THAILAND
NEW YEAR’S EVE BOMBINGS

Date: 31 December 2007
Location: Sungai Kolok, Narathiwat

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE BOMBINGS

An air of caution enveloped New Year’s Eve celebrations in Thailand when bombs exploded in the hotel and nightlife area of Sungai Kolok in Narathiwat in the early hours of the morning on 31 December 2007. Five explosions had occurred in Sungai Kolok. Sungai Kolok in Narathiwat province attracts many tourists from neighbouring Malaysia and has been attacked several times in recent years.¹

According to police, the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) exploded at or outside two hotels.² The bombs exploded almost simultaneously. Shrapnel from the blasts injured at least 27 people.³ The powerful blasts resulted in the collateral damage of cars and motorcycles along the roadside.

According to newspaper reports, police had managed to defuse one bomb at a hotel but five IEDs struck two other hotels nearby. The first blasts occurred at about 00:40 am on 31 December 2007, sending people fleeing into a hotel car park, where another bomb was hidden.⁴ Two bombs were hidden behind loudspeakers of a discotheque in the Riviera Hotel in the Sungai Kolok municipality. The third blast occurred as a result of an explosive-laden motorcycle in the parking lot of the Riviera Hotel. The fourth bomb exploded in a discotheque on the second floor of the Marina Hotel and injured four persons. According to a

police officer, the IED which exploded in the discotheque was hidden inside a cigarette packet. A fifth IED was placed in a motorcycle parked in front of a karaoke bar near the Marina Hotel, approximately 100 metres from the local police station.

In both instances, the bombs exploded in the discotheques of the respective hotels prior to the secondary bomb blasts at the parking lots.

**SWIFT ACTION BY SECURITY PERSONNEL**

Merely hours after the attacks, three insurgents were arrested. According to Narathiwat governor Karun Suppakitwilekakarn, the arrest came after police conducted investigations using the security cameras found at the hotels. All the three confessed that they were behind

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5 Ibid
the bombings. The arrested were 23-year-old Muhammad Saki Madeura, 24-year-old Sahae Sa-a and 29-year-old Assaroh Mayi. Preliminary investigations showed that the men had criminal records for previous involvement in violence in the Sungai Kolok and Sungai Padi districts.\(^7\)

### Possible Implications of Attack

The current bomb blasts in Sungai Kolok echo the New Year’s Eve bombings in 2006. Whilst the perpetrators of the bombings in 2006 have yet to have been apprehended, the bombings on New Year’s Eve on 31 December 2007 were apprehended merely hours after the attack. These were primarily the result of security cameras present which the investigating officers were able to successfully exploit.

The arrested insurgents have acknowledged their intent to instigate chaos during the New Year’s Day holiday. The simultaneous nature of the attacks attests to the capability of the insurgents in southern Thailand to mount coordinated attacks. The attacks have successfully garnered the attention of the media and security alerts have been heightened in Bangkok as New Year celebrations continue.

The target of the attacks being hotels may indicate a shift in strategy to directly targeting foreigners in southern Thailand. Local civilians have increasingly been the target of attacks in southern Thailand in recent months. The bombs may have been strategically placed in the discotheques in both hotels. The groups responsible for the ongoing violence in southern Thailand are primarily ethno-nationalist. Several groups however like the Gerakan Mujahideen Islami Pattani (GMIP), Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN-C) and Runda Kumpulan Kecil (RKK) have a slightly more Islamist stance and agenda. These groups want the establishment of an autonomous or independent Islamic state. The discotheques may have been targeted due to the preponderant nature of these locations to be seen as a place of vice. The nature of the target of attacks may shed light on the affiliated religious beliefs of the perpetrators. It has yet to have been ascertained if the men arrested were member of any of these groups or if they were acting as an independent cell.

There has been ongoing speculation if the violence in southern Thailand would spill over to other parts of the country. At present there is no indication that the attacks in Sungai Kolok was meant to be a catalyst for further attacks on festivities in other part of Thailand. This possibility however cannot be completely negated either. The opportunity to carry out these attacks may have been mitigated by the heightened security in northern Thailand after the attacks in Narathiwat in the morning. There remains a very real risk of the violence in southern Thailand spreading to other part of Thailand if the insurgency in southern Thailand continues unabated.

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