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A New Threat in the Horizon?

Arabinda Acharya and Uday Ravi

Aside from the obvious diplomatic and security concerns, the attempted bombing in Georgia and the attacks in India and Georgia against Israeli targets have alerted authorities about the use of “sticky bombs” as a new tactic. Security agencies around the world may be required to reconfigure their counterterrorism strategies to deal with the threat posed by a new kind of weapon – the sticky bombs - on the roads.



Map showing the sites of the bombings against Israeli targets in Georgia, India, and Thailand.

Image Credit: [Sky News](#)

On 13 February 2012, a bomb exploded in a car belonging to the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. The explosion took place barely 500 meters away from the official residence of the Prime Minister of India. The bomb, which was stuck to the body of the vehicle, exploded and engulfed the car into flames. According to eyewitness accounts, a lone individual driving a red motorcycle and wearing a brown jacket stuck a magnetic device to the car. After the per-

petrator on the motorcycle crossed the traffic intersection, there was a blast and the targeted vehicle caught fire.

An Israeli embassy official, Tal Yehoshua Korene (also the wife of the Defence Attaché at the embassy) and the driver of the car were critically injured in the blast. Two other persons, who were in another car behind the targeted vehicle, were also injured.

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Multiple Locations and a Common Theme

The incident in New Delhi was not an isolated occurrence. The trail started on 12 January 2012, when a dual Lebanese-Swedish citizen, suspected of being an Iranian-backed Hezbollah member, was arrested in Bangkok. Apparently, he stockpiled medical “cool packs” which contained ammonia for commercial export and was in possession of 10 gallons (38 liters) of ammonium nitrate which is used to build bombs. There was speculation that this was part of an operation by Hezbollah operatives to target United States (US)/Israel establishments and citizens in the country.

On 13 February 2012, a magnetic bomb stuck on the rear side of the car of a local employee of the Israeli embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia was defused by Georgian law enforcement authorities before it could detonate. This was followed by the incident in New Delhi on the same day.

The following day, on 14 February 2012, three Iranian men set off an explosion in their rented, two-story house in Bangkok, Thailand. The explosion, which was apparently an accident, ripped off part of the roof, and knocked out the building’s windows and doors. One of the men managed to board a flight and escape to Malaysia where he was subsequently arrested at the Kuala Lumpur airport, another member was arrested at the Bangkok airport. The third accomplice hurled a grenade at a taxi, which refused to give him a ride. When police chased him, he hurled another grenade at the police officials. But the grenade bounced back on detonation and ripped off both his legs. According to police, all the three arrested are linked to Hezbollah. The Thai police are on the lookout for another Iranian woman who had rented the house where the explosion occurred.

Iran Connection

Even though analysts linked the New Delhi and Tbilisi incidents to the fourth anniversary of the 12 February 2008 assassination in Syria of the military commander and Hezbollah deputy leader Imad Mughniyah, there are other linkages as well. All these incidents occurred amidst international concerns and outcry about Tehran’s attempts to acquire a nuclear weapons capa-

bility, combined with a veiled threat of an imminent attack on Iran’s nuclear establishments by Israel. (The possibility of an attack on Iran’s nuclear establishments was revealed by the U.S. Secretary of Defence – Leon Panetta in the first week of February 2012.) The incidents, particularly in New Delhi and Tbilisi, were also linked to the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists employing the same tactics used- magnetic bombs. Iran has publicly accused Israel and the U.S. for the targeted assassinations of its nuclear scientists. The timing and coincidence of the events led to the speculation that these incidents could be part of Iran’s retaliation for the targeted assassinations of its nuclear scientists or an attempt to preempt any possible military strike by Israel by demonstrating that Tehran could either act on its own or through its proxies to strike at Israel/U.S. interests in any part of the world.

