



Analysis: Bangkok Shrine Bombing

(Updated as of 4 September, 2015)



Intelligent Security Solutions Limited

www.issrisk.com

To say there has been a degree of confusion around this incident would be something of an understatement. The different responses to explain the motivation and who were potentially responsible for the attack have been driven by the desire to deflect people from the patent reality of why and how this incident in all likelihood happened. The regurgitation of the political motivation theory in various guises by many commentators to the extent where essays are literally being written is both distracting and discerning.

Intelligent Security Solutions (ISS) shall recap its original analysis below and return to each scenario in sequence, adding the additional 'theories' that have been thrown into the mix.

Synopsis

There have been a number of speculative and, frankly, ill-thought out and ill-advised claims as to who was responsible, why and why now.

The first claim in the immediate aftermath of the attack was that it was political, that the Red Shirts had decided to exit the political arena in a horrendous and spectacular way.

The second claim was it was a family feud (*which family?*) or a rather large, seemingly international, sophisticated and very well planned family feud.

The third claim was that it was the aggrieved people smugglers who hit back at the Thai authorities for recent raids.

Aside from some tenuous aspects to the third claim (i.e. 'people smuggler theory'), none of these assertions hold any water for reasons that shall be discussed later in this report.

Target selection and underlying message

What is clear now is that there is no question that the choice of target and physical siting of the device had but one objective - mass casualties. That was the only indiscriminate aspect of the siting, in that they really didn't care per se who was caught in the blast, just as many people as possible.

Whoever was responsible understood the nature of the target geography very well. That particular section of the street is a bottle neck owing to the heavy presence of flower sellers and hawkers. It is also located between major shopping malls and traffic lights, creating a pedestrian choke point. All these factors contributed to the presence of a large number of people in a small and confined area. When taken these facts into consideration, then the choice of target and siting of device were selected for the sheer



number of people likely to be there at the evening.

The ethnic or national make-up of the people visiting Erawan Shrine was likely the primary reason why it was selected. Add the fact that it is a renowned tourism destination in Bangkok, and you have two major motivations for selecting it as the target.

ISS remains committed to the analysis that this was intended to be a mass casualty attack and we believe that the number of people killed and injured, although significant, could have been worse had it not been for several events and coincidences.

Observers have questioned why the bombers chose to deploy the device that evening and not the previous day, or a day before that. We believe that the answer to this is simple. No doubt the 'Bike for Mom' event a day before would appear to be an attractive target for a mass casualty attack - had the message been directed solely at the Thai establishment, including the Royal family; but this was not the case.

Furthermore, given the Thai Royal family's involvement in the event, security was greatly heightened and thus the chance of capture or failure would have increased and this we believe was a major factor in date selection.

ISS firmly believes that the bombers had multiple messages to send and to a broader audience without formally claiming responsibility for the attack. As aforementioned, launching the attack the night before would have sent the wrong message, in that it would have appeared to have been purely targeting Thailand and, or the establishment and Royal family. This was certainly not the intended message the bombers wished to convey.

They selected the Erawan Shrine for the symbolic message it would send to both Thailand and China. The shrine is popular with many Chinese tourists and local Thais. This was a singular symbolic location whereby the perpetrators knew they would hit a mix of Thai, Chinese and other people, but assured that Chinese and Thai would be the majority casualties, as opposed to Westerners.

This was a callous attack designed to have far reaching ramifications. These ramifications will be elaborated on in the latter sections of this analysis.

Potential scenarios for those responsible

Four updated scenarios are presented below as to the most likely responsible group for the bombing and their likely motivations. The four potential scenarios being presented are:



- Political terrorism
- Domestic terrorism
- Foreign terrorism
- Combined foreign and domestic terrorism

1. Political terrorism [Assessment – Highly Unlikely]: Seminal fact – this attack was clearly designed to inflict the greatest number of casualties. A politically motivated attack tends not to be so indiscriminate in targeting civilians in this way. Yes, in many Muslim countries like Pakistan etc., such events do happen on occasion, but not in predominately Buddhist societies. This attack presents too much of a deviation from the modus operandi (M.O.) of politically motivated proponents for us to succumb to this popular and one-dimensional explanation.

