

FIGHT INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM THROUGH GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION

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Preliminary investigations by Sri Lankan authorities have shown that the white supremacist who rampaged through a mosque in New Zealand in March inspired the even bloodier terrorist attacks on churches in Sri Lanka. Terrorist chatter on social media sites of the Islamic State, which has claimed responsibility for the Lankan attacks, speak today of repeating this against churches in Southeast Asia.

Lankans will rightly be mystified why a gunman's actions an ocean away should have led a group of locally based terrorists to wreak havoc across their island. However, it is an important reminder of how terrorism, in terms of ideology, tactics and response, has become a genuinely international phenomenon. From the point of view of most terrorists, this makes perfect sense. Most of us assume a world built around nation states, their constitutions and legal systems. The New Zealand gunman's world was one defined by race and ethnicity. The Lankan terrorists saw the world in terms of warring religions. The nation state was a secondary, if not an irrelevant, construct. If a mosque attack in Christchurch is refracted through a prism of a supposed global struggle between Islam and Christianity, then it makes perfect sense that what happened in New Zealand should result in a savage retaliation in Sri Lanka.

Mirroring society at large, terrorism has become ever more globalised over time. Experts often cite the 1968 hijacking of an Israeli airliner by a Palestinian militant group as the first "international" terror incident in modern times. More recently, Al Qaeda harnessed media coverage of 9/11 to fuse dozens of terrorist groups around the world into a single entity and declare war on governments across the planet. The Islamic State took this a step further by using online methods to radicalise, recruit and activate individual terrorists who often had only a marginal exposure to the underlying ideology. Copycat terrorism and violence are a well-known phenomenon. The 2016 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris inspired a wave of Islamist terrorism—mostly in another continent, Asia. In the case of Sri Lanka, we now have a case where local groups took it upon themselves to serve as avengers for New Zealand Muslims who neither asked nor wished for such action.

The Easter bombings only underline the importance of an earlier truism: international terrorism must be fought through global counterterrorism cooperation. This unfortunately remains a patchy affair to this day, with too many governments placing petty interests above genuine cooperation. The Christchurch to Batticaloa bridge should also serve as a warning to governments that continue to sponsor terrorists: the fallout from such violence is both uncontrollable and unpredictable.

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