



UPDATE:

Sri Lanka Easter Bombings

APRIL 2019

As of 23 April 2019, over 250 people are dead and over 500 injured after a series of coordinated suicide bombings took place across Sri Lanka at three luxury hotel restaurants catering to Western travelers and three Catholic churches on Easter Sunday. The government announced at least 40 suspects had been arrested, and two domestic groups were identified as being behind the attack. Rumors about motive and possible ISIS involvement continue to circulate and have not been confirmed. The six coordinated attacks highlight the importance of tracking employees and family members while they are traveling in the event of a catastrophic terrorist attack.



RESPONSIBILITY

While ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks, they have offered no evidence of direct involvement, and government officials suspect two domestic Islamist militant groups were behind the attacks. It is entirely possible these groups, **National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ)** and **Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim**, received training or material and logistical support from ISIS, given the complexity and coordination needed to carry out the attacks. If true, it shows ISIS still has global reach to influence, inspire, and materially support Islamic extremist groups. While they no longer control vast swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, the group continues to pose a real threat and should be taken seriously.



MOTIVE

Sri Lankan State Minister for Defense Ruwan Wijewardene told Parliament that investigations revealed that the attacks were carried out by Islamic extremists in **retaliation for the mosque attacks** in Christchurch, New Zealand. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe said it was possible but that it was impossible to say for certain at this time.

INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

A leaked intelligence memorandum from earlier in the month warned of plans by the National Thowheed Jamaath to attack churches. Apparent failure to act on the intelligence or share the alleged plot has thrown Sri Lanka's security services into the spotlight, and several top officials will likely be fired or even arrested.

TAKEAWAYS & ANALYSIS

- The Easter bombings targeting Western hotels and Catholic churches in Sri Lanka come as a shock. Sri Lanka does not have a history of radical Islamist violence, with one of the suspected groups, the NTJ, being most well known for defacing Buddhist statues. This **suggests outside help**, lending credence to the claims of responsibility by ISIS, as traditional NTJ targets would have been Buddhist temples, not Catholic churches.
- Christians are a minority in Sri Lanka, making up just over six percent of the population, and leaders have urged followers not to retaliate in the wake of the attacks. It is possible the Easter bombings could prompt retaliatory attacks against mosques or Islamic communities outside of Sri Lanka.
- Travelers should avoid Sri Lanka in the near-term, as additional attacks are possible given there are suspects on the run.



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