Typically speaking, unless facing a fundamental transition in orientation, nationalist separatists themselves tend to be more politically driven than extremist religious groups and so, do not resort to such radical, indiscriminate actions.

Who does benefit most in this example if motivation was indeed political? We don't see how any political faction could benefit from it, in that it would swell public opinion so much against them they will have presided over their own demise. This attack

belies strategic sense and political actors are normally more strategically driven.

2. Domestic terrorism [Assessment – Possible]: This being an act committed by insurgents from Southern Thailand (Southern insurgents) is possible, but possible only if a transition is taking place within the movement. Even then, it is a more likely scenario than politically motivated attackers, given the nature of the attack.

The M.O. may not fit with the known or expected Southern insurgency, experienced both in terms of geography and scale / level of attack. However, there are precedents of fairly significant tactical shifts in the Southern insurgents M.O. over the past decade. These transitions do not happen overnight, they take time to eventuate and emerge and for observers to notice. For example, between 2005 and 2008, tactics that were common in Iraq and Afghanistan began to appear, namely in the use, design and siting of roadside IED's in southern Thailand. This was credible and verifiable evidence of a tactical shift and improvements alien to their historical M.O., suggesting influence from external players and actors either feeding in or returning to the Southern insurgency theatre.

We believe it would not be beyond the realms of possibility that several incidents since 2013 again point to a transition in the



M.O. for the southern insurgents, or at least within its more radical elements. For example, the Phuket device in December 2013, comprising of 180 Kgs of explosives and two gas cylinders, was not a small device and has been verified by multiple Thai sources to lead back to Southern Thailand. More importantly, it was a clear 'geographical push' into the north of the country. The key point here is we could be witness to a morphing in strategy of Southern insurgents.

Furthermore, if one looks at the combat indicators, they are indicative of the testing of responses and perceptions. If these responses and perceptions fail to identify the 'shift', then the insurgents will have leeway to push the envelope and hence spread their operational tentacles.

3. Foreign terrorism [Assessment – Likely]: Patently with the evidence emerging, this scenario has gradually become accepted as the most laudable one, but with a twist. However, it is not as clear cut as it appears.

A complex set of relationships is beginning to unfold pertaining to the identities, origins, ethnicities and ultimately the possible motivations of the network of individuals identified thus far as having been either implicated or suspected as being implicated in the attack. This mix of people has added to confusing perceptions as to the origins or

the group behind the bombing and therefore contributed to the diverse mix of explanations for the motivations.

In light of these factors Scenarios 3 and 4 blend together.

4. Combines foreign and domestic terrorism [Assessment – Most Likely]:

This scenario proposes that the attack was planned and executed by an external group with limited domestic assistance. That external group is becoming increasingly clearer as a grouping of ethnic 'Turkic' origins. The reason to identify it as 'Turkic' is that evidence so far points to both Turkish and Uyghur involvement, with the local Thai element woven in through a marital relationship.

An interesting aspect of this whole saga is that if this Southern Thai Muslim woman was implicated through complicity or duplicity and then sent out of the country to Turkey, as evidence is suggesting, then it reinforces the prospect that the entire team was indeed external. They used her name and identity for the apartment (whether knowingly or unknowingly is purely academic) so as to remain insulated and isolated. By perhaps using her and moving her subsequently out of the country, allowing them to operate without any direct local assistance, again points to an external cell.



Further commentary will be made about this cell in the Conclusion section of the report. But at this point the available evidences suggest three indisputable common factors about the suspects – all of them are Muslims, all but one of them are foreigners and the majority of them share an ethnic ‘Turkic’ origin. Throw in the potential for one suspect to be Thai Muslim, and there are certainly grounds for a confusing picture.

The cell

This is not an ad hoc cell by the looks of it, it is certainly not something thrown together in a short period of time in response to events in the past month or six weeks. When the

above is confirmed then one can make advised observations of the likelihood that the cell was in place and activated some time ago, which indicates a much higher level of planning.

Additionally, that scope, albeit speculative, and based on available information and interpretations of past actions and events, can advise as to the potential size of the group or network directly involved. The cell is likely to comprise of bomb maker(s), logistics people, and buyers for material acquisition, intelligence scouts and co-ordination.

