines, recruitment guides, and interviews with terrorists and their family members. These are discussed in the context of the broader strategy of al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. Both organizations seek to exploit 'Islamaphobia' to recruit and radicalize individuals from a target audience on multiple 'impact' levels. Relevant methods are presented to consider the scope and depth of their information operations. Research findings that show propaganda campaigns are designed to have strategic as well as individual impacts to propagate ideology and inspire action are summarized. Recruitment and radicalization approaches based on both sociological studies and data from individual country experiences were then used to frame observable pathways to terrorism. An analytical lens based on risk factors is used to discuss recruitment tactics on structural, social, and individual levels. Recommendations for Sri Lanka to counter the spread of 'Islamaphobia', improve social integration, and counter extremism at a local level are presented for consideration by policymakers*.*

Keywords: Recruitment, Terrorist Strategy, Information Operations

Introduction

Terrorists seek to provoke societies and governments into action that benefits their overall strategy. It is therefore fundamentally incumbent upon the security establishment to understand this overall strategy and avoid playing into the underlying motives of terrorist groups. This paper intends to provide an understanding of the global outreach operations of international Salafi-Jihadi groups in an effort to raise the veil of confusion on radicalization into Islamic extremism in Sri Lanka. Groups like Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State are adept at manipulating this confusion in communities they target. The paper will discuss and introduce recruitment strategies and approaches that subvert Muslim communities around the world.

Methodology

This research considers the global recruitment approach of Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. It explores and contrasts the recruitment methodologies and media used by these organizations to manipulate a global audience. In-depth research conducted by research organizations and scholars engaged in security studies were consulted extensively for this purpose. These studies included primary data collected from former and current Salafi-Jihadis. Cumulatively, this research draws from qualitative data collected on or from over 2800 members, defectors, and family members from terrorist groups from around the world. Given the global threat of inspired lone actors and groups, a number of studies analyze the media strategy of these two groups through the in-depth study of media outputs, captured materials, and online presence. Studies included Arabic and other language publications and forums. Peer reviewed publications were also consulted to gain understanding of various recruitment and radicalization theories. Primary data in the form of online Salafi-Jihadi publications were also considered. This includes *Inspire*, *Dabiq*, and *Rumiyah* magazines as well as informal and formal recruitment guides and analyses of the same. Analyses of terrorist profiles and backgrounds were also consulted. The time period covered in the research extends from 2006 to the present.

Extremist Ideology

At the outset, it is necessary to define who are the Islamic extremists. The Cambridge dictionary defines an extremist as someone who has a belief that is considered unreasonable or unacceptable to most people (Extremism, n.d.). According to the PEW Research Center, there are 1.7 billion people who follow the Islamic faith worldwide (Diamant, 2019). Every Muslim is obliged to follow the teachings of the Prophet and the Quran in practicing Islam. As in any faith, this is done to varying degrees and consists of various sects, sub-cultures, and orientations based on their interpretation of the religion. Within this Muslim population, some have laid exclusive claim to being Salafis, which, in its broader interpretation is a "universal Islamic ideal to follow the teachings of the Prophet and the early pious Muslim community" (Bin Ali, 2018). According to Mohammed Bin Ali "...the difference between the Salafis and non-Salafis is about interpretations, understanding of religious texts, methodology and approach." Salafis are not considered a separate sect or united under a movement or hierarchy but have emerged as the most prominent representatives of the Islamic faith in the world today, due to terrorism. This is due to the sustained activities of the so-called Salafi-Jihadists, who believe in violent action to enforce strict adherence to their interpretation of Islam and proselytize the world. To them, moderate and liberal Muslims are considered bad Muslims, even worse than non-believers of the faith. To date, a large majority of those killed at the behest of Salafi-Jihadist are fellow Muslims, and a large majority of terrorist attacks occur in Muslim countries (Cordesman, 2017). Their violent interpretation of Islam has been propagated with such aggressiveness and effect that all Muslims are judged on the purity of their practice in relation to the tiny minority of self-proclaimed Salafis.

