

Terrorist Attacks in Turkey

by [Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay\)](#)

Nov 20, 2003

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay\)](#)

Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute.

The following is a transcript of the CNN program Insight, from an episode dedicated to the terrorist attacks carried out in Istanbul on November 15 and 20, 2003. Soner Cagaptay's remarks appear in the last portion of the transcript.

JONATHAN MANN, CNN HOST: Istanbul again. Turkey suffers another double bombing, the targets this time symbols of British finance and diplomacy. Hello and welcome.

Turkey is a Muslim nation, but it is allied with the West, friendly with Israel and makes almost no place for Islam in public affairs. In short, it represents a vision of Islam that is anathema to extremists.

This week, its people paid dearly. 27 were killed Thursday in twin car bombings in Istanbul. Britain's consul general was among them. 450 people were wounded. Add to those numbers the 25 people killed in another set of twin attacks Saturday. The targets then were a pair of synagogues. Thursday a British bank and diplomatic mission.

The timing Thursday also coincided with the U.S.-British summit, but in both cases the majority of victims were Muslims and Turks.

On our program today, the Istanbul attacks. We have this report from Alex Dobson.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ALEX DOBSON, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): A Turkish TV crew just happened to be filming nearby when the second blast happened at the British consulate. At first, people just fled in panic. Others did what they could for the injured, like this woman. They scabbled desperately at the rubble with their bare hands for signs of life.

It's believed 15 people were killed here. Bodies lay all around, partially or completely entombed in the debris.

Among the dead, the British Consul General Roger Short.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE (through translator): You couldn't see anything from the dust cloud.

DOBSON: It's difficult to say that there were body parts strewn all over the place.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE (through translator): I was close by. Suddenly everything collapsed. There were pools of blood. Bodies everywhere.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE (through translator): I work in the building office at the consulate. We are solicitors. The whole building collapsed. There was nothing left inside.

DOBSON: The consulate building stands in the middle of its own small park. The high compound walls surrounded by the old crowded streets of the Baoul (ph) District.

The consulate building was largely closed for refurbishment. Instead the staff were in relatively unprotected temporary offices strung along the heavy compound walls near one corner at the main gate, the precise corner where the bomb was detonated up against those large walls.

Security staff were one side of the main gate, consular staff the other. Just two days ago, staff had expressed concerns about the security of their temporary offices.

By late morning, the city hospitals were appealing for blood donors.

Five minutes earlier, another British target, the HSBC Bank a couple of miles north. The face of it's 15-stories ripped off by the force of another truck bomb. Also damaged, a shopping center here with two more British stores.

It is all anything but coincidental. A British bank, a British consulate, targeted just as George Bush's second day with Tony Blair was getting underway.

Just before midday, a caller to a news agency said the Turkish group Islamic Great Eastern Raider Front and al Qaeda planted the bombs.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This is, I think, a terrible deed by people who are attacking the very roots of the civilization that we all share.

DOBSON: Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said, "Turkey will be like a fist against the bombers." Of course he, like Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair, have to tough it out, but look at what they're faced with.

Today's bombs came just five days after two more suicide car bombs killed 23 people at two synagogues also in Istanbul, which some will take as proof that the West's so-called war on terror cannot cope with suicide attacks, homemade explosives and the softness of civilian targets. Small wonder that one of the leading experts on al Qaeda said again today that only politics will neutralize this threat, not war, which brings us back, of course, to Mr. Bush, Mr. Blair, the Middle East and Iraq.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MANN: Joining us now with the latest from Istanbul is CNN's Mike Boettcher. Mike, what's the city like this evening?

MIKE BOETTCHER, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well, Jonathan, it's really gone back to normal. This is a country that, as you know, over the past few years has had experience with terrorism from Kurdish groups.

Now of course they're totally surprised that this did occur here, but they picked up the pieces pretty quickly and they're getting back together with their lives rather quickly, although behind me -- I'm just in front of the HSBC Bank, and 100 meters behind me they've set up a white sheet, and they're going piece by piece through the debris, trying to find out anything they can about this bomb and anything they can about who actually set the bomb.

MANN: How much do outsiders know about the investigation that's underway, about the likely suspects? Some names have come up. Some of them have been doubted by Turkish authorities. Are they sharing any of the early indications that they have?

BOETTCHER: Yes, Jonathan. I've been working on this since the initial bombings last Saturday at the synagogues here, the two simultaneous bombings, and the keys to what happened in today's bombing go back to that.

Now they have tracked two of those people. One was in Bosnia with al Qaeda people in Chechnya, and also in Iran, where he met al Qaeda people as well. He is said to have traveled in the al Qaeda network. The other has connections in Pakistan, traveled there, and Afghanistan. Now both of these men are thought to have been classic al Qaeda

sleeper agents who trained in those areas in the countries I mentioned, also fought in Chechnya, and then came back and so to speak slept until they were ordered to carryout this attack.

And by the way, Jonathan, this is the first time, if it is indeed proven that it is an al Qaeda attack, that they've been able to pull it off in conjunction with a major event.

As you know, with various summits and conferences around the world, there's always been high security. They've always been expecting an attack. And now it occurred, not in the United Kingdom, where the summit is, but against the targets representing that in Turkey.

MANN: Have you seen any noticeable increase in security since this latest attack? I know you just got there. I'm curious about whether you noticed, for example, anything out of the ordinary coming to the airport or moving through the streets.

BOETTCHER: Really nothing out of the ordinary coming into Turkey or through the airport. But I will say, Jonathan, that coalition intelligence officials have been very nervous about this last week of Ramadan. They fully expected major attacks throughout the world in this last week of Ramadan, and all four of those attacks now have occurred in Turkey, but they don't believe it's all over yet. I mean, they're worried about the days to come until we reach the Eid celebration at the end of Ramadan.

MANN: Now, once again, I know you just arrived there, but I'm curious about whether you have heard about foreigners taking any particular steps or being advised to take any particular steps in Turkey.

BOETTCHER: Not that I've heard, Jonathan.

As you said, I just arrived a few hours earlier and was working the investigation, who was involved in this, but, you know, having traveled to Istanbul many times, it's such a huge city, such a cosmopolitan city, I don't get the feeling that you're going to have people pick up and leave. Just knowing this place like I do, that's what my gut tells me -- Jonathan.

MANN: OK. CNN's Mike Boettcher, in Istanbul, thanks very much.

And just moments ago the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed a resolution condemning Thursday's attacks as well as the bombings of those two synagogues in Istanbul last week. The attacks came as British Prime Minister Tony Blair was meeting with the U.S. president in London.

Mr. Blair said the attacks would only strengthen their resolve in the war on terror.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TONY BLAIR, BRITISH PRIME MIN.: 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 wherever and whenever we can and in defeating it utterly.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MANN: British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

We're going to pursue that subject after the break. When we come back, we'll talk to a Turkish diplomat about what his government is going to do.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MANN: Istanbul has not been the only target for extremists out to punish Turkey in recent weeks. On October 14, a suicide bomber blew up his car outside the Turkish embassy in Baghdad. The blast killed the bomber and a

bystander and wounded at least 13 other people.

Welcome back.

Turkish security forces are now said to be on high alert. Turkish army troops appeared briefly on the streets of Istanbul, on a major highway, and standing guard beside police.

Joining us now to talk about the government's reaction and its plans is Faruk Logoglu, Turkish ambassador to the United States.

Thank you so much for being with us, Mr. Ambassador. Our condolences to you, to your government, and to the people you represent.

Let me ask you about what these two sets of attacks now mean. There were Turks involved, or believed to have been involved, in the attacks Saturday. That may have been the case in these latest attacks as well. How great a threat does your country face? And how great is the threat from among Turkish citizens themselves?