In an interview to the Brazilian newspaper *Correio Braziliense* immediately after the January 2012 Bangkok arrests, we assessed that if the persons involved really belong to Hezbollah, it could be the beginning of a serious threat and possibly a new chapter in transnational terrorism. Iran is coming under extreme pressure for its nuclear programme with the threat of military strike against its nuclear installations. It is within Iran’s capability to carry out these attacks on its own using covert forces, a scenario which is similar to the killing of its nuclear scientists and the one that has not been ruled out by security agencies of concerned countries. This was reinforced by the statement of the Iranian Defence minister, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, who promised a “strategy of threat against threat” from Israel, which “is blessed by none other than Iran’s supreme spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.” Vahidi moreover vowed more “firm responses to Israel’s acts of hostility” as part of Tehran’s new approach of “reliable defence and strong deterrence.”

At the same time, if Iran is looking for retaliation using proxies, Hezbollah would be the most obvious candidate. It may be noted that Hezbollah is an older and more established organization than Al Qaeda. It has a global reach from the Middle East to Europe, North

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and South America and South and Southeast Asia. While it has chosen to not operate “out of area” with only minor exceptions, it would have a built in global capacity to launch attacks on virtually every continent. If its support and logistics fronts spread all over the world are required to carry out attacks, it could do so at a very short notice. The group owes a lot to Iran and would be willing to carry out strikes if Iran is attacked. Thus, it is possible that, apart from Thailand, India and Georgia, Hezbollah operatives could be taking positions in many other countries to retaliate if relations between Iran and Israel and the U.S. reach a flashpoint.

Dealing with a New Tactic

The bombs used in New Delhi and Georgia were improvised versions of limpet mines, a kind of magnetic device used in many parts of the world. One of the most publicized uses of such devices was the 1985 sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* – the Green Peace vessel - by the French foreign intelligence service, the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), while it was berthed in Auckland. Magnetic bombs were also known to be improvised by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and used extensively against the Sri Lankan navy. The Maoist insurgents in India are also known to be using this weapon.

Assessing the damage, experts at the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CSFL) in India, estimated that the bomb which was stuck to the car in New Delhi on 13 February 2012, was of the size of an executive diary. According to CSFL, the bomb contained chemicals, including sulphur and potassium chlorate with sulphuric acid. Such devices could be detonated by timer or remote control.

The use of magnetic bombs or what the Indian agencies call “sticky bombs,” projects a new threat especially in cities across the world with highly congested roads and heavy vehicular traffic. Several magnetic bombs can be assembled and planted on cars, public transportation and other public infrastructure in busy cities all over the world and the extent of the damage can be alarming. With high population density, blasts using magnetic bombs at multiple locations can throw

the concerned city into chaos. Though these bombs may not be intended to target specific individuals or installations all the time, the attacks can result in high fatalities, create an atmosphere of fear and undermine the confidence of the local populace on the concerned governments to provide security.

Getting Across the Sectarian Divide

Following the New Delhi attacks, one of the explanations of the local police was that this could have been carried out by Iranian sympathizers enlisting the support of Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), the group implicated in many high-profile incidents including the November 2008 Mumbai attacks. Traditionally, the Sunni and Shi'a sects have kept themselves apart on religious issues and even indulged in violent sectarian clashes in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, the extremists from both the sects the world over draw strength from Islam's revival in late 1970s led by Iran. On political issues such as Palestine there has been a broad agreement among the leaders from rival sects. The wider Muslim community is likely to view Iran's resistance to international pressures on nuclear issues, mostly led by the West, as a struggle against the Zionists and the crusaders. It is also possible that an attack against Iran could be perceived as another example of the West's war on Islam.

Thus the possibility that the Shi'a and the Sunni groups may find an accommodation with each other against common enemies cannot be entirely ruled out. Many groups from the rival sects have already cooperated on many matters despite the religious differences. This cooperation, albeit on the level of the discursive, was evident during Israel's attacks on Hezbollah in August-September 2006, when groups like Al Qaeda and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood pledged support to Hezbollah. Justifying the support, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri drew a distinction between Shi'as fighting against the Zionists and the crusaders under the banner of groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and the Shi'as as in Iraq, who have traded their religion for power and authority. While it remains unlikely that there will be an outpouring of brotherly love between the two sects, both could leverage on each other's areas of in-

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terests and capabilities to carry out retaliatory attacks in multiple theatres.

