

Turkey: public prosecutor accuses general of involvement in terrorist attacks

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A bomb attack carried out last November in the southeastern Anatolian city of Semdinli has provoked sharp conflicts within the Turkish ruling elite. The controversy centers on charges related to the attack brought by a public prosecutor from the city of Van against Yasar Büyükanit, the head of Turkish ground forces.

But the background to the dispute is the foreign policy orientation of Turkey, which is faced, on the one side, with growing opposition to its attempt to join the European Union and, on the other, the destabilization of the Middle East resulting from the US war in Iraq and Washington's threats to intervene in Iran.

At the beginning of November, a hand grenade was tossed into a book shop in Semdinli. Witnesses said they had seen the culprit. The man jumped out of a car in broad daylight, threw the grenade, and returned to the car. The vehicle with the bomb-thrower and two others was surrounded by passers-by, who pulled the three from the car. One person was killed and several injured in the blast.

In the trunk of the car were Kalashnikov machine guns with eleven magazines, two hand grenades of the type used by the Turkish army, identity documents, including one for the JITEM (secret service), bearing the name Ali Kaya, and a vacation pass issued by the Turkish military.

The obvious involvement of secret service agents in a terrorist attack attracted national attention and led to violent protests, in which at least another four people were killed by police.

According to press reports, 32-year-old Kaya is an important "specialist" for the Turkish army in the country's occupied Kurdish territories. He speaks fluent Kurdish, knows the region well and is said to have had many years of experience in secret missions against alleged or actual supporters of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). The commander-in-chief of the land forces, Yasar Büyükanit, praised Kaya as a "very valuable soldier" whom he knew personally.

Subsequently, charges were brought against Büyükanit. In his indictment against the terror bombers, public prosecutor

Ferhat Sarikaya Van accused the general of seeking to influence the judiciary (a criminal offence in Turkey) and forming a criminal gang aimed at preventing Turkish entry into the European Union. The idea was allegedly to carry out attacks that would provoke conflicts in southeast Turkey, leading to a nationalist backlash which would, in turn, intensify opposition in Western Europe to Turkish membership in the European Union.

The indictment states that the bomb attack in Semdinli was linked to similar assassination attempts in the same province of Hakkari, and that the three culprits could not have acted without the knowledge of their regional commanders, a lieutenant general, a major general and a colonel. According to Turkish law, Büyükanit and the three other officers cannot be charged by the public prosecutor. He therefore sent the indictment to the military public prosecutor, who can take up the case only with the agreement of the chief of staff.

This is unlikely to happen. The chief of the general staff, Hilmi Özkök, has made no public comment, but he did meet with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan, President Necdet Sezer and the army leadership after the indictment was issued.

On March 13, at a ceremony to mark the 107th anniversary of the entry in the Turkish War Academy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, both Özkök and Sezer hinted at their support for Büyükanit. According to the *Turkish Daily News*, Özkök said, "Büyükanit is even stronger now." He said his only disagreement with Büyükanit was whether to support Besiktas or Fenerbahçe (two popular soccer clubs in Istanbul).

"I count myself a member of the War Academy because I passed my military service there," Sezer said, to which Özkök replied: "Then we may say there are six, not five, presidents who came out of the academy, sir." The message was unmistakable: The chief of staff agrees with his accused land forces commander and successor, while the president considers himself a member of the army.

The Interior Ministry has already rejected a request by the public prosecutor's office in the city of Hakkari for an

investigation into the governor of the province, the head of the gendarmerie and the local administrator in Semdinli. Justice Minister Cemil Cicek has also ordered an investigation—against public prosecutor Sarikaya from Van, on charges of abusing his office.

Cicek, who is regarded as a nationalist hard-liner in the government of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), also criticized the parliamentary committee of inquiry which is looking into the events at Semdinli. It is alleged that Sarikaya received information from the parliamentary committee of inquiry that he used in his indictment.

The largest opposition party, the Republican Peoples Party (CHP), even spoke of a “coup against the military” and received support from the nationalist media. They insinuated that the AKP was backing a deliberate campaign to prevent Büyükanit from taking over the post of head of the general staff, planned for August. The acting general, Özkök, is regarded as relatively moderate and intent on reconciliation with the AKP and its pro-European Union course, while Büyükanit is regarded as a hawk.

Prime Minister Erdogan called the army “one of the most important institutions of our country,” and opposed “attempts by the media to pit the government and military against one another.” At the same time, he explained that nobody had the right to claim on the basis of the indictment that what was involved was a coup against the military. Those maintaining such a position, such as opposition leader Deniz Baykal (CHP), did not understand the characteristics of a democratic state, he said.

Erdogan wants to avoid an open confrontation with the military. His policies of market reforms for Turkey and closer relations with the European Union have won the sympathy of the international banks and big business, resulting in rapid economic growth over the last three years, with a low rate of inflation.

This has done little, however, to improve the situation for the majority of the population—poor peasants and the poorest inhabitants of the big cities—although it was these layers which voted for the AKP on the basis of the latter’s promises of social justice and new moral values in politics. Social tensions were starkly revealed when Erdogan insulted vulgarly a peasant who had expressed his discontent. In addition, he and his finance minister, Kemal Unakitan, have been hit with charges of corruption.

To the obvious displeasure of nationalists in political and army circles, Erdogan made certain, if somewhat symbolic, concessions to the Kurds. Short Kurdish transmissions are now permitted on state television, and private stations are allowed to transmit a few hours of Kurdish programs every week.

In order to reach a settlement of the Kurdish conflict, sections within