



2014-10-07 | Attacks in Chile taking a dangerous turn to terrorism



On September 08, 2014, crowds gathered to enjoy lunch at a fast food restaurant located next to the Escuela Militar (photo) metro station in Las Condes neighborhood of Santiago, Chile. At 14:05, a fire extinguisher filled with gunpowder was detonated leaving 14 injured. [Photo: Escuela Militar de Chile]

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Since 2005 anarchist groups have detonated explosive devices in non-populated areas within Chile during late night hours on at least 198 separate occasions, according to Spanish newspaper *El País*. Because of the timing and absence of civilian populace during these attacks, no casualties were reported. But recent attacks conducted in July and September 2014 deviated from the original pattern as they were conducted at the Santiago Metro Station, a public transit system used by an estimated 2,500,000 individuals per day. And although the Metro attacks did not result in civilian deaths, they made it clear that extremist cells of anarchist groups are willing and

capable of carrying out large-scale terrorist attacks aimed at inflicting multiple casualties at any hour of the day.

The 2014 attacks

On July 13, 2014, the last subway car of the night pulled into Los Dominicos stop at the Santiago Metro Station. Per protocol, a subway employee began checking the train cars one by one to ensure they were all empty during which time a backpack was found underneath a seat in the first car. The bag contained a fire extinguisher filled with gunpowder and a clock wired to the device with cables. This incident was immediately reported to subway security and police. In response to the threat, the subway platform was evacuated, and shortly after, the device detonated before authorities even had a chance to look at it. Information released by Chilean news agency *Emol* indicated that no injuries were reported in conjunction with this attack. However, it represented the first instance in which alleged anarchists dared to detonate an explosive device in a public forum with citizens still present.

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Following this attack, Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio* indicated that at least two of the victims suffered full limb amputations, but as in the first attack, no deaths were reported. Hours following the September incident, the Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire (CCF) released an online statement claiming responsibility for both Metro attacks. They further blamed authorities for injuries sustained by civilians and claimed that their target was not the civilian populace, but the “structures, properties and enforcers of power.”

In carrying out the two Metro attacks, the CCF not only undermined legitimate anarchist groups dedicated to creating lasting social change, it also highlighted its potential to conduct potential large scale terrorist attacks. But the question still remains, how did a small group coordinate a possible mass casualty terrorist attack and who could have helped them?

From anarchism to extreme anarchism

Anarchism in Chile has been used for decades to fight for the injustices of capitalism, but up until 2014, had never been used to attack innocent civilians. Instead, Chilean based anarchist groups are known for using political inroads to beget education, tax, and political reforms. Today, these groups continue to fight for reform but differing views on how to achieve end goals has resulted in splintering of groups; some of which now have international ties to European violent extremist groups. These same European groups are believed to guide and support extremist cells in Chile.

Take for example the CCF. This group is native to Greece, but as evidenced by the Santiago Metro attacks, the CCF has at least one Chilean based cell comprised of Chilean nationals. It also appears that the Chilean cell may have followed guidance released by the CCF in Greece to use everyday items to create explosive devices. This idea is evidenced by the fact that fire extinguishers filled with gunpowder were utilized in both the July and September attacks.

CCF affiliation in Chile is concerning, because according to Greek authorities and information released by the news website *The Perfect Storm*, the CCF's loose, horizontal structure made of individual cells makes it hard to fight. Also of concern is the fact that some security experts have described this group as a mythological serpent in the sense that once one head is cut off, another pops back up. If this is the case and there are more CCF cells operating in Chile, wiping out the remaining members is imperative to stop future attacks.

El País has also reported information indicating that Chilean based extreme anarchists are believed to have ties with Spanish based terrorist groups. Just last year, two Chilean anarchists who were tried and acquitted in connection with the Santiago bombings were later arrested in Spain where they were charged with planting a bomb in a church in Zaragoza. Additionally, at least nine known Spanish terrorists have visited Chile to directly support small scale bombing attacks in recent years. For these reasons and so many more, Chilean ties to international violent extremist groups are concerning as they may serve as the influence for more high profile attacks.

Extremist Chilean anarchists responsible for the Santiago metro terrorist attacks made it clear that they are willing and able to target densely populated venues during daytime hours. Possible future attacks are also of concern, but the Chilean government is

determined to thwart any attempts and to prosecute offenders by enacting an anti-terrorism law first used during the Pinochet era. This law allows for anonymous witness testimony by the prosecution and greatly increased sentences. In applying it, the Chilean government likely hopes to dismantle small extremist cells with probable international ties while restoring peace and tranquility to the streets of Santiago.
