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# Turkey under attack

## Terrorists' message and Ankara's response

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY WAS RIGHT WHEN he argued: "While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him." Terrorist attacks always elicit the inevitable question: Why here, why now? Turkey is no exception. As Turks mourn the victims of the two horrendous attacks that shook Istanbul last week, they are also trying to come to terms with the tragedy that has befallen their country.

Sadly, Turkey may now become one of the front-line states in the war against terrorism. Since September 11 the stepped-up security and intelligence measures in the US has diverted the wrath of terrorists to softer targets. Indonesia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and now Turkey are such targets. But make no mistake: the United States will surely remain number one on the terrorists' list. In fact, the concurrence of terrorist attacks with President George Bush's visit to the UK and the choice of British targets send a strong symbolic message about who the terrorists really consider their enemy. Targeting synagogues in Turkey is part of the same logic in terms of sending a message to Israel.

Yet, there is a new message in this most recent wave of terrorist attacks. Starting with the Italians in Iraq and continuing with Jewish and British symbols on Turkish soil, the attacks have repeatedly targeted the close allies of the United States. Put simply, the message to these countries seems to be "your cooperation with America will not go unpunished".

The terrorists' reasoning is simple. The UK is America's staunchest ally in Europe. Turkey has a similar image in the Islamic world in terms of its pro-American credentials. Yes, Turkish-American relations were strained because of Iraq. But thanks to Turkey's recent turnaround and offer to send as many as 10,000 Turkish troops to help Americans stabilise the country — an offer that has been shelved only because the Iraqis opposed it — US-Turkish relations are back on track.

Given the recent improvement in Turkish-American relations, the timing of the attacks could not have been more unpropitious. The terrorists knew perfectly well when to strike. I realised this when I called a relative in Istanbul right after the attacks to check if everyone was all right. After a brief exchange his voice saddened as he pointed out that this is the price Turkey is paying for siding with the United States. I am afraid that the 60 to 70 per cent of Turks who are opposed to any kind of Turkish-American cooperation in Iraq may come to the same conclusion.

The same sad logic may also apply to the terrorist attacks against synagogues. Turkey is the only Muslim country in the

OP-ED



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world that has strong military ties with Israel. The terrorists targeted Jews but ended up killing more Muslims. They may now be tempted to think that with a few more such attacks they can force Turkish society to rethink their country's alliance with Israel.

The bottom line is that its excellent relations with the United States and Israel make Turkey a perfect target for jihadi terrorists. Being the most secular, democratic and pro-western country in the Islamic world is another misfortune of Turkey that is worthy of punishment in the eyes of Islamist radicals! We can be sure that most Turks will see what happened along these lines. Yet, the difference will be between those who will make such observations without any major complaints and others who will turn them into arguments in favour of changing Turkey's domestic and foreign policy orientation. My humble opinion is that those who think that such attacks will alter the pro-Western and secular nature of the Turkish state know very little about the country.

One major reason why the Turkish state would not even consider changing its pro-Western orientation and course is because it is used to terrorism and has a high threshold of pain. The Kurdish insurgency in the Southeast cost 30,000 lives in the 1990s and the Turkish government started to reform its Kurdish policy only after a clear victory against Kurdish guerrillas. Ankara does not like to negotiate from a position of weakness. No change should therefore be expected in Turkish foreign policy at a time when the country is attacked.

On the domestic front, a major reason why the terrorist attacks would only strengthen the Turkish resolve to fight terrorism is because of the political colour of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The last thing this moderately pro-Islamic government wants is to appear soft against Islamist terrorism. Such a perception would give the Turkish secular establishment and the Turkish military the excuse they need to jump on the AKP and start a campaign to force it out of power.

Once the dust settles down and the shock of terrorist attacks is painfully absorbed, the AKP should make it clear that the terrorists' strategy would boomerang in their face. This would mean an even stronger partnership between the United States and Turkey; a Turkish Republic committed to good relations with both Israel and the Arab world; and most importantly, a unique country that will continue to challenge the clash of civilisations with its democratic, secular, Muslim and pro-Western character.

