

Dozens killed in bomb attacks at Istanbul airport

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Dozens have been killed and nearly 150 people wounded after a series of bombs exploded at Istanbul's Atatürk International Airport. Overnight media reports from Turkey said the death toll has risen to 36, with Turkish officials predicting the final figure might be as high as 50.

The city's governor Vasip Şahin said that three suicide bombers were responsible for the carnage. The attackers reportedly opened fire with assault rifles before blowing themselves up. Police exchanged fire with the bombers and several police officers were among the dead and wounded.

The method and staging of the attack was similar to that carried out at the Brussels airport three months ago by gunmen claiming loyalty to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Turkish government officials strongly suggested that ISIS had arranged the attack, but no organization has yet claimed responsibility.

There were conflicting reports about which locations the attackers targeted, but they included the entrance to the international terminal, and the airport parking lot. Atatürk airport is the world's 11th largest and the third busiest in Europe, after London's Heathrow and Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris.

A video circulating on social media showed a police officer wounding an unidentified man, who then blew himself up only seconds later, as he lay on the ground. An NBC News reporter who witnessed the explosions said he saw a police officer wrestle a man to the ground, who then detonated himself. It was not clear whether these were the same incident or separate events.

All entries and exits to the airport were sealed off by the police, with access limited to emergency vehicles. Some incoming air traffic was diverted, and all outbound flights were canceled. US authorities halted

all flights between Istanbul and the United States, and issued instructions for special handling of the ten Turkish Airlines flights en route from Istanbul to various US destinations at the time of the bombings.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and Chief of Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar at the presidential complex to discuss the attack. Afterwards Yıldırım, Deputy PM Numan Kurtulmuş, Transportation Minister Ahmet Arslan and Family and Social Policies Minister Fatma Betül Sayan travelled to Istanbul.

This is the fifth terrorist attack in Turkey's largest city this year, but the first that Turkish authorities attributed unambiguously to ISIS. Earlier attacks had been blamed on a radical split-off from the Kurdish nationalist movement PKK, giving the Erdoğan regime a pretext for intensifying its military operations against the Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey.

The tourism industry, one of Turkey's main earners of foreign exchange, has been devastated by the previous attacks, with April showing the biggest drop in tourist arrivals in 17 years, according to official figures.

The attack came the day after the US State Department warned Americans against travel to southeastern Turkey, where there have been multiple terrorist attacks along with military conflicts between Turkish forces and the PKK.

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A US government official, who would not be quoted by name, told NBC News that that the Istanbul attack "fits the ISIS profile, not PKK ... This does not fit the PKK profile, they go after Turkish targets, not international targets."

Another US official told NBC that more such attacks

could be expected, saying, “Our long summer of discontent has just begun.”

There have been many indications over the past year of ties between ISIS and sections of the Turkish military. For instance, last November, *Newsweek* cited the comments of a former ISIS commander who claimed that the terror group operated massive truck convoys transporting oil into Turkey, with the “full cooperation” of the Turkish military.

Alongside the US, Turkey has provided extensive support to Islamist militias in Syria, in a bid to topple the Russian-aligned Assad regime. As with previous terror attacks, the Erdoğan regime will also use the latest tragedy as the pretext for a further crackdown on civil and political rights.

The attack will also be used by Washington to justify its predatory military operations in the Middle East. Both presidential candidates of the two main US parties, Hillary Clinton for the Democrats and Donald Trump for the Republicans, issued statements denouncing the terrorist attacks. Clinton pledged support for Turkey as a NATO ally, while Trump cited the attack as an argument to “take steps now to protect America from terrorists.”



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