

INCIDENT PROFILE

Turkey, Taksim Square Suicide Bomb¹

OVERVIEW

A suicide bomber blew himself up beside a police vehicle in a major Istanbul square near tourist hotels and a bus terminal, wounding 32 people, including 15 policemen.

INCIDENT:

The attack in Taksim Square which was followed by police gunfire, sent hundreds of panicked people racing for cover. Although the attack coincided with the possible end of a unilateral ceasefire by Kurdish rebels, no group has claimed responsibility.

DATE:

The suicide bomber struck at 10.30 am, on Sunday, 31 October 2010.

LOCATION:

It took place at Taksim Square which is considered the heart of modern Istanbul. The square is a popular spot for street demonstrations, and lies adjacent to a major pedestrian walkway whose shops and restaurants are usually packed with local residents and tourists. As a transport hub, a major stop for the city's underground train network is also situated there. The Hyatt, Ritz-Carlton and other major hotels are also nearby. As a major shopping, tourist and leisure district the location is famous as shoppers' paradise.

PERPETRATED BY:

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK was suspected to be behind the attack but the armed Kurdish rebel group has denied responsibility for the bombing.² The assailant was later identified as Vedat Acar by the governor's office in Istanbul, and the authorities claimed that he joined the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in 2004.³

TARGET:

Apparently the target was a bus full of police officers who were part of the riot police stationed at Istanbul's busiest square.

TACTIC:

¹ ALLVOICES, "Bomb Blast in Istanbul Injures 32" *Local to Global News* (<http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/7191876-bomb-blast-in-istanbul-injures-32/stories>, 1 Nov. 2010), 3 Nov. 2010.

² BBC, "Kurdish PKK Denies Istanbul Bomb, Extends 'Truce'" *News Europe* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11664707>, 1 Nov. 2010), 2 Nov. 2010.

³ Hurriyet, "Istanbul Officials Identify Taksim Bomber, Link Him to PKK" *Daily News and Economic Review* (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=istanbul-officials-identify-attacker-in-taksim-square-bombing-2010-11-02>, 2 Nov. 2010), 3 Nov. 2010.

A male suicide bomber tried but failed to get into a parked police vans and detonated the bomb just outside the vehicle.

IMPACT and VISUAL AIDS:

As a result, 17 civilians and 15 police officers have been reported injured. The five people in serious condition were all police officers. The number of people injured could have been higher had the attacker's bomb exploded fully. The second device that either failed to detonate or was not used was later found on the male bomber whose body was seen lying close to the foot of the statue of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, at the centre of the square.⁴

WITNESS ACCOUNTS:

According to Mehmet Toz who was in the square at the time of the blast, there was a very loud explosion, and people were seen running away from the site. Some fell on the ground. Everyone panicked but no one could make out what had happened. According to another witness, Muammer Ulutas, who works at a nearby cafe, policeman fired four rounds of shots at the suicide bomber after he had blown himself up. A third witness described the explosion like an earthquake, and noticed that most of the injured were policemen.

ATTACK ANALYSIS:

TARGET ASSESSMENT:

While the place offers many soft targets for terrorists to pick from, it was obvious that the real target was the policemen who were stationed at the square. This reflects the intention of the group behind the attack to avoid civilian casualties as far as possible. However, the bombing was a clear reminder to the Turkish government the price they have to pay should they decide not to take the PKK's demands seriously.

TACTIC ASSESSMENT:

The tactics that was used had been used many times before in many other parts of the world. It echoes a growing concern among security analysts of the difficulty in protecting soft targets, especially, when they are tightly clustered into a hub.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

While activities at and in the vicinity of the Taksim Square will return to normalcy quickly, the security challenge to prevent future attacks from happening remains enormous. There is also no guarantee that future attacks will not be of greater scale, both in terms of number of deaths and physical destructions.

GROUP ASSESSMENT:

While the core PKK may be committed to finding a political solution and more willing to negotiate, the same cannot be expected from splinter groups. The fact that they are small may be a motivating factor for them to be louder than their size permits. This may lead them to be

⁴ Sebnem Arsu, "Bomber Wounds 32 in Attack in Istanbul," *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/01/world/middleeast/01turkey.html>, 31 Oct. 2010), 1 Nov. 2010.

more violent in order to attract attention. What is even worse is if they decide to compete and outdo each other through violence.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS:

As society urbanizes, the need for all infrastructures, amenities and facilities to be tightly clustered together within a reasonable radius to form a hub cannot be avoided. Areas developed in this manner may be extremely difficult to protect thus, increasing the need for more creative use of available technology to enhance security of the area.