An overwhelming majority of Muslims reject extremism and violence, but the non-Muslim world has been led to believe that the Salafi-Jihadi approach represents all Islam (Cordesman, 2017). The rejection of the Salafi approach can be seen in the data from the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia. Results of a 2015 survey conducted by a private company showed that Indonesian public perception of the Islamic State is significantly negative. According to the survey results only 0.3 percent of respondents supported establishment of the Islamic State and importantly, only 0.8 percent "indicated even general support" for the group (Moir, 2017).

In actuality, "*Islamaphobia*" that has swept the world today, plays right into the strategy of the Salafi-Jihadis, bringing to life a fundamental concept of their worldview, that of us versus them (believers vs. non-believers). This perception is the soil that forms the breeding ground for Islamic extremism. This concept must be addressed if the scourge of Islamic extremism is to be addressed with any effectiveness. This writing intends to highlight how this perception is manipulated to recruit and radicalize individuals into violent action, feeding into the strategy of the Salafi-Jihadis.

Despite the different definitions and interpretations of Jihad, what is relevant here, is the violent interpretation that is used by globally oriented Islamic extremist groups. To them, Jihad is considered a "Holy War" and it is the religious duty of every Muslim to contribute towards the effort. Under the umbrella label of Salafi-Jihadism, Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State compete for the mantle of global representative of the 'true' Islam in pursuit of a violent revolution in the name of Islam. Despite the religious veil, Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State are both political-military organizations with a global audience and an objective of global governance. They differ in their organizational structure and execution of their objective. However, in order to survive in the face of global security measures, their structure and activities have resembled each other, albeit, at different points in time. Both Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State operate in a centralized or decentralized manner depending on the activity, local security context, and available support structure.

They differ only in the following aspects; Al-Qa`ida is organized with a core leadership based in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan (hereafter Al-Qa`ida Core); affiliated groups such as Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Jemmah Islamiya in Indonesia, and Al-Qa`ida in the Indian Sub-Continent; associated groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Tehrik-e-Taliban in Pakistan; and adherents or inspired individuals and groups scattered

throughout the world. The Islamic State is organized as a physical State in territory captured and held for a time in Syria and Iraq, provinces or Wilayats such as the Khorasan province to which parts of South Asia come under, groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State such as Boko Haram, and inspired individuals and groups worldwide or adherents.

Salafi-Jihadi Strategy

The political objective of both Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State can be considered as claiming lands with majority Muslim populations to be governed according to a traditional interpretation of Sharia or Islamic law. In order to achieve this, their objectives can be summarized as overthrowing the existing governing structure of majority Muslim countries and expelling these countries of Western influence and interference. The Salafi-Jihadi has two enemies, the near enemy who are essentially the Sunni establishment; be they in Government or religious administration form, and the far enemy, who are the non-muslims led by the Western establishment and institutions. It is important to note that Western culture prevalent worldwide as a result of the region's global socio-economic dominance is included within the latter category. In engaging both the near enemy (except in and around areas that are physically controlled by these groups) and the far enemy, Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State draw from Salafi-Jihadi theologians and strategists throughout history and prominent theoreticians and practitioners of guerrilla warfare (Whiteside, 2016 and Chipman, 2003). The teachings of Mao-Tse Tung, Col. Von Nyugen Giap, and Che Guevara, all advocated terrorism as a tactic within a larger strategy for political revolution. Political objectives of the weak have proven to be achievable to various degrees through the practice of asymmetric warfare. As the Islamic State demonstrated through gruesome public executions of individuals, terrorism is effective in gaining the attention of an international audience with minimal effort.

Terrorist attacks are executed to attain various smaller objectives that support the overall strategy to achieve the aforementioned broader objectives. For example, Al-Qa`ida attacks to provoke are used to draw out its enemy into a resource draining response. The Islamic State seemingly uses terrorist attacks of provocation to influence the enemy into responding in a manner that persecutes Muslims. Either way, the narrative that the West and local power structures are inherently anti-Islamic and intent on subjugating and exploiting Islamic lands and people is fulfilled when they effectively provoke their enemy into repressive acts. Al Qa`ida and the Islamic State compete to establish themselves as the vanguard of Islam, demonstrating that the only solution to the resulting *Islamphobia* is the violent interpretation of Islam, Salafi-Jihadism. Their propaganda campaigns are designed to feed this concept comprehensively (Ingram, 2016).

