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Suicide bombing kills 51 at wedding in Turkey

By Alex Lantier

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Fifty-one people died and 69 were injured Saturday when a horrific suicide bombing hit a Kurdish wedding in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, near the border with Syria. At least 17 of the wounded are severely injured and clinging to life.

The pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) has confirmed that one of its members was getting married at the wedding. The wedding party was winding down and guests were beginning to leave when the suicide bomber, identified as a boy aged 12 to 14, detonated his explosive vest. "The celebrations were coming to an end and there was a big explosion," one of the guests said. "There was blood and body parts everywhere."

Many of the victims were children, apparently because they had gathered to one side of the folk dancing at the party, and were therefore closer to the blast.

The bride and groom, Besna and Nurettin Akdogan, were injured. "They turned our wedding into a blood bath," the bride told Turkey's Anadolu News Agency after being released from the hospital.

The couple had reportedly fled the town of Siirt to Gaziantep in order to escape fighting between the Turkish army and ethnic Kurdish militias in Turkey. The government offensive against Kurdish separatists escalated as Kurdish militias across the border in Syria began playing a larger role in the war in that country.

Yesterday, a mass funeral was held for victims of the bombing in Gaziantep, though authorities said further DNA testing will be needed to identify all of the victims, many of whom were blown apart.

Several international heads of state issued condemnations of the bombing. Russian President Vladimir Putin called it “shockingly cruel and cynical,” and French President François Hollande denounced it as an “infamous terrorist attack.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel sent a letter to Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım regretting that “Again, innocent men, women, and children have fallen victim to cowardly and treacherous violence.”

Notable for his silence on the bombing was US President Barack Obama, whose relations with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have collapsed since Erdoğan publicly attacked Washington for supporting last month’s failed military coup against him.

While as of this writing no one has claimed responsibility for the Gaziantep bombing, international media and several Turkish officials blamed the atrocity on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has reportedly recruited children to be used as suicide bombers.

“Initial evidence suggests it was an ISIS attack,” Erdoğan said while visiting Gaziantep after the bombing, which he called a “heinous” crime. Stating that the attackers aim to “provoke people by abusing ethnic and sectarian sensitivities,” he added, “Our country and nation have only a single message to those who attack us: you will not succeed.”

The atrocity in Gaziantep is the outcome of years of incitement of Islamist terror and ethnic bloodshed in the region by Washington and its imperialist allies in Europe as part of their proxy war for regime-change in Syria. Since 2011, the NATO powers and their Middle East allies have funneled billions of dollars and vast weapons shipments to Islamist and Kurdish nationalist militias fighting in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have died and over 10 million have fled their homes, unleashing the greatest global refugee crisis since World War II.

Erdoğan’s attempts to follow the twists and turns of imperialist policy have had devastating consequences for Turkey itself, particularly since Washington and its European allies began attacking ISIS in 2014 after it invaded Iraq and threatened to topple the US-backed puppet regime in Baghdad. ISIS had developed an extensive logistical network in Turkey and, starting last year, retaliated with a string of terror bombings inside Turkey.

These included the October 2015 attack in Ankara that killed 105 people and the March 2016 bombing on Istiqlal Avenue in Istanbul, both of which were planned by ISIS forces in Gaziantep.

The latest attack is retaliation for an even broader shift in the alignment of forces in the Syrian war that has intensified the conflict between the Erdoğan government and ISIS. Since last year’s

Russian military intervention tipped the scales of the war in favor of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the Turkish government has steadily shifted its policy. Having found itself isolated after it recklessly shot down a Russian bomber over Syria last fall, and facing the prospect of a defeat of US-backed forces in Syria, it reoriented its policy towards Moscow and the Assad regime.

This reorientation accelerated last month after Moscow warned Erdoğan of the coup being prepared against him by Turkish officers acting out of the Incirlik air base in Turkey, a critical staging ground for US and NATO air strikes on Syria and Iraq.

Both Washington and ISIS are furious at the developing ties between Turkey, Syria, Russia and now China, which pledged last week to begin expanding its aid to the Assad regime.

Shortly before the Gaziantep bombing on Saturday, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım made clear that his government is considering taking the unprecedented step of allowing Moscow to use Incirlik air base to bomb ISIS. The base has historically been used by Washington to further its designs against Moscow. Yıldırım's remarks confirmed rumors that have circulated since Igor Morozov, a member of the Russian upper house, called for Moscow to make an "agreement with Erdoğan that we get the NATO base at Incirlik as our primary air base."

At a press conference, Yıldırım said, "Turkey opened Incirlik airbase to fight ISIS terrorists. It is being used by the United States and Qatar. Other nations might also wish to use the airbase, which the Germans are also now using." Asked specifically if Moscow could also use Incirlik air base, Yıldırım replied, "If necessary, the Incirlik base can be used."

US officials are increasingly desperate over these shifts, which threaten to split Turkey from the NATO alliance and create a broad realignment of major powers in Eurasia against the United States. They are responding by escalating their reckless threats of military action against Russian and Syrian government forces, at the risk of provoking a global war.

Last week, after Assad's Air Force bombed Kurdish militia among whom were "embedded" US Special Forces operating extra-legally within Syria, Pentagon spokesmen warned that the US was prepared to attack anyone who threatened its troops, risking a direct clash with Russian, Iranian or Syrian forces.

On Saturday, the commander of US forces in Iraq and Syria, Lt. General Stephen Townsend, issued a more official threat to take military action against Syria and Russia. He told CNN, "We've informed the Russians where we're at... [They] tell us they've informed the Syrians, and I'd just say that we will defend ourselves if we feel threatened."

"If the Syrians try this again, they are at great risk of losing an aircraft," an anonymous senior US military official told CNN.

CNN commentators added that the situation "increases the probability of direct conflict" between US forces on the one hand, and Moscow and Damascus on the other.

