# Islamic State claims New Year attack on Istanbul nightclub killing 39

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Yesterday, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia claimed responsibility for a bloody terror attack on Istanbul's Reina nightclub. Around 700 people were celebrating the New Year at the nightclub when, at 1:30 a.m. on January 1, an individual armed with an assault rifle shot unarmed security guards at the nightclub and entered the premises, shooting and killing 39 patrons, including 15 foreigners. Sixty-five others were wounded.

Police operations had been stepped up in Istanbul in the two weeks before the attack, after Turkey's National Intelligence Agency (M?T) received warnings that ISIS was preparing attacks on nightclubs or parties in Istanbul, the capital city of Ankara, or other major Turkish cities. A total of 147 ISIS suspects were detained, including at least 63 ISIS members, according to Interior Ministry sources. Eight ISIS members were detained in Ankara while planning an attack on New Year's Eve.

On New Year's Eve itself, amid a state of emergency in Turkey, some 25,000 police officers were on duty and patrolling the streets in Istanbul to guard against a possible terror attack. The US embassy warned of terror attacks on New Year's Eve and recommended that American citizens in Turkey not celebrate the New Year in crowded places.

Astonishingly, a lone gunman nevertheless was able to take a taxi to a location near the upscale nightclub, which is across the street from a police station. He then walked to the club, pulled an assault rifle from his bag, and launched an assault that killed or wounded over 100 people—largely Turks and tourists from other Muslim countries.

ISIS hailed the horrific attack in a statement it released, denouncing Turkey for allying with the United States and the European powers against it in the fighting in Iraq and Syria. It declared, "In continuation of the blessed operations that Islamic State is conducting against the protector of the cross, Turkey, a heroic soldier of the caliphate struck one of the most famous nightclubs where the Christians celebrate their apostate holiday."

"We let infidel Turkey know that the blood of Muslims that is being shed by its airstrikes and artillery shelling will turn into fire on its territories," the statement added.

Immediately after the attack, Turkey's Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) announced a gag order, submitting reporting of the attack to state censorship. A massive man-hunt is still underway across Turkey to locate the shooter and identify potential accomplices.

Anti-terrorism experts who looked at footage of the security cameras at the nightclub said that the shooter seemed well-trained and efficient in the use of his assault rifle and shot wounded victims in the head, execution-style. He cleaned his weapon and changed his clothes, spending 13 minutes in the nightclub's kitchen, and later escaped the scene by hailing a taxi. Police who examined the videos are working on the hypothesis that he is an ISIS fighter aged roughly 25, from the ex-Soviet republics of Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, or the Xinjiang region of western China.

The initial account of the attack that is emerging raises serious political issues, however. How was a lone gunman, who was carrying out a mass shooting near a police station amid a high alert and under a state of emergency, allowed to slaughter people undisturbed for over a quarter of an hour, and then to escape?

In the aftermath of the attack, rumors spread that police deployments to secure the area around the nightclub had been deliberately scaled back just before

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the attack—raising the issue of whether some section of the authorities had foreknowledge of the shooting.

Yesterday, the US Embassy in Ankara felt compelled to react to these rumors by issuing a statement denying any US foreknowledge that an ISIS attack would target the Reina nightclub. “Contrary to rumors circulating in social media, the US government had no information about threats to specific entertainment venues, including the Reina Club, and the US government did not warn Americans to stay away from specific venues or neighborhoods,” it said.

Turkish and international officials simply issued statements condemning the attack, however. Turkeys ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) promised to “end” terror, while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that the goal of the attack was to spread chaos. The opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) called for intensifying the security crackdown in Turkey and attacked recent Islamist statements by some AKP deputies denouncing New Year’s celebrations.

White House spokesman Eric Schultz said that US President Barack Obama “expressed condolences for the innocent lives lost, directed his team to offer appropriate assistance to the Turkish authorities, as necessary, and keep him updated as warranted.”

European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini condemned the attack from her Twitter account, writing: “2017 starts with an attack in Istanbul. Our thoughts are with victims and their loved ones. We continue to work to prevent these tragedies.”

In fact, this horrific shooting flows from the military intervention of the United States and the EU into the Middle East and Turkey and, in particular, the AKP government’s collaboration with the US-led proxy war in Syria. If ISIS has a large network of dozens or even hundreds of operatives inside Turkey, this is because the CIA and its European and Middle East allies used Turkey as a staging ground to arm and support Islamist opposition militias operating across the border in Syria.

The Turkish ruling elite’s decision to turn Turkey into a major staging post to arm opposition militias carrying out raids, terror bombings, and war crimes in Syria has not only had horrific consequences for the population of Syria. The devastation and depopulation of Syria also plunged Turkey into escalating bloodshed.

ISIS has repeatedly carried out terror attacks, and the Turkish army’s crackdown on the Kurdish population—fearing that Washington would strengthen Kurdish nationalists too much by arming Syrian Kurdish militias as proxies in Syria—plunged the country’s Kurdish areas into civil war.

ISIS was responsible for the bloodiest single attack in Turkey’s history, on October 10, 2015, killing at least 109 people and wounding more than 500 in a twin suicide bombings against a peace rally in Ankara. In 2016, the Islamic State carried out six terrorist attacks in Turkey, in which 127 people were killed and some 320 others wounded.

Split-offs from the Kurdish nationalist movement such as the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) also carried out several terror attacks, including bombings in December in Istanbul and Kayseri.

In this New Year’s attack, the specific grievance cited by ISIS was the Turkish government’s alliance with Russia and Iran to try to crush Islamist opposition militias like ISIS inside Syria. Last week, Turkey negotiated a ceasefire in Syria with Russian and Iranian officials covering much of Syria, but it has pressed on with bloody attacks on Al Bab aiming to seize ISIS’ capital in Syria, Raqqa. ISIS appears to have retaliated by organizing another terror attack on Turkish soil.

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