Car Bomb Explosion at New Delhi, 13 February 2012

On 13 February 2012, a car belonging to the Israeli embassy in New Delhi exploded close to its embassy premises. The attack is suspected to be a coordinated terror attack after a car bomb involving an Israeli embassy vehicle in Georgian capital of Tbilisi was defused.¹ The embassy vehicle was a Toyota Innova SUV which bore diplomatic number-plate 109 CD 35. The powerful bomb exploded and engulfed the car into flames at 3.16 pm when it stopped at the traffic light intersection of Aurangzeb road and Safdarjung road. The explosion took place barely 500 meters from the official residence of India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.² The location of the blast is a high security area of New Delhi. An Israeli embassy official, Tal Yehoshua Korene who was sitting at the backseat of the car and the local driver of the car, Manoj Sharma were critically injured in the blast.

Tal Yehoshua Korene, aged 40, is the wife of Israeli Defence Attaché at the embassy. Tal Yehoshua Korene is being treated for splinter injuries at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Primus Hospital while the driver Manoj Sharma, aged 40, has been admitted to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital.³ In addition to the embassy official and the driver, two other persons who were within the radius of the blast were also injured namely, Arun Sharma, aged 40, and Manjeet Singh, aged 75.

No group has asserted responsibility for the blast so far. The Special Cell of the Delhi Police is currently investigating the incident and a team from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) is examining the car to ascertain the nature of explosive used.⁴

Sequence of events

According to official police sources, Mrs. Korene was traveling in the Innova car to American Embassy School to pick up her two children. Eyewitness accounts state that a lone motorcyclist driving a red bike and wearing a brown jacket stuck a magnetic device to the car. After the motorcycle crossed the intersection, there was a blast and the vehicle caught fire. The rear door was reportedly blown out.

The driver, Manoj Sharma lost control of the car and hit a road divider. However, he managed to pull out Mrs. Tal Yehoshua Korene from the backseat and quickly put her into an auto-rickshaw (a three wheeler) and escorted her to the Israeli embassy.⁵

Tactics

This is a brutal attack on a diplomatic vehicle in New Delhi. According to details given by the police, the blast was carried out by a magnetic bomb. However, it is to be noted that magnetic bombs were used to eliminate four Iranian nuclear scientists in Iran over the last two years.⁶ The motorcycle bomber who carried out this operation is also believed to possess good knowledge of the neighborhood as he has cleverly evaded CCTV cameras. Police believe he must have done a reconnaissance of this route earlier and gained familiarity with the locations of the CCTV cameras in the neighborhood.⁷

According to the police, the bomb used in this attack was of an advanced type not used in New Delhi before. A senior police official described the bomb as a 'low intensity incendiary device' probably made by foreign experts. Assessing the damage caused by the bomb, experts estimated it to be the size of an executive diary. According to the assessment, the bomb had been stuck to the car with a magnet and was probably actuated by remote control, as it exploded within seconds of the biker's taking off. In addition, after the police cordoned off the area and began searching for clues, they found a powdery substance which they initially suspected to be RDX but later said might be nitroglycerin. Preliminary investigation revealed that low-grade explosive material was used. Chemicals, including sulphur and potassium chlorate with sulphuric acid were used to detonate the blast. However, no wires or detonators from the bomb remained after it

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exploded. This technology is a crude way of assembling explosive material where an acid is used as a triggering mechanism to detonate a blast. A team from the Central forensics lab has taken the samples for analysis.

These kind of magnetic devices are often used by terrorists in Iran, Israel, Southeast Asia, Egypt, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia and it is likely that the bomb may have been planted by local sympathizers like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) who support anti-Israel groups. However, no group has asserted responsibility for the attack and the police are still thoroughly investigating the source and nature of explosives used in this blast. Following the blast, security has been put on high alert in the capital and western embassies and missions are taking additional security precautions in the movement of their staff.

**Analysis**

This car bomb attack comes in the backdrop of the anniversary of the 12 February 2008 assassination in Syria of the military mastermind of Hezbollah, Imad Moughniyeh - an attack blamed on the Israeli authorities. However, Israel has been quick to blame Iran for this car bomb explosion in New Delhi and accuses Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah of trying to conspire attacks on its establishments and citizens. Indian intelligence sources also suspect an Iranian connection to this magnetic bomb attack as it could be viewed as retaliation against the covert attempts to thwart Iran’s nuclear programme which the western countries as well as Sunni Muslim countries fear that the nuclear programme will equip Iran with nuclear weapons. Moreover, Delhi Police sources did not rule out the possibility of Iranian sympathizers enlisting the cells of Lashkar operatives to carry out such attacks as they display unremitting animosity towards Israel.

According to intelligence sources in New Delhi, there had been no specific intelligence of a planned attack on the country's diplomats in India and no immediate leads on possible perpetrators. In addition, no similar operation of this nature had been attempted by terrorist groups in India, except for a drive-by shooting at the Jama Masjid Mosque in New Delhi on the eve of the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

While a thorough investigation into this incident will give leads on the perpetrators behind this attack, presently it remains unclear since no group has taken responsibility for this brutal bomb attack.