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**SRI LANKA ARMY STRATEGIC READINESS IN COUNTERING VIOLENT
EXTREMISM: HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?**

INTRODUCTION

1. Violent extremism is a severe threat to the entire world and it can emerge in different forms. Extremists need a healthy civil atmosphere to promote their ideologies first to reach their long-term goals. Therefore, these extremists use motivation and mobilisation tools to attract sufficient followers with their ideology or group concepts. Modern security focuses have given their high priority to managing national security from terrorist threats. Military defined that as a non-traditional security challenge but it emphasized as a most influential security challenge to the modern forces. Sri Lanka was also faced three decades-long terrorism threat and it ended in 2009. Therefore, Sri Lanka Army has equipped with reliable human resources, equipment and strategies to manage a terrorist attack. Though, this challenge has some potential risks.

2. This violent extremism is a severe threat to the national security of Sri Lanka. This issue is a global security issue and a rising tide of extremist movements threaten to destabilize civil societies around the globe. As an independent and sovereign nation, we have to ensure national security from any type of security threat or violent movement. Aftermath the protected war, an acceptable peaceful security environment managed until present but one violent terrorist effort launched by the Islamic terrorist group in the Easter Sunday 2019. Therefore, Sri Lanka Army has realized the present intentions in the security sector. So we have many opportunities to manage the re-emerging threat of terrorism in Sri Lanka. According to the current information, there is no major opportunity to re-emerge terrorism in the country as long-run effort because our security network covers the entire island. However, capable security development and further readiness are essential.

3. Violent extremism challenges are severe threats to the national security of Sri Lanka. This issue is a global security issue and a rising tide of extremist movements threaten to destabilize civil societies around the globe. Violent extremism challenges can appear in any asymmetric way. As an independent and sovereign nation, we have to ensure national security from any type of security threat or violent movement. Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is the key security force of the country and ensuring national security is our responsibility. Therefore, strategic readiness is much important as a solution to manage a future terrorist threat.

AIM

4. The aim of the service paper is to discuss about Sri Lanka Army strategic readiness in countering violent extremism and find the possible strategic improvements in the Army to strengthen the Army readiness.

**VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND POSSIBILITIES TO
REEMERGENCE IN SRI LANKA**

5. Violent extremism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government or its citizens to further certain political or social objectives. Available provisions are sufficient to the military forces for manage their responsibilities under hostile, emergency, uncertain or operational situations. Though, extremism related threats cultivate in peaceful civil environment and military approaches are restricted in peaceful environment under the military laws. Law enforcement generally recognizes two types of terrorism as domestic and international. Therefore, today we can see following extremism challenges in Sri Lanka as major security threats.

- a. Religious extremism.
- b. Political extremism.
- c. Violence terrorism.
- d. Influential radicalism.
- e. Diaspora extremism.

6. Extremists need healthy civil atmosphere for promote their ideologies first to reaching their long-term goals. Therefore, these extremists use motivation and mobilisation tools to attract sufficient followers with their ideology or group concepts. Extremism is based and executed in the local or territorial environment by own citizens. International influences to infiltrate the extremism ideologies in local environment, which is connected to foreign governments or groups, transcends own nation's boundaries. This part of this paper implements the growing tension during the past decade period and its challenges to national security.

- a. **Religious based extremism.** Religious based extremism raised as challenging security issue in Sri Lanka between 2012-2022 period. These violent efforts can raised as terrorism when it spark as communal violence or ethnic problem in the country.
- b. **Easter Sunday attack.** The Easter Sunday attack was launched as a series of bombing in Colombo on 21st April 2019 reported the key terrorist attack after 2009 Humanitarian War. This attack launched by an Islamic fundamentalist group, namely the Tawheed Jammath movement.
- c. **Other threats.** Youth uprising, civil rights or political based violence incidents can raise as violent extremism at any time. In addition, modern societies can faced terrorist threats from various radical or extremist ideologies of the individuals or groups.
- d. The concept derived with previous experiences so the SLA had sufficient capabilities to manage these facts although our security deployments

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are totally different in present and that gained some challenging situation to the Army for manage these challenges immediately. According to the recent experiences, we have to ready for face the any kind of extremism threat such as:

- (1) Suicide attacks in vulnerable places.
- (2) Possible gunfire in civil targets or public places.
- (3) Multiple attacks or multidimensional attacks.
- (4) Technology driven attacks like target the petroleum tanks, gas stations or such highly inflammable places.

