

A strange “Iranian” explosion in Bangkok

John Roberts
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Evidence that has emerged over the past two weeks since the February 14 explosion in Bangkok has undermined the official Israeli claim that it was part of bungled plans by Iran to attack Israeli diplomats.

The events in Bangkok followed bombings on February 13 in Georgia and the Indian capital of New Delhi, fuelling media speculation that the attacks were Iranian retaliation for the assassination of senior Iranian nuclear scientists. The only casualty was an Israeli diplomat’s wife who was wounded when a bomb was attached to her vehicle in New Delhi.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately declared all three incidents to be terrorist attacks directed at Israeli diplomats and urged all nations to unite against “Iranian aggression”. Iranian officials denied any involvement and pointed to the possible involvement of Israeli intelligence.

The bombings were politically convenient for the Netanyahu government, which according to Israeli and international media reports, is actively discussing Israeli attacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Netanyahu is due in Washington next Monday for talks in which Iran will be at the top of the agenda.

The killing of Iranian scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan in January had all the hallmarks of a Mossad operation designed to goad Iran into retaliating and providing the pretext for Israeli air strikes. The meticulously planned assassination also involved a magnetic bomb planted on Roshan’s vehicle, but the similarities end there. The incidents in Georgia, India and Thailand were marked by amateurishness and gross ineptitude.

In Bangkok, the events descended into farce. There

was no attack on Israeli diplomats, but an apparently accidental bomb blast at a rented house that lifted the roof off a front room and showered the area with debris. Three Iranian citizens fled the house—Masoud Sedaghatzadeh, Mohammad Kharzei and Saeid Moradi.

Moradi, who was the last to leave and apparently injured, tried to hail a taxi. For reasons unknown, he dropped a bomb on the road in front of the taxi, blowing apart the vehicle’s front end. When cornered by police, he attempted to throw another bomb, but it hit the ground near him and shredded both his legs below the knee.

Moradi was arrested at the scene, Kharzei at Bangkok’s airport and Sedaghatzadeh when he arrived in Kuala Lumpur. Thai authorities have begun extradition proceedings. Thai police state that they have obtained little information from their questioning of the suspects.

Thai police have issued arrest warrants for two people, both Iranians. Leila Rohani allegedly rented the house being used by the three men. She returned to Iran on February 5. Norouzi Shayan Ali Akbar has been variously described by police as the master bomb maker, or simply the caretaker at the residence.

On February 26, three more Iranians were arrested. The only connection is that they lived in the same building as Rohani and two had made mobile phone contact with Moradi.

In the damaged house, police found two portable radio bombs, a motorbike bought by Rohani and stickers with the Arabic word “SEJEAL”, meaning hot fire or fire stones. The stickers had appeared in dozens of locations in Bangkok before February 14, prompting

police speculation that they marked possible targets or escape routes.

If Sedaghatzadeh, Kharzei and Moradi were part of a bomb plot, they were hardly professional assassins. Far from lying low, they drew attention to themselves by meeting in the resort town of Pattaya in early February and consorting with prostitutes for several days. The *Bangkok Post* published a front page picture, taken by a sex worker with a mobile phone, of the three in a Middle Eastern-themed bar.

An *Asia Times* article on February 24 by IHS-Jane's security analyst Anthony Davis declared the operations in Thailand, Georgia and India were marked by "a startling lack of professionalism". He continued: "In Bangkok, incompetence veered into a bloody comedy of errors that in any work of spy fiction would have been dismissed as ludicrous." He noted that in India, the magnetic bomb had been placed on the vehicle to significantly lessen the chance of killing the target.

There is one obvious parallel: the alleged plot revealed by US officials last October, involving a failed Iranian-American used car dealer from Texas, Manssor Arbabsiar. He allegedly commissioned a Mexican drug cartel to blow up the Saudi ambassador to the US. Again, despite strident US accusations that Tehran was responsible, the level of sheer amateurishness made any participation by the Iranian regime highly unlikely.

In his *Asia Times* article, Davis noted: "If the Iranian government was indeed responsible for the recent attacks, it would be setting itself up for a fall in two countries (India and Thailand) with which it shares valuable diplomatic and trade relations and at a time when it has a vital interest in not providing Israel with a pretext for war."

Davis pointed to the possibility that the attacks were carried out by elements of the Iranian opposition group Mujahideen e Khalq (MeK), which has been previously linked to Mossad. He explained that in addition to MeK operatives being trained by the Israelis to carry out assassinations inside Iran, the group has a large pool of untrained members. These "Iranians" could have been used by Mossad with "no risk of any blow-back" in the

event of a fiasco.

Whatever the explanation, the least likely is that the attacks in Thailand, Georgia and India were carried out by Iranian intelligence organisations. In response to calculated Israeli provocations, including acts of sabotage and murder inside Iran, Tehran has been rather restrained in its rhetoric. It is well aware of the mounting US and Israeli propaganda campaign designed to create the climate for a potential war against Iran.



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