On the face of it the operation / cell seems

KEY PLAYERS IN BANGKOK BOMB BLASTS

What roles have the main suspects allegedly played in recent Bangkok bombings?

- Abu Dustar Abdulrahman or 'Izan':** Chinese national. Alleged Mastermind. Left Thailand on August 16 for Bangladesh.
- Mieraili Yusufu:** Chinese national. Alleged bomb-maker, said to have told police he made the bomb used at the Erawan Shrine. Arrested in Sa Kaew province.
- Adem Karadag:** Nationality unknown, carrying a Turkish passport whose authenticity is questioned; found to possess bomb-making materials when arrested in Nong Chok in Bangkok.
- Man in blue shirt:** Nationality unknown. Kicked a bag containing bomb into a canal near Sathorn Pier; blast exploded on August 18 without causing any casualty.
- Man in yellow shirt:** Nationality unknown; Carried bomb to the Erawan Shrine on August 17, shortly before it was detonated – killing 20 and injuring over 120.

11 suspects in the Erawan Shrine and Sathorn Pier bomb blasts

- August 19:** The first warrant is issued for a "man in a yellow shirt", captured in security cameras at the shrine.
- August 26:** Adem Karadag was arrested at an apartment in Nong Chok district, where a huge amount of bomb-making materials were found.
- August 27:** The second warrant is issued for a "man in a blue shirt", who allegedly kicked a bomb into a canal by Sathorn Pier.
- August 31:**
 - Third warrant:** Wanna Suansan, 26, a native of Phang Nga province, who allegedly rented an apartment in Bangkok's Min Buri district for the suspects.
 - The fourth:** an unidentified foreigner for possessing bomb-making materials.
- September 1:**
 - The fifth:** Ali Jolan, accused of possessing bomb-making materials.
 - The sixth:** Ahmet Bosonglan, on a charge of having bomb-making materials in possession.
 - The seventh:** an unnamed man, nationality unknown. He faces charges of possessing bomb-making materials.
- September 2:**
 - The eighth:** Emrah Davuloglu, Wanna's Turkish husband.
- September 3:**
 - The ninth:** Mieraili Yusufu, arrested on September 1 at Sa Kaew province.
- September 7:**
 - The tenth:** Abdullah Abdul Rahman
 - The eleventh:** a man, about 175 cm tall captured in video footage wandering in a department store in Min Buri.

Source: The Nation



to be fairly well structured and financed, from accommodation, materials for devices, transportation in country, transportation to and from country, subsistence, fake passports, intelligence gathering and security, all of which require personnel and financing. This would indicate longer term planning and preparation rather than an ad hoc response to recent events.

To mix home-made explosives (HME) takes training, practice and testing. It is not something that a loose coalition of disgruntled individuals can come together inside a few weeks to perfect. On the contrary, it indicates a predetermined allocation of skill sets and resources.

The bomb factory

The recovery of a fairly significant amount of bomb making equipment, with some of the materials clearly at an advanced stage of construction, indicate that the suspect, and or others, were clearly in the process of planning further attacks, and likely fairly soon at that. The amount of explosives recovered will serve as clear indicators to the potential number of devices (similar to the shrine IED), which will give a reasonable indication of the scope of their intentions.

Several other critical questions require answering before a more accurate assessment of the unfolding situation can be made, such as:

- When were the apartments rented? A key question in determining when motive was formed.
- What types of explosives were used? Military grade, commercial or homemade? If military or commercial then the indications are that the suspects were in advanced stages of construction for new devices and the quantity of explosives would indicate potentially how many based on previous incidents. If homemade then the stage of mixing would indicate how close they were to completion.