FARUK LOGOGLU, TURKISH AMB. TO U.S.: I think it would be useful to look at the basic reasons why Turkey was chosen as the target.

This is an organized attack. I think that much is clear. First, I think it was an attack on Turkish democracy and Turkish way of life as a secular nation. Secondly, I think Istanbul was selected because of its historic symbolism, where through the centuries and even today different religions and different cultures have come together, and this was, I think, an attack on the concept of civilizational coexistence and civilizational harmony.

And third, Turkey is a NATO member, is a candidate country for joining the European Union, has been the main source, the main venue of stability in the region, and I think the terrorists are trying to target Turkey's stability so that they can create greater chaos in the region.

MANN: Now al Qaeda has claimed responsibility, but so has another organization called the Great Eastern Raiders Front, a Turkish organization.

How much can you tell us about them?

LOGOGLU: At the moment, of course, both the first incident that took place last Saturday and yesterday's events are under investigation, and Turkish officials have made statements to the effect of possible al Qaeda connections.

As you said, one Turkish organization had earlier claimed responsibility for the Saturday attacks. I think it's too early to sort out the actual organizations responsible for this, but what we are facing is a concerted effort by terrorist organizations and very probably the international connections in Turkey at the present time.

MANN: Now Tayyip Erdogan promised strong measures to fight these organizations, but he didn't lay out exactly what the government would do. What steps will the Turkish government take?

LOGOGLU: As you pointed out earlier in your program, Turkey is not unfamiliar with terrorism. Unfortunately, we have had a lot of experience with terrorism over the years, and the current government has already declared that we will use both our experience and our current means and our civil society to overcome this.

Certainly in the (UNINTELLIGIBLE) they will be looking for the contributions of the international community. For years the United States was our lone ally in our fight against terrorism, but I believe the events in Istanbul are a second wakeup call to the international community that we must cooperate, we must stay together to fight terrorism.

MANN: Well, is that, in an unfortunately way, perhaps the cause of the problem here? The terrorists are clearly responsible for these terrible killings, but do you -- do you think other Turks are going to regret their close alliance with the United States and the fact that the United States, their ally, has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq?

LOGOGLU: Not at all. I don't think that's going to -- you're not going to hear much of that in Turkey.

Turkish people are aware of the fact that over the years our American friends gave us consistent support in the fight against terrorism. There may or may not be connections between these events in Istanbul and Afghanistan and Iraq, but for us, this is terrorism. Terrorism for Turkey has no religion, no etiology, no nationality, and this is what we are faced with and this is how the Turkish people are going to deal with this.

MANN: Faruk Logoglu, ambassador to the United States, thank you so much for talking with us.

LOGOGLU: Thank you.

MANN: We take a break once again and then a closer look at Turkey's long fight against terror.

Stay with us.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KOFI ANNAN, U.N. SECY.-GEN.: Those who carried out these attacks have no respect for human life and we should condemn utterly their actions.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MANN: A different day's tragedy. These are the images of an attack in February of 1999, blamed on the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK. Turkey has fought for decades against Kurdish rebels at a cost of some 30,000 lives. One month ago, the Kurdish militants announced they were ending their 5-year unilateral cease-fire.

Welcome back.

The terror attacks over the past week are shocking by their scale, but Turkey, as we've heard, has suffered so many attacks on innocent victims from groups on the left, on the right, groups fighting in the name of nationalism and in the name of religion.

Joining us now to talk about how Turkey has responded is Soner Cagaptay, a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Thank you so much for being with us.

SONER CAGAPTAY, WASHINGTON INST. FOR NEAR EAST POLICY: Good to be here.

MANN: I know that you are from Istanbul. The people of Istanbul, the people of Turkey, have suffered so many terrorist attacks. Is this just one more? Or is it different this time?

CAGAPTAY: Well, it is only another attack in some ways, but it's also different, because this could be the beginning of perhaps a series of attacks if indeed there is a pattern emerging, if indeed the attacks are, as we suspect, guided by al Qaeda. I think we're seeing a dangerous trend.

And, you know, you mentioned the fact that I am from Istanbul, and I think here it is important to mention that al Qaeda's targeting Istanbul is fairly symbolic and significant.

The attack on Turkey, from al Qaeda's perspective, is an ideological attack on what Turkey is. Turkey represents everything that al Qaeda is not. This is a secular, democratic country that's at peace with the Western nations, and Istanbul is its heart and pride. And so attacking the heart and pride of Turkey, al Qaeda is attacking what Turkey has and what it stands for.

MANN: Al Qaeda is in fact the latest enemy, if we can call it that, of what Turkey represents. But if you go back through the decades, you can go back through a whole list of organizations, I mean, and you can do this faster and

better than I can, but the PKK is only one of them. During the 70's and 80's, leftists and rightists were -- tell us more about that.

CAGAPTAY: You're right.

Well, there is a history of violence in this part of the world, and I think it was only encouraging to see that over the past few years, Turkey had become a very stable and peaceful country with the cessation of hostilities. With the PKK, the government had passed a huge bunch of reforms which had made the country more of a liberal democracy. So all of that was very encouraging.

So it is now discouraging to see al Qaeda start a new cycle of violence and that's why I think it's incumbent upon both Turkey as well as Turkey's friends, the United States and Europe, to collaborate in their efforts to fight al Qaeda through international networking, because we don't want Turkey as a destabilized country. We don't want Turkey in the path of violence, because Turkey in some ways, as I said earlier, represents a unique exception in the Muslim world. It's a country that is secular and democratic, and that's something that al Qaeda wants to eliminate.

MANN: Well, they certainly, one would presume, like most terrorist organizations, whoever did this wants to provoke a reaction. They want to provoke a strong response from the authorities that might even alienate the people of Turkey. In fact, internationally, that's the effect that the fight against the PKK had. The reaction from Turkish authorities alienated a lot of supporters of Turkey internationally.

What are the chances that that might happen again, that the liberal democracy that you just described is going to be endangered because of the reaction to this?

CAGAPTAY: I guess this time this is going to be (UNINTELLIGIBLE) of a shock because there is consensus across the board that terrorism, whatever is its cause, is something we should not tolerate, and now that we have seen the attacks of September 11 in the states, I think there will be a lot more sympathy to Turkey, having us having witnesses terrorism over here.

So I think when Turkey reaches out for allies in its war against international terrorism and against al Qaeda, it's going to find a lot of allies, and I don't see the country necessarily being alienated. I actually see the country having quite a few friends.

MANN: Forgive me for interrupting. What I'm getting at here, and maybe I'm expressing it wrong, is that there has historically been a tension over who is really going to control the country between civilian authorities and military authorities.

In a time of crisis, are military authorities now, do you think, going to take the upper hand?

CAGAPTAY: I think that's a long shot. I think it falls on Turkey's current government, Justice and Development Party, to prove that it is a party committed to democracy and secularism, and that involves fighting violence of all sorts against the political system, and I think here the challenge for the Justice and Development Party is to explain to the Turks that whether or not they like the idea, this is terrorism that hijacks their religion, Islam, and uses it in its own political machinations, and I think the Justice and Development Party has to explain to the people that just because there is a small minority of violent Muslims who are killing people does not mean that Islam is a terrorist religion.

And in this regard there's a task that forms on the government in Turkey as well as to moderate Muslims across the world and in Turkey, and it is to speak out against violence and it is also to speak out against al Qaeda's agenda so that they will prevent their religion from being hijacked by the violent agenda of al Qaeda and its affiliates.

MANN: Soner Cagaptay, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, thank you so much for talking with us.

That's INSIGHT for this day. I'm Jonathan Mann. The news continues. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

Terrorism (/policy-
analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Turkey (/policy-
analysis/turkey)