A. Information Operations
"…we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media." (Al-Zawahiri, 2005)

While the above statement is true in any conflict, it is more important in relation to terrorism. The asymmetric tactic of terrorism is targeted violence at non-combatants in order to influence a wider audience and impact a political objective. In order to influence a wider audience, terrorist groups need to be conscious of how and to whom it promotes its accomplishments. In impacting a political objective, their message needs to be relevant and rational. Both Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State have put in a great amount of effort to organize their information operations on multiple 'impact' levels in order reach their target audience effectively.

Despite being acutely aware of the importance of centralized media output, Al-Qa`ida does not have a hierarchical media organization. Instead, its information operations take place in a decentralized manner on multiple levels with some training and assistance from Al-Qa`ida Core (Gambhir, 2016). Al-Qa`ida Core based out of Afghanistan and Pakistan put out statements, letters, videos of battle and training, and speeches to set the ideological, theological and strategic tone of the organization. These are carefully released using multiple methods including respected Western and Middle Eastern media companies. They were careful to select media companies that would provide them with "detailed reporting and faithful quotations" (Hankiss, 2019). A production company set up by Bin Laden released over 160 videos between 2005 and 2007 (Hankiss, 2019). Al-Qa`ida

affiliates also operated production companies that prepared videos and magazines designed to inspire, educate, and influence a global audience. The *Inspire* magazine published by Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula is one such example. Both *Inspire* and another online magazine *Camp of the Sword*, provided instructional material for aspiring Salafi-Jihadis. For example, the first edition of *Inspire* included an article authored by "The AQ Chef" titled "How to Make a Bomb in Your Mom's Kitchen" (AQAP, 2010). It also included an article on how to send and receive encrypted messages including through easily available mobile phone apps. Al-Qa`ida members and adherents operate numerous websites and forums to push out instructional materials, theological justification, propaganda videos and articles, and Jihadi magazines that address various related topics. According to Hankiss, "by 2008, Al-Qa`ida was running over 4000 websites". However, these efforts do not appear to be organized or cohesive campaigns (Gambhir, 2016). There are however, networks and relationships that are closely interlinked in the world of jihadi information operations (Kimmage, 2008).

In contrast to Al-Qa`ida, the Islamic State runs a hierarchical media organization to conduct highly cohesive information operations. Taking from Bin Laden's desire to centralize media operations, Al-Qa`ida in Iraq, the predecessor to the Islamic State, created Al Furqan Institute for Media Production in 2006 (Hankiss, 2019). Thereafter, the Islamic State "created a highly structured, well-resourced bureaucracy to support its media operations" (Gambhir, 2016). By centralizing media production and output, the Islamic State information operations are clearly aligned with its military operations through its operational structure. It maintains cohesiveness through written guidance, evaluation and quality control processes, and interaction with its media bureaus (Milton, 2018). It also allocates resources for training as well as encryption and security protocols along multiple levels of engagement (Bloom, 2017).

Islamic State propaganda operations also comprises a decentralized approach. Here, the structure of information sharing is horizontal, and consumers are also issuers of material. "This approach is by nature interactive, decentralized and empowering to the bottom" because every user can be a content creator and user (Ben Arab, 2016). Once they have accessed material from an Islamic State affiliated source, they are able to share information via personal accounts on social media, jihadi forums, and content sharing sites. This leads to a ripple effect that in theory allows unlimited reach for content originating from the media tentacles of the Islamic State. This tactic allows the Islamic State to "crowd source" its content while maintaining a coherent message or narrative. The multi-dimensional approach of Islamic State information operations allows them to have not only coherence, but also an adaptive approach to propaganda.

This is demonstrated in the sequence of professionally produced online magazines that the Islamic state published between 2014 and 2017. *Islamic State News* and the *Islamic State Report* published in June 2014 transitioned to *Dabiq* published from July 2014 to July 2016, which transitioned to *Rumiyah* published from September 2016 to September 2017. Contents of the magazines were used for strategic politico-military propaganda that reflected its physical rise and fall as well as theological arguments and discussion to justify and promote its ideology. They were closely connected to the groups information operations that "generate a self-reinforcing and compounding strategic and psychological impact on target audiences" (Ingram, 2018).

