

Why Is Turkey Being Destabilized?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The two massive bomb attacks on Nov. 15 and 20, against synagogues and British institutions (the British Consulate and the HSBC bank) in Istanbul, have initiated a process intended to destabilize the strategically located nation of Turkey. No sooner had the smoke cleared after the attacks, than the official line went out internationally, that “al-Qaeda did it.” As in the case of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks against the United States (to which the Turkish bombings were immediately compared), the blame was conveniently placed on the catch-all perpetrator organization. When the second wave of bombings struck, on Nov. 20, U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who were holding a joint press conference in London, seized the opportunity to announce that the “war on terrorism” would be relaunched.

One does not need to be a counterintelligence expert to suspect that something stinks. Just where the stink is coming from is not yet clear; but a few questions may help to track it down.

Who could have done it? Although persons purporting to represent al-Qaeda, as well as a local Turkish affiliate, immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, Turkish officials were not convinced. On Nov. 23, when Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan was asked by the BBC whether the bombings were the work of al-Qaeda, he answered: “Is it an al-Qaeda conglomerate? . . . Or is it some other terrorist organization? We are not 100% sure, at this point.” The remains of the suicide bombers in the attacks were identified through DNA tests, and were found to be Turkish citizens, as were nine others arrested as suspects. Yet, as Turkish government officials reiterated, the suspects had international connections, which had not yet been identified. The modality and sophistication of the bombings indicated that local groups were not the ultimate source.

A Puzzle

Several experts in terrorism, and in regional affairs, offered their insight into the nature of the assailant group. In an interview with the German NDR radio, Prof. Udo Steinbach, director of the Hamburg-based German Institute of Oriental Studies, said that he was “puzzled” by the Istanbul attacks, because “Turkey has no tradition of a really militant and extremist Islam. We know Islamist parties, that’s a tradition in Turkey and has been for decades. But, in the 1980s, cells were built, in part supported by state intelligence services, in the context of the fight against the Kurdish PKK. There the secret

services also encouraged the building of Islamist cells, which then, so to speak, were deployed against the secular anti-government groups and the Marxist PKK. This is a pretty complicated connection. The Turkish security forces then tried to scale it down in the 1990s—with a certain success, as was seen. We can assume that extremist Islam, organized in groups like Hezbollah, has no big or strong network and certainly no support in the population. But cells apparently still exist. And these cells have, so to speak, extended their hand and moved shoulder to shoulder with an al-Qaeda which—I mention this—sooner or later was ready to put Turkey in its sights.”

Echoing Steinbach’s analysis was an article in the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on Nov. 26, which reported on the possible connections of the nine Turkish suspects, and radical-Islamist circles. The town the four suicide bombers came from, Bingoel, was the staging ground for conflict between Turkish security forces and the PKK; at the time, “the youth fought either on the side of the PKK or the radical Islamist movement which fought them,” the paper wrote. According to a Turkish paper cited, *Sabah*, the Yamac clan to which the perpetrators belonged, had been close to the Palestinian group Hezbollah in the 1990s, and had been involved in over 60 anonymous killings of Kurdish activists, during 1991-94. The *Zeitung* explained: “Since the Hezbollah fought against the Kurdish PKK, it was not only tolerated but actually supported by one part of the security forces. Was thus a monster created, that now has gone out of control?”

A senior European security source told *EIR* that the attacks, which he saw as part of an attempt at the destabilization of Europe, pointed to a “terrorist complex involving organized crime, privatized intelligence/military operations, and whatever extremist organizations/terrorist groups available—be they neo-Nazis, left extremists or Islamic fundamentalists.” In the Turkish case, he believed Islamist groups were probably utilized. However, this does not answer the question of who set up the operation in the first place.

An Arab source based in Europe said he thought such attacks could have been carried out by Turkish or Arab elements, working in terrorist groups which, without their knowledge, were ultimately controlled by foreign intelligence services. He cited several documented cases in which elements working for the Israeli Mossad had recruited Islamist terrorists, and deployed them against U.S. or other Western targets. Several Turkish and Arab press outlets mooted a Mossad or American hand in the affair.

Who Benefits?

This leads to the question: *Cui bono?* Who could benefit from such a terrorist assault? What could be the motive? Several of the security experts mentioned above saw the bombings in the context of Turkey’s Iraq policy. It is known that, although the government of Prime Minister Erdogan, under pressure from Washington, had agreed to allow U.S. troops transit rights across Turkey into northern Iraq during the war,

the Parliament had voted against it. Furthermore, when the United States leaned on Ankara to send its own troops into Iraq, as part of the “coalition of the willing,” Turkey refused. Whatever compromises the government might have been willing to make, strong factions inside the military were—and remain—adamantly opposed to any such deployment.

Thus, for the senior European security source, Turkey’s opposition to the Iraq war was a reason for it to be targeted. A former U.S. intelligence operative told *EIR* bluntly that the Istanbul bombings should be seen as “payback” for Turkey’s refusal to join the war in Iraq. Turkey is also being targeted for its refusal to participate in the drumbeat for a war against Syria, which is being sounded by the Cheney-Wolfowitz-led “junta” in the Bush Administration and Israel’s Ariel Sharon government. The source dismissed the line about “al-Qaeda did it.” He pointed to the fact that it is Turkey’s military that opposed the war, the same military establishment which U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz thought he had in his pocket. (Recall that Wolfowitz, following the Parliament’s “no” vote on troop transit, had called down the Turks, saying that the Turkish military should have forced the Parliament to comply!) This source also pointed to the technical sophistication of the bombings, including the use of shaped charges and powerful military explosives.

Arab and Turkish sources noted the deterioration in Turkey’s relations not only with the United States, but also with Israel. Sharon, who had requested meetings with the Turkish government on his way back to Israel from Moscow recently, was refused landing rights, and Erdogan, it was said, was ill or had scheduling problems and could not receive him. Thus, the hypothesis that the Israelis may have been involved.

Another intriguing hypothesis was posed in the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Nov. 22, in an article by British historian Prof. Norman Stone, who lectures at Bilkent University, Ankara. The article was titled “Who Wants To Get at Turkey’s Throat?” Stone wrote that Turkey is not so unstable politically, and not in such bad condition, economically. Who would want to destabilize it? Not wasting a single word on al-Qaeda, Stone dismissed the idea that the Turkish Armed Forces were involved. The Kurdish extremists of the PKK were likely not involved either, because they were effectively defeated. But on the larger strategic scale, there is the Kurdistan issue: “In Iraq, the Turks are categorically opposing a project which, in Western circles, has become of enormous significance: Kurdistan. The Kurdistan project would be an important factor for America to declare

victory in Iraq, pull out the troops, and have another non-Arab state which is friendly to the U.S.A. Also the Israelis would rejoice.”

‘A Bailout’ for Bush and Blair

There is no doubt that those who benefitted from the destabilization, were Blair and Bush. In their joint press conference on Nov. 20, both seized on the Istanbul bombings to announce a new round in the “war against terrorism.” Evading unpleasant questions on the national resistance guerrilla war in Iraq, Blair declared Iraq to be “the main battleground” of the “war against terrorism.” Both men focussed almost exclusively on this theme. Blair opened by stating: “Once again, we must affirm that in the face of this terrorism, there must be no holding back, no compromise, no hesitation in confronting this menace, in attacking it whenever we can, and in defeating it utterly. What this latest outrage has shown us is that this is a war,” and “its main battleground is Iraq.” Bush said that the terrorists sought to intimidate America and Britain, but “they are not going to succeed,” because they we are united in determination to fight and defeat this evil wherever it is found.”

On the theme of Iraq as the main battleground of war against terrorism, Bush adopted a formulation earlier used by Vice President Dick Cheney: The al-Qaeda terror network has been equally responsible for terrorist atrocities in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco—as well as Israel, Iraq, and now Turkey. That is: The Palestinian resistance and the Iraqi resistance against occupation, are redefined as “al-Qaeda terrorism”!

One London insider reported that the Istanbul bombings came “like a bailout for Bush and Blair. Both are under tremendous pressure, due to the Iraq fiasco; both are under enormous domestic political pressure, especially Blair; and they face a deteriorating economic situation which they are not dealing with. Therefore, they will focus everything on the ‘war against terrorism.’ ”

The same idea was elaborated in a bitter commentary in the *Times* of London on Nov. 22, by Matthew Parris. He wrote: “The explosions in Istanbul are good news for . . . George W. Bush and Tony Blair” who will use them to reinforce their hardline policy. “Both will gain. The World loses.” He went on: “It is bad taste, but true, to say that terrorist atrocities are good for the careers of our Prime Minister and the U.S. President. It is bad taste, but true, to say that Britain would probably not have been the target in Turkey on Thursday, had our country not been a key member of Mr. Bush’s coalition. It is bad taste but true, to say that British interests and British lives are paying to sustain in office a prime minister who has joined the Americans in a colossal military and diplomatic blunder and now has no choice but to plough on with it.”

And it is bad taste, but probably true, that among those who are trying to benefit politically from the terrorist atrocities, may be those who wanted the hit in the first place.

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