7. Different extremism incidents reported during the past years especially these cases reported after the Humanitarian operation. However we could manage durable peace in the country but some specific incidents reported as extremist incidents. Religious based extremism raised as most challenging threat and few other incidents reported in the country with the intention of several violent groups.

CAPABILITIES OF THE SLA FOR FIGHT AGAINST THE VIOLENT EXTREMISM

8. Available resources and readiness of the Sri Lanka Army is overwhelming for such purpose though the seeds of these kind of extremism incidents cultivate in peaceful civil environment and military approaches are limited by the law. Military service have given uninterrupted services to the nation to protect the nation from all form of threats though overcome the extremism is an impossible task until it emergence as violence extremisms.

9. Violent extremism activities appearing in civilized areas and then it can moved to covered areas like jungles and natural fortification areas. Yet the SLA has been equipped with sufficient capabilities like small groups of Special or elite forces and trained our infantry by the Special Forces with Advanced Infantry Platoon Training (AIPT), Special Infantry Operation Training (SIOT). However we had adequate training and experiences for counter these threats immediately although we need a possible national defense plan for identify and manage these threats from early stages. Army Special Forces capabilities are included the complete trainings and development for fight with violent extremism. This strategy is more capable for future trends covert actions and smaller units more capable for fight violent extremism. Army readiness describe according to the following sub topics:

- a. Special Reconnaissance.
- b. Counter Terrorism.
- c. Hostage Rescue.
- d. Urban Warfare.

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- e. Conducting unconventional warfare and special operations in under any circumstances.
- f. Conducts both covert and overt missions.
- g. Battle space preparation, intelligence collection in enemy areas, LRRP missions with sabotage or offensive raiding.
- h. Counter Proliferation missions.
- i. Rapid Deployment Force to meet unforeseen environment.

IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVE THE STRATEGIC READINESS AND IT'S IMPACT TO THE ARMY

10. Violent extremism challenges is crucial and it can't measure or assess early and massive resource development also not applicable. Therefore strategic readiness is more important than most of other development efforts in the Army. Strategic readiness of the Army need to improve though area of responsibility of Battalion levels. Therefore, main focuses need to upgrade the strategic readiness of Bn level conventional forces.

11. The role of the army has recognized by the army organization accurately but the surrounding provisions and government decision making bodies not providing adequate opportunities to army involvements at the correct time so army have faced some issues when involve with military activities against the violent extremism. The current experiences are also proved these challenges and we need sufficient provisions to mediate these activities without any legal obstacles for the reason that the national security is more important than all other factors. If not it supported to the Army deployments, armed personals cannot direct their missions upon these violent extremism at the correct time and at the accurate place.

STRATEGIC READINESS OF THE ARMY AT PRESENT FOR MANAGE EXTREMISM THREATS

12. The SLA intelligence have vast experiences about these kind of extremism challenges and the intelligence links managed accurately under the crucial environments in the history. Accurate military intelligence services gain various psychological supports to national defense plan and we can identify or overcome enemy strategies before their strategic changes. So the intelligence factor is the key and information systems are the main targets of the future warfare. The SLA intelligence activities are mainly handled by the Military Intelligence Corps (MIC) and various other reliable sources are used for enhance the information data bases but the joint intelligence framework was not functioned during the past few years and it influenced adversely to reemergence the violent extremism in the country.

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13. Violent extremism activities appearing in civilized areas and then it can moved to covered areas like jungles and natural fortification areas. Yet the SLA has been equipped with sufficient capabilities like small groups of Special or elite forces and trained our infantry by the Special Forces with Advanced Infantry Platoon Training (AIPT), Special Infantry Operation Training (SIOT). This strategy is more capable for future trends covert actions and smaller units more capable for fight violent extremism.

WEAKEN OR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AREAS IN STRATEGIC LEVELS OF THE ARMY

14. Weapons, military vehicles and armours are also distributed accurately among the SLA units so we can manage some traditional extremism efforts. However there are some issues with these components for the reason that we are using these equipment against giant extremists or terrorists and the current extremism are different. We haven't sufficient urban fighting capabilities and gears for conduct the proper operations in such environment.

15. Combat vehicle population is also not suitable for fighting in urban or civilized areas because those heavy vehicles cannot use effectively in these environment. Technology gap is another key issue and we haven't scanners, capable explosive detectors and communication systems for fight with modern violent extremists.

16. Accordingly, the shapes of the future threats of violent extremisms are vital and unrealistic because any kind of incident can change as a violent extremism incident. Especially, infiltration of extreme Islamic ideologies to the common societies and attempting to create favorable legal protection for these extremism have influenced adversely to increase the violent extremism. The Kandy incidents, Beruwala incidents and sudden series of attacks during the Easter Sunday were gained challenging threats to national security and unable to launch instant deployments from the Army.

17. In the meantime, United Nations and various other international actors and enforcements are focusing about the attempts of human rights protections during these fighting or operations of official the forces. Therefore the SLA needs to identify their future objectives, strategies, manpower, technology and economy to face future threats with sustainable manner. Especially these concentrations are needed to develop through appropriate ways because violent extremism is a complex subject in a multiethnic environment.

18. These violent extremists are expected to proliferate and expand their activities in wider area for their survival. Also they are attempting to make secrete links with international non state actors for strengthen their fighting capabilities with arms, ammunitions and other resources. Then the nation states are expected to form regional alliances and to grow more agile in responding to these threats, as well as to build a level of political and psychological resilience. Modern violent extremists find most

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applicable methods as their firearms. In this manner the SLA needs to promote high psychological and intelligence factors among our memberships.

19. The legal provisions are not sufficient and opportunities to conduct military operations against violent extremism is difficult in civil environment. However these threats are not simple and the army represents the entire nation without concern the religious, economy, social or ethnic factors. Although available provisions are not sufficient for immediate responses and sometime violent extremism can escalate as a long run crisis or insurgency due to delay responses of the army or government military.

CONCLUSION

20. Sri Lanka Army has vast experiences in unconventional form of military and we could resolve all these security challenges. The extremist effort gained some potential risk to the national security and the SLA had taken the responsibilities to ensure the national security again. The Easter Sunday attack is an early warning of a possible future threat and the SLA had previous experiences about such violent extremism and we have to release the growth of these challenging threats among the Sri Lankan communities. Therefore, the SLA has been maintained stronger security formation for ensure the national security from any form of security threat.

21. Increase the effectiveness of Army is the key factor when concern to improve the strategic readiness of the Army. Violent extremism can be interpreted more broadly than terrorism, and include a wider range of groups. Therefore, most nations use 'prevent' strategy to counter the violence terrorism and resolve such issues early. The legal provisions are not sufficient and opportunities to conduct military operations against violent extremism is difficult in civil environment. The military intelligence and initial security formations are maintaining according to the provisions of peacetime security formations. Although some time we have to response immediately for some incidents like violent extremism. But it is difficult under the existing pattern of thinking in politics and government administration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The SLA can introduce insurgency and riots control concepts for improvise the Army readiness and we can train our infantry with these concepts. Further they need to equip with the knowledge about civil law enforcements, provisions under the legal environment and challenging factors etc. So we can conduct workshops or seminars to our riot control teams during the riots control drill.

23. The prevention and countering of violent extremism is a broader area and SLA readiness fairly accepted to manage it when they use it for create violence in social environment. Though, Army need a strategic step to take well before this implementing age and Army has sufficient opportunities to develop a universal list of violent extremism groups or organisation and we can identify their nature for counter them strategically.

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24. Army can make contingency plans to ensure ongoing intelligence collection in locations where the Sri Lanka will scale back its countering violent extremist organizations efforts and the force readiness required to move military assets into these areas if necessary.

25. Special operational Forces of the SLA use to conduct high-tempo operations for direct action and Army has to take step to improve the infantry battalions of the Army under these Special Operational forces to contribute capacity building and train, advice and assist missions for enhance the strategic readiness of the Army.

26. Further, recommendations gives to further improvement requirements of the Army with asses the present strategic readiness. In addition, these recommendations focuses to further improvement requirement of the army according to the strategic development to strengthen the capabilities of the Army to manage the future threats.

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