The evidence

In response to the questions posed in the previous section, the following series of photos of evidence retrieved from the Cell's bomb making factory, provide clear indicators as to what type of explosives were being handled and in fact constructed:

Photo 1: Standard materials used in IED construction





Photo 2: Constituent chemical components for HME



Photo 4: Ball bearings and sleeve (sleeve wrapped around primary explosives)



Photo 3: Constituent chemical components for HME



Photo 5: Various sizes of pipes to house explosives ('pipe-bombs')

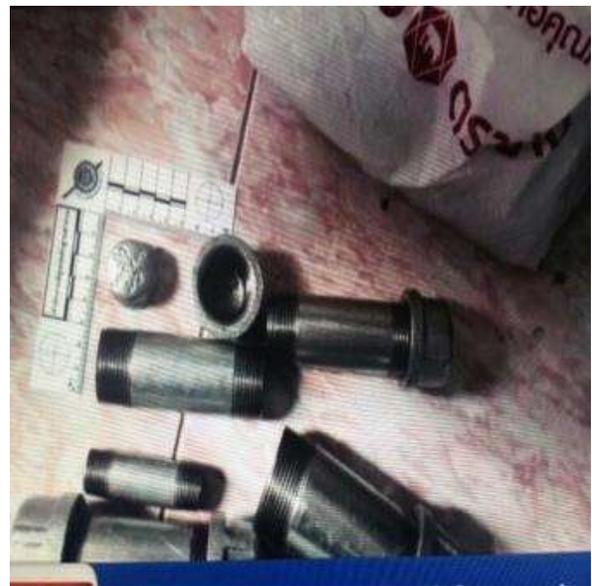




Photo 6: Ball bearings, typical fragmentation generating objects commonly used in HME



From the on-site evidence gathered at the bomb-making factory, the explosives were Home Made (HME). That resolves some of the more vexing questions regarding the cell's sophistication / competencies but also creates a raft of other questions and considerations around these critical topics.

Foreign suspects arrested

Thai police arrested on Saturday (August 29) a suspect in what could be the first possible breakthrough in the August 17 Erawan Shrine blast. The pre-dawn raid was launched at the Pool Anant apartment in the capital's suburban district of Nong Chok after investigators received a tip-off that a man who looked like the suspect shown on CCTV footages leaving the shrine blast scene, was staying there.

The 28-year old male suspect is a foreigner holding, what Thai police described as a, 'fake' Turkish passport, as well as a dozen

other spurious passports. Initial investigation revealed that the man, identified as Adem Karadag, has travelled in and out of the country since January 2014.

Authorities also seized from his apartment bomb-making material -- including ball bearings, pipes and fuses -- that were "similar or same type" as those used in the shrine attack and the subsequent non-lethal bombing at Sathorn pier.

At this point, police still could not confirm the suspect's nationality and whether he was the bomber. A national police spokesman only said they believe he was involved in both the shrine and the pier blasts, and that he did not act alone. Previously, police said they were eyeing multiple suspects, possibly belonging to a "network".

However, national police Chief Somyot Pumphuang downplayed any suggestion that the suspect was connected to terrorism. "He is a foreigner, but it's unlikely that he is an international terrorist. It's a personal feud," Somyot told a televised news conference. "He got angry on behalf of his friends and family members," he added, without elaborating.

On August 31, a second foreign suspect was arrested by Cambodian authorities and was handed over to the Thai government in the Cambodian border town of Poipet in



Banteay Meanchey province, opposite Thailand's Sa Kaeo Aranyaprathet district. He was believed to be on his way to Phnom Penh from Thailand.

The suspect was carrying a Chinese passport which gave his name as Yusufu Mieraili, and his place of birth as the western Chinese region of Xinjiang, but police were not sure if the passport was authentic.

However, on September 4, police reported that forensic tests on the two detained foreign suspects failed to find a link to the site of the blast. Police said DNA examination of the two foreigners tie them to a stash of explosives found in two successive raids at apartments in Bangkok's outskirts, but not to evidence collected at the Erawan Shrine.

Conclusions

The evidence and assessment point to the likelihood that the shrine bombing was not a domestically politically motivated attack. With foreign terrorism now having appeared in Thailand, it is a potentially significant shift in strategic penetration of South and Southeast Asia. Key conclusions as of September 4, 2015:

➤ A Turkic connection is now unambiguous.

