



MASSACRE IN ANKARA: A FIRM HAND OR AN APPEAL FOR RESTRAINT?

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This evening, 19 December 2016, while opening a photo exhibition devoted to Russia's cordial relations with Turkey, the Russian Ambassador to Ankara Andrei Karlov was shot dead with a pistol by a man at the event wearing a suit. Two other people were also shot and injured. At the time of writing it is not known who the assassin was, but the most likely source of speculation that has arisen in the media is the following.

According to both Russian and Turkish sources, it appears that the murderer was likely a current or former Police Officer (possibly dismissed as a result of the July 2016 Turkish coup attempt), pretending to act as a security official. In any event, it is manifest that the assassin was acting pursuant to some sort of political grievance and was undoubtedly a terrorist. The murderer was videoed shouting about Russia's allegedly improper involvement in the Syrian civil war in the aftermath of the bloodbath he had orchestrated. This was a cynical irony at best, given that Mr Karlov had engaged in negotiation of the travel of the Turkish Foreign Minister to Moscow the very next day to participate in peace negotiations finally to bring the Syrian Civil War to an end.

Mr Karlov was a man of the highest stature and was held in universal regard. A graduate of the Moscow Institute of International Relations in 1976, he held amongst other positions Russian Ambassador to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Head of the Consular Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as Russian Ambassador to Ankara from 2013, well known as an admirer of all matters Turkish and a foremost proponent of Turkish culture. He leaves bereaved a widow and a son.

One of Russia's most capable and long-serving diplomats in some of the most formidable roles, his death comes not just as a tragedy to his family but also to the nation he served and the country to which he was so eminent an envoy even amidst troubled times. Mr Karlov achieved the most extraordinary results in defusing confrontations between Russia and Turkey that arose in late 2015, and his memory and epitaph must surely be devoted to the successes of this, one of his most exceptional and successful of missions.

At the current time, it is not clear whether the gunman that murdered Mr Karlov had any or no political allegiance; what his motives were; whether he acted alone; or how he came to perpetrate this atrocity. All we can say is that Mr Karlov was a victim of a terrible crime, the purpose of which appears to have been to derail peace negotiations relating to Syria. Turkey has expressed outrage and deep regret, and has pledged a full and thorough investigation. Russia's view is that ISIL is to blame. That may well be right, but until the independent investigation is complete we will not know for sure.

Whatever the reason for this atrocity, Mr Karlov was not properly a victim of foreign civil conflict. He was a diplomat, devoted to maintaining the peace and using the tools of negotiation

and communication to avoid death and war. His intentions were palpably benign. That one or more persons, whatever their reasons, might seek to circumvent his noble mission through orchestration of his murder, in order to perpetuate the continuation of the cruelest of conflicts in the Middle East, is not only depressing but an affront to the conscience of us all.

This view is universally held, and this is one of relatively few events in geopolitical relations that unites all sides in common horror and determination irrespective of political ideology. The Turkish President immediately called the President of the Russian Federation to convey his regrets and outrage. The US State Department issued a prompt statement condemning this act of violence and expressing sympathy with Mr Karlov's family. The British Foreign Secretary described the murder as despicable and cowardly. The French President condemned his murder in the strongest terms. Germany confirmed that it stands shoulder to shoulder in the fight against terrorism.

The most important thing now is to understand that whoever the attacker was, their motive was unclean and it must not deter civilised nations from making peace within a benighted country where so many have already died. Both Russia and Turkey have confirmed that tomorrow's negotiations will go ahead notwithstanding the atrocity of this evening. These events are an outrage of the cruelest kind. But if there is one glimmer of hope notwithstanding this hour of darkness, it is that this act of terror will draw all parties together with a determination to eliminate terrorists, extremists and those committed to violence as a solution to political disputes. This determination must be pursued without compromise. Those responsible for this outrage must be held to account, and politically inspired terrorism must be eliminated unrelentingly.

In light of these horrific events, I see an opportunity for the international community now to be united over the Syrian conflict as never before. Let us pray that this proves to be case. I believe that it will. We all grieve with the family of Mr Karlov, and we pray for them at this darkest of times.

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