A Paradigm Shift?

If all the incidents (in Bangkok, New Delhi and Tbilisi), and issues (Iran's nuclear ambitions and concerns about the same by the international community, especially by the US, Israel, and some Middle Eastern countries; and targeted assassinations of Iran's nuclear scientists), of the past few months link up, an unwelcome consequence could be a virtual rewriting of much of what is currently known about transnational terrorism. Despite the sectarian divide, an attack on Iran could galvanize the already agitated Muslim community to an unknown extent, leading to new configurations and new strategies. The attack could transform the nature, spread and lethality of terrorist attacks worldwide. A ban on Iran's oil exports and other sanctions are unlikely to hurt the country in the short-term. The sanctions regime is further undermined due to disagreements among some of the members of the international community, which obviously strengthens Iran's resolve on nuclear issues. At the same time, Tehran has a lot of strategic advantages in the destabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan, the resilience of Hezbollah and probably Hamas - the proverbial thorns in the process of stabilization and peace in the Middle East. From a tactical perspective, the security agencies around the world would also be required to reconfigure their counter-terrorism strategies to deal with the threat posed by a new kind of weapon - the sticky bombs - on the roads.

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The CTTA: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis is now open for contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, terrorism and organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and terrorism, and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 800 to 1500 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Electronic copies of the articles (MS Word format) may be submitted to the editors at the following address: isdiane@ntu.edu.sg

The Translation of Radical Resources into the Indonesian Language and the Problem of Radicalization

Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Zulkifli Mohamed Sultan

Jihadist websites in Indonesia have now taken to translating the works of radical thinkers into Bahasa Indonesia thus contributing to the increasing number of radical materials available online. It is proposed that Counter-radicalization efforts should also look at the works of moderate Islamic thinkers and translate them as seen fit as part of initiatives to counter the efforts propagated by the radicals.

One of the activities carried out by Muslim radicals to spread their ideology is the translation of various articles and books to the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia). These materials are then uploaded to websites and personal blogs where they can be accessed freely and redistributed to the masses. There are efforts to establish an online library compiling various resources of radical ideology in the form of text, audio as well as video. Among these efforts is a website known as the Arabic *Minbar Al-Tauhid Wa Al-Jihad*, which has the largest online repository of radical materials and is dedicated to Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, a famous and respected radical ideologue; and the Indonesian *Maktabah Al-Tauhid Wal Jihad*, a copy-cat of the former.

The Indonesian webpage of Maktabah Al-Tauhid consists of more than 100 books and articles translated from Arabic and English. The website has thousands of pages from the works of almost 50 radical figures, leaders and thinkers. All these are added to many other materials already found across the internet, resulting in the increase in number of radical materials available online. The five top figures whose works have been translated are: 1) Abdul Qadir Abdul Aziz, from Egypt, 23 writings; 2) Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, from Jordan, 17 writings; 3) Abu Mus`ab Al-Suri, from Syria, 13 writings, 4) Abu Mus`ab Al-Zarqawi, from Jordan, 12 writings; 5)

Abdul Mun`im, 11 writings.

It is interesting to note that all the efforts to build up an online library are being done voluntarily. The radical activists who operate this site use Wikipedia, a free online encyclopaedia, as a model. The website uses voluntary contributions from the public. The moderators of the website will upload a list of resources which require translation and it is open to anyone who wants to volunteer and translate it. The moderators also invite those who have already translated some resources to contribute their work to the website. This invitation generally gets good responses from the sites' visitors. There are at least 4 individuals and 2 groups who respond frequently to the invitation and are actively engaged in the website. These translates to the quick production of translated materials; the mobilization of skills and energy for the purpose of radicalization; effecting radicalization at many levels i.e. new recruits, sympathizers, and hardcore activists; and to sustain radical ideology and the radicalization process in society.