- Evidence exists of South / Southeast Asian to Near East terrorist groups working together ... cross-fertilization.
- Verifiable evidence of cross-fertilization of disparate terrorists and / or groups working together as a consequence of the Bangkok incident.
- Is there a Syria & Iraq 'Jihadist Alumni' connection? The human trafficking / transiting connection suggested by the Thai authorities do perhaps have a shred of reality to it. Thailand is an integral transit route for Uyghurs to escape from China or those who may be Syria bound. It is academic what their motivation may be, as the transit route link clearly exists.
- Not having a historic / previous precedence to measure this attack against, in Bangkok particularly, has contributed strongly to the misinterpretation of the motivation and the cause and effect (how, why). This has in turn led to the misunderstandings and various interpretations being thrown around, including proliferation of weak theories.
- We firmly believe this was not just an attack in Bangkok, this is an attack against Thailand & China for their collaboration in the treatment / expulsion / deportation of Uyghurs. It is a statement of intent by a sub group (Turkic) of the *Umma* and this context should not be ignored or disregarded or taken out of



context from the motivation for the attack and what message they wished to convey. Our position is that it was scenario 4, a pan-Turkic cell involving Turkish and Uyghur's working together with limited domestic support.

- The attack underscores the potential and growing magnitude of the reaction and morphing of the Uyghur issue from what has been labelled a local problem to a regional issue, localization versus regionalization.

Terrorism has been in a state of flux and change for a very long time. Forty years ago national separatism, left wing terrorism or communist orientated terrorism were the norm, the motivations were definable, containable and manageable. Things have changed with the advent of radical Pan-Islamic terrorism during the past thirty years. Many Islamic terrorist groups started their existence pursuing local or nationalist agendas.

As the Pan-Islamic movement took root and propagated a common ideological theme, there has developed a platform for a unified Islamic cause, albeit fragmented over that time frame, but much less fragmented now. However, these developments have not been streamlined, there was first the Afghanistan Mujahedeen fighting the Soviet occupation, which spawned the al-Qaeda network, lasting for nearly two decades to

now. That essentially led to the creation of ISIL, morphing into ISIS and ultimately IS.

What has occurred in Bangkok is more symptomatic of the alignment that is taking place across the Islamic fundamentalist world generally and less directly connected to IS. The policies of failure pursued by governments who do not want to face the reality that their very actions are assisting the transitions from localisation to regionalization of terrorism networks and affiliations that are now essentially being driven together under a commonality of purpose.

Although the Bangkok incident seems complex, it seems so as it is being interpreted in a variety of ways by different actors and parties for a plethora of reasons from politics to PR and image preservation. When in actual fact the motivations, the cause and effect and those responsible are actually fairly clear to see when the fog is blown away.

About Intelligent Security Solutions

Intelligent Security Solutions (ISS) is an Asian based consultancy and risk analysis company with a highly qualified and experienced team and an extensive on-the-ground presence. We are a bespoke independent Frontier, Emerging, and selected Developing Markets political risk research, due diligence, and business solutions consulting company. ISS has formed a highly qualified and experienced team with an extensive network of organic connections committed to providing clients with comprehensive, high-end quality information, intelligence, and security services. ISS specializes in the North East Asia region (China, Hong Kong, Mongolia, DPRK, and South Korea); South Asia region (Myanmar and Bangladesh); and South East Asia region (Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia). ISS has its headquarters based in Hong Kong with representation in DPRK, South Korea, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Shanghai and Beijing.

- Intelligence Based Security Solutions
- Leaders in Risk Analysis, Mitigation and Response
- Frontier, Emerging and Selected Developing Market Specialists
- Proactive Partners for Market Entry Strategies, Business Solutions, and Mergers and Acquisitions

Our clients range from family enterprises to large multi-national corporations seeking to expand into these unique specialist markets. Existing global conglomerates, energy and mining companies, hedge funds, asset managers and private equity investors operating in these markets often seek our assistance to formulate risk strategies and contingency plans to counter operational challenges or to simply to gain a deeper insight into the changing socio-political, economic policy and regulatory risks associated with these unique markets.

ISS fundamentally believes that our specialist markets, in particular DPRK, Mongolia and Myanmar, represent the world's last remaining frontier capital markets that are fast becoming synchronized into the global economic landscape. ISS is dedicated to remaining the most relevant global leaders operating in these markets and has invested considerable time and resources to establish deep influential connectivity and local networks in all intelligence, political, social and economic sectors.