It has employed new technologies and approaches to information operations that clearly distinguished them from other Salafi-Jihadi organizations in cyberspace. Now that the physical Islamic State barely exists, its information operations may very well have become more decentralized. The 'Virtual Caliphate' though, based on the foundations of a highly organized and adaptive media apparatus is likely to continue to be as effective (Gambhir, 2016).

The Islamic State and Al Qa`ida have developed their information operations to propagate their ideology and execute their overall strategy. Thus, their media operations also reflect organizational evolution. In order to understand how inspired actors are made operational in their name, we need to understand the framework within which recruitment and radicalization takes place.

B. Recruitment and Radicalization

There is no shortage of social science theories and approaches explaining how and why individuals join extremists' groups (Borum, 2011). Despite the amount of evidence showing that both Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State expend resources to recruit individuals to their organizations on any of its layers, ultimately, it is the decision of the individual to enlist or contribute in some manner. Recruitment is not a top down process but more complex in that the individual too takes an active role and identifies with a group. Despite a substantial amount of research on recruitment and radicalization, constant risk factors or theories of who becomes a terrorist or why they resort to violence could not be identified (See Borum, 2011; Williams et al in Neo, 2016, also Soufan and Schoenfel, 2016). There are, however, observable trends and pathways to terrorism that can be considered. Due to the limitations of space and the applicability in this context, the analytical lens of risk factors as framed by Schils and Verhage is used to discuss recruitment and radicalization (Schils and Verhage, 2017). These are 1. Elements forming the breeding ground, 2. Individual push factors (propensity), and 3. Environmental pull factors (exposure). These risk factors are discussed here in relation to the recruitment tactics of Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State.

1) Breeding Ground: On the first layer, the breeding ground comprises of the social, political, and economic structures on a global or national level that would be beyond the individual's influence. Within this context, local circumstances precipitated by the above-mentioned influences and perceived as discrimination, marginalization, and unemployment, can lead to dissatisfaction and frustration with existing structures. Individual reactions to this context may differ and existing social mechanisms such as social integration determine how they interpret these situations. Perceived injustice or insecurity to an individual or group affects these reactions. Individuals searching for a sense of identity and social belonging are particularly vulnerable (Schils and Verhage, 2017). Research done on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) in Tunisia by Ben Arab demonstrates the approach used by Salafi-Jihadist to exploit local situations for recruitment. It showed that the main message of local recruiters for the Islamic State used the local

context of injustice, hardship, and perceptions of oppression to magnify the feeling of an existential threat. Their recruitment message highlighted a sense of obligation to take action to protect the local community of Muslims from the oppression and exploitation by other socio-economically powerful Muslims. The Islamic State is offered as the ideal solution that would give them a sense of belonging, purpose, and justice based on Islamic law (Ben Arab, 2016). Research conducted in Kenya and Somalia on members and family of Al-Shabaab (an Al-Qa`ida affiliate) also correspond with these findings (Botha, 2016).

Islamic State media and recruiters play on this crisis narrative of identity and community and eventually offer themselves as the solution (Ingram, 2016). On one level, it serves to inspire potential Jihadis to take action locally, either through supporting an affiliated Jihadi movement or taking individual action. On another level, it inspired individuals to make their way to the physical Islamic State. The effectiveness of their recruitment is proven with an estimated 38,000 FTF joining extremist groups in Iraq and Syria by March 2016 from around 86 countries (TSG, 2015). Outside of Iraq and Syria, in 2018 alone, they claimed 779 attacks around the world (BBC, 2019).

Al-Qa`ida too "has made efforts to frame local grievances in accordance with its narrative outside of the United States" and "harmonize its propaganda with grievance narratives associated with local and regional Jihadi movements" (Braniff and Moghadam, 2011). Al-Qa`ida leaders Bin Laden and Zawahiri have been observed speaking to regional sensitivities and empathizing with local concerns in their communications (Ciovacco, 2009). Al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State have thus been effective in exploiting structural discrimination of Muslim communities and blaming it on the West or corrupt local governments. Evidence of this is corroborated by the numerous attacks conducted against Western targets by adherents and associated groups.

2) Individual Push Factors: "The prospect of finding identity, purpose, belonging, and adventure seems to be more of a draw for many ISIS recruits than mere theological motivations" (Soufan and Schoenfel, 2016)

Individual push factors are described as personality traits and emotions of individuals. Personality traits may entail a taste for violence or being a thrill seeker (Schils and Verhage, 2017). In research focused on Al-Qa`ida and Islamic State recruits, Meaghin Alarid posits that "Radicalized men and women alike often feel despair, humiliation, and outrage over injustice and perceive few options for influencing change" (Alarid, 2016). Salafi-Jihadi propaganda cater to a variety of personality traits be they rational, educated individuals holding moderate Islamic ideas or uneducated adventure seekers. Malaysians who joined the Islamic State fell into both categories in addition to those with an extreme religious ideology (Moir, 2017). Islamic State media output has included "videos that appeal to individuals seeking excitement, bloodshed, and personal meaning" as well as positive narratives that accentuated the Islamic State as a stable community governed under Islamic law to appeal to professionals (Bloom, 2017). Media releases and social media accounts of professionals who left their home countries were used to advertise the daily lives of educated professionals to "entice other equally capable Muslim professionals to emigrate to Raqqa" (Bloom, 2017). What becomes apparent in examination of personality traits of extremists is that there are no generalized traits that would indicate an individual is at more risk of becoming radicalized. Despite the thousands of members in online violent extremist communities, very few actually get involved in violent activity (Neo, 2016). However, access to online extremist platforms via suggestion or personal interest does have an impact on the likelihood of further exploring this milieu (Neo, 2016). For individuals seeking adventure or a purpose in life, online extremist platforms provide like-minded communities as well as a plethora of material to explore further. Recruiters too are known to seek out "disillusioned youth and individuals with criminal records" (Soufan and Schoenfel, 2016).

3) Environmental Pull Factors: Environmental pull factors involve significant others, attractiveness of the extremist group, and ideological recognition (Schils and Verhage, 2017). Significant others refer to family or friends that may provide the initial introduction to an extremist ideology or group. Social media, and mobile communication applications allow direct communication with family members and friends who have already joined an extremist group. They are able to not only encourage significant others to join the group but also provide first-hand accounts of their experiences. Research conducted in 'Jihadist hotbeds' or locales that have supplied the Islamic State with a disproportionate number of recruits, show that "recruits often consist of networks of known associates, friends, and family members, rather than a wider web of strangers" (Soufan and Schoenfel, 2016). Some terrorist groups do prefer to recruit family members to ensure operational security and prevent infiltration from the State's security apparatus (Bloom and Horgan, 2013).

Charismatic leaders, influential preachers, and engaged recruiters have also shown to be highly effective at radicalizing and recruiting in 'Jihadist hotbeds. An example is Hussein Bosnic, who focused his recruitment efforts on small remote villages in Bosnia, "off the radar" of the State. He was reported to have put in considerable time into making personal contact with prospective recruits and vulnerable individuals. The network developed by Bosnic established strong ties between Jihadist sympathizers in Bosnia and the Islamic State (Soufan and Schoenfel, 2016). Analysis of 'Jihadist Hotbeds' in the same report edited by Arturo Varvelli (2016), reveal that communities that are isolated from the rest of society, even within Muslim countries, may serve as breeding grounds for radicalization. Madrassas too may serve as incubators for violent extremism and form insulated communities that are difficult to penetrate (Bloom, 2017).

It has already been mentioned that Islamic State propaganda material is designed to appeal to the local context as well as be accessible to a global audience. The result of propaganda that is accessible and customized to appeal to local grievances is that potential recruits may form an emotional connection to a foreign extremist group (Neo, 2016). According to Gambhir (2016), the Islamic State has custom made magazines based on language and recruitment videos based on nationality. Excessive media output by Islamic State allowed them to reach niche audiences on a global scale. Some of their media output was used as general messaging. For example, the magazine *Rumiyah* was translated into eight different languages. Similarly, Al-Qa`ida and affiliates too have highly differentiated media outputs developed by their local media companies.

Videos, movies, and literature are translated into multiple languages and disseminated via web forums to be accessible to a global online audience (Braniff and Moghadam, 2011). Once accessed by an individual, they can be shared undetected by authorities via a number of available encrypted communications platforms such as *Telegram*.

Expansion is intrinsic in Salafi-Jihadi ideology and therefore their strategy. Their media-operations clearly reflect this expansionist strategy as well as ideology. As al-Qaida Core came under intense pressure and the Islamic State lost its physical strongholds, they encouraged and supported lone action and small-cell attacks around the world. The Easter Sunday 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka stand out as the largest inspired terrorist attack, carried out by adherents of the Islamic State.

Recommendations in The Sri Lankan Context

Sri Lanka has experienced a number of violent events and incidents of social unrest following the end of the ethnic conflict in 2009. By 2015, hundreds of incidents pertaining to religious intolerance and religiously motivated conflict at various levels of society against Muslims and Christians were well documented (Gunatillake, 2015). The anti-Muslim riots in Kandy and Ampara Districts in 2018 stand out as significant events. More concerning is the growing incorrect usage of 'Muslim' to denote a distinct race or ethnicity. It is an identity that is fundamental to the ideology of Salafi-Jihadi's. The purpose of the mention of these incidents and demographic categorization is not to analyze them but pose them in the context of carrying the traits of a breeding ground for recruitment and radicalization introduced above. This context becomes especially important with the presence of extremists that had either travelled to Syria to join the Islamic State or conducted propaganda dissemination campaigns promoting Salafi-Jihadi ideology. In the context of a national mood of *Islamaphobia,* their ideas would have extra weight and rationale for identifying with the self-proclaimed representatives of global Islam.

As the investigation on the Easter Sunday attacks unravels details of those involved, family members of attackers are being implicated. Details of the leader of the attackers, Zaharan

Hashim's activities have also been revealed. These details match the environmental pull-factors framework of analysis discussed above. Without personality profiles or adequate information on the personal life of the Easter Sunday bombers, we cannot accurately cast them in the light of the individual push factors framework. Nevertheless, the learning from the many studies examined, and the understanding of the breeding ground and environmental pull-factors, allow gleaning of some relevant considerations for counter-radicalization efforts. Ideally, these would serve as building blocks for framing the Counter Terrorism strategy of Sri Lanka and updating the Prevention of Terrorism Act to address the threat of Islamic terrorism.

A. Counter the spread of Islamaphobia
1) Develop national level narratives that clearly differentiate between secular Islam, non-violent fundamental Islam and violent radical Islamism.
2) Clearly differentiate between the average Sri Lankan Muslim and those with radical violent ideologies in reporting associated events in both national and international news.
3) Prohibit the spread of hate speech that attempts to cast all Muslims as Islamists.
4) Prohibit the spread of ideas that inaccurately frame Muslims as outcasts in their own Country.

B. Government agencies should work closely with local religious organizations and groups
1) Develop a non-discriminatory framework that allows the practice of Islam in any form that is non-violent.
2) Identify dissemination of extremist ideologies within the Muslim community.
3) Act on reports by religious leaders or community leaders of extremist activity without delay and in a manner that does not infringe on individual rights.

C. National level policies should be introduced to improve social integration on a structural level
1) Define Sri Lankan identity through a holistic multi disciplinary process.
2) Discontinue single religion schools or introduce minimum requirements for integration of students of different faiths.

3) Prohibit operation of religious schools that do not conform to the national education system.
4) Promote the multi-religious nature of Sri Lankans at all formal Government events and offices.
5) Establish a multi-disciplinary research center to address the complexities of countering violent extremism.

These recommendations have been introduced based on the learning drawn from analysis of global experiences in Salafi-Jihadi terrorism, and the evolving understanding of the nature and dissemination of Salafi-Jihadi ideology in Sri Lanka. Their strategy is to target and exploit inherent weaknesses in national structures. Therefore, effective recommendations need to impact the Sri Lankan public on a structural level in order to address the Salafi-Jihadi narrative. Salafi-Jihadi information operations to manipulate, radicalize, and recruit from the global Muslim population cannot be curbed or stopped through counter-terrorism operations alone. It requires a change in perceptions at a national level. Sri Lankans are privileged to have inherited a multi-religious and tolerant society given the predominance of Buddhist philosophy in the State and society. As Easter Sunday 2019 and its aftermath demonstrated, it would be disastrous for Sri Lankans to mis-interpret the values that the majority population believes in so strongly, and instead continue the intolerant and divisionary practices institutionalized during the colonial period that ended 72 years ago.

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ID 237