Insights for counter-radicalism

This issue sheds some light for counter-radicalization initiatives.

First, this vigorous act of translation shows that ideas matter for the radicals. It benefits them personally and it is also an important means of winning the sympathy of the people and the recruitment of new members. Radical activists

The Translation of Radical Resources into the Indonesian Language and the Problem of Radicalization

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would not have spent so many resources and efforts on ideational materials as demonstrated in their translation works, if they are not important to them, do not serve their cause or if there are no demands for them.

Second, radical groups are dynamic and creative. They always strive to overcome any challenges and take advantage of any opportunity to achieve their objectives. Thus, counter-radicalization efforts must have the same traits. They need to observe the changes in the radical landscape and modify their response. Failure to do so will result in a policy that will be rendered ineffective against the radical groups.

Third, these efforts of vigorous translation would not have succeeded without a pool of volunteers and resources that contribute to sustain and maintain radicalism at the worrying level. Fourth, it is a fact that resources in the Arabic language hold great value and influence among the radical groups.

Closing remarks

Although translations represent only one aspect of the radicals' activities, it is a good measure of their level of commitment and determination. This means there is still more that needs to be done against radicalism in Indonesia despite the arrest and detention of radicals and the increase in counter-radicalization efforts.

Officials should consider looking at translating counter-radicalization materials from Arabic to Bahasa Indonesia- most especially the revisionist (former jihadist) works of Egyptian Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiah and also Sheikh Abdul Qadir Abdul Aziz, a.k.a Dr Fadl. The two are now the biggest critics of the Al Qaeda. It should be noted that radical groups are still distributing the old writings of Sheikh Abdul Qadir while ignoring his recent ones.

Thus far, the revisionists have produced more than 25 volumes that explain their past ideological beliefs and their condemnation of Al-Qaeda. These writings have contributed to deradicalization efforts in Egypt, Algeria and Libya where a number of radicals have turned over a new leaf. The spread and distribution of these materials can be the counter to the radical materials being translated and uploaded online.

GLOBAL PATHFINDER II

The ICPVTR Terrorism Database – Global Pathfinder - is a one-stop repository for information on the current and emerging terrorist threat. The database focuses on terrorism and political violence in the Asia-Pacific region – comprising of Southeast Asia, North Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Oceania.

Global Pathfinder is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counterterrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps . It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles.

In addition to providing the latest information on terrorist attacks and pronouncements, Global Pathfinder also includes over a hundred terrorist training manuals, counter terrorism legislations and conventions, analytical papers on terrorist ideologies, commentaries on terrorist trends and patterns, transcripts of landmark cases, interviews with terrorists as well as photographs from different conflict zones across the world. Further, Global Pathfinder also has a huge collection of jihadi websites, the contents of which are routinely translated and analyzed by our analysts. This analysis helps develop an understanding of the developments in the ideological spectrum and trajectory of the terrorist threat, in both in tactical as well as strategic space.

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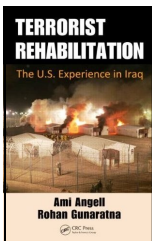
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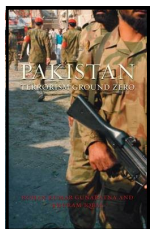
ICPVTR conducts research, training, and outreach programs aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with practical knowledge, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically-motivated groups.

The Centre is staffed by academic specialists, religious scholars, as well as personnel from the law enforcement, military and intelligence agencies, among others. The Centre is culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising of functional and regional analysts as well as Muslim religious scholars from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

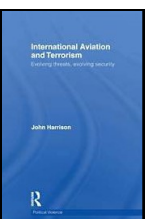
Events and Publications



- Terrorist Rehabilitation: The US Experience in Iraq (CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2011) by Dr. Ami Angell and Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

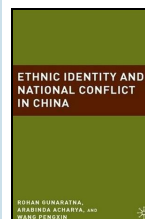


- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khuram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison

Watch this space for upcoming events at ICPVTR



- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya