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Death in Istanbul

By Justin Raimondo
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If you think the assassination of the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, the same day terrorist attack in Berlin, and the announcement the next day of an agreement by Russia, Turkey, and Iran to end the Syrian civil war are all a monumental coincidence, then you haven't been paying attention.

Aside from the requisite "Allahu Akbar!", Mevlut Mert Altintas, the Russian Ambassador's killer – a police officer – shouted "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria!" That's what's being reported widely, but he also said, according to the *Daily Mail*, in Arabic:

"We are the descendants of those who supported the Prophet Muhammad for jihad.' According to local media, his words are similar to the unofficial anthem of Al Nusra. Some reports claimed he said words to the effect of: 'We made an oath to die in martyrdom ... it is revenge for Syria and Aleppo ... until they are safe, you will not taste safety.'"

Turkish strongman Recep Erdogan has had to walk a tightrope between the party's rural fundamentalist supporters and the realities of the Syrian civil war, as the combined might of the Russian-Syrian-Iranian forces has steadily made inroads on the Saudi- and US-supported Syrian rebels, which also include the al-Qaeda affiliated Nusra Front. With the fall of Aleppo, Erdogan's turn away from support to the rebels and his focus on defeating ISIS and the Kurds, proved problematic on the home front.

With ISIS and the Kurds making gains near the Turkish-Syrian border, Erdogan had no choice but to change course from his previous policy of unconditional support to the Syrian rebels. This

led to the necessity of having to forge a separate peace with Russia and Iran, a move that could not have pleased Islamists in his own ruling party. The *coup de grace* occurred right after the assassination, when the defense and foreign ministers of the three countries met. This statement by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu says it all:

"All previous attempts by the United States and its partners to agree on coordinated actions were doomed to failure. None of them wielded real influence over the situation on the ground. The approval of the declaration at the level of defense and foreign ministers implies our readiness to guarantee and jointly address concrete questions related to resolve (the crisis in) Syria."

While the official government line in Ankara is that the killing was the work of the "Gülenists" – a group routinely blamed for everything by the authorities, from the recent coup attempt to the downing of that Russian fighter earlier this year – the reality is that Altintas was no Gülenist. He was reportedly active in the youth section of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), and now there are reports that he was part of Erdogan's personal security team.

It looks like Erdogan has reaped what he has sown. In August, he told Tass that, since the Nusra Front was fighting ISIS, they "should not be considered a terrorist organization." As of this writing, no one has taken responsibility for the hit on the Ambassador, but it no doubt came from this milieu.

The Syrian catastrophe, and now the Islamist assault on Turkey, is yet another case of deadly "blowback." For years, the US and its Saudi and Gulf state allies have been funding "moderate" Islamists in an effort to overthrow the government of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, with Israel a silent partner in this regime change operation. Along with the Western media, which has bought into the myth of the Syrian opposition as a benevolent force, the Saudi propaganda machine has been working overtime to portray what is happening in the region as a "holocaust" perpetrated solely by Assad. This is simplistic nonsense of a sort our media is peculiarly susceptible to: they are always looking for Good Guys versus Bad Guys, Innocence versus Evil, in a world made up almost entirely of grays and shades of black. And of course the fact that our own intelligence services – notably the CIA – have been in bed with Syria's Islamists (all of them "moderates," to be sure!) may account for the favorable publicity they've been getting in the Western media.

Now that the jig is up in Syria, expect all of the terrorist factions – al Qaeda, Nusra Front, ISIS, etc. – to merge into one amorphous mass: they were never that separate to begin with. Also expect that the coming end of the "Caliphate" will result in more not less terrorist attacks in Western Europe and the United States: an animal fights harder and lashes out when cornered.

Terrorism won't disappear as long as two factors continue to be operative: 1) Western intervention in the Middle East, which fills the ranks of al Qaeda, ISIS, and the rest, and 2) State sponsorship of terrorist organizations continues unabated. And the biggest culprits aren't Iran, contra Fox News, but the Saudis, the Qataris, and the rest of the Gulf states – our so-called "allies." This is the head of the snake: until and unless it is beheaded, it will continue to strike.

A scheduling note: I'm taking a short Christmas break. My next column will appear next Wednesday (December 28). Until then, Merry Christmas to all!