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## The 'challenge' of Turkey

OP-ED



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*Economically, politically, institutionally, Turkey needs the 'anchor' of the European integration process. Europe and Turkey together must prove to themselves, and to the world, that Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' is not unavoidable*

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON DID ALERT US to the danger. In his now famous thesis on the 'Clash of Civilisations' he gave Turkey as an example of a 'torn country', one divided internally, according to him, between East and West, a country neither in Europe nor in the Middle East, with a fault line running within rather than at the border.

The recent bombings in Istanbul underscore, once again, the importance of Turkey's overcoming Huntington's fault line to emerge firmly as a prosperous, secular and stable democracy. If Turkey succeeds, it will show that there is nothing inevitable about the 21<sup>st</sup> century becoming one of a 'Clash of Civilisations', during which the Cold War's divisions are replaced by new religious antagonisms that resemble the Middle Ages. The concept of borders itself must be rethought in today's world: borders that run in minds and on the internet are as important as lines that divide geographical space.

Turkey's success in moving forward as a modern democracy will depend, of course, on many factors, most of them internal to Turkey and having to do with domestic leadership and decisions that political and economic actors will make in Turkey. But the terrorists who struck with such deadliness understand the global, not just regional, nature of the struggle for Turkey's soul.

External factors will be critical in determining where Turkey ends up. Indeed, the single most important factor, which will have a decisive impact on developments to come and could set the stage for a remarkable success story, or, on the contrary, lead to failure, is the European Union's forthcoming decision on whether or not to start negotiations towards Turkey's full EU membership in 2005.

In December of 2002, EU leaders committed the Union to start negotiations with Turkey on full membership, provided Turkey fulfilled the relevant criteria common to all candidate countries. A December 2004 summit, to take place under a Dutch chairmanship, is to see the EU review Turkey's progress and decide, provided the criteria are met, on whether to start negotiations 'without delay'.

Economically, politically, institutionally,

Turkey needs the 'anchor' of the European integration process. Europe and Turkey together must prove to themselves, and to the world, that Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' is not unavoidable; that Christians, Jews, Moslems, and other believers and non-believers can build the 'European Project' together; that a society with a large majority of Moslems, can be democratic and secular; and that Turks and Greeks can do what the French and Germans have done: overcome a century-long antagonism to build a 'good neighbourhood'.

The 'borders' between East and West that Atatürk largely abolished in Turkey must not

be allowed to form again in the minds of new generation. The situation here is not unlike that which the EU faced in Eastern Europe, a region which also needed an 'anchor' after the fall of communism. The EU provided that anchor almost without hesitation and the result has been spectacular.

Countries with command economies and scant experience of democracy are about to become full members of the Union, after a decade of rapid transformation. The anchor was there from the beginning. Europe was decisive and generous, and it worked.

In 1990, Turkey had a more advanced market economy and a much greater experience with democracy than the Eastern European countries about to join the EU. But, in the case of Turkey, Europe has long been reluctant to provide the same sort of incentives and hopes. This has hurt Turkey's progress. But when Europe did move more decisively, as it did at the Copenhagen summit in 2002, economic and political progress in Turkey accelerated in a very tangible way.

Turkey must, of course, fulfil the conditions common to all candidate countries, measured in a fair and reasonable manner. But if it does fulfil these conditions, further hesitation by Europe will undermine all those who want to bring Turkey's democratic transition to a successful conclusion.

No doubt the challenge for Europe of integrating a large Turkey, bordering on the Middle East, is great. The rewards of success, however, would be immense — for Turkey, for Europe, and for the world. Few moments in history hold the promise of the EU summit of December 2004.

A year remains before us. Turkey must work hard to get ready. The United States must think long-term and gently support the process, instead of toying with the misconceived notion of Turkey as part of a new 'greater Middle East'. Most importantly, European statesmen, who know in their hearts what is required, must show the courage and the wisdom to lead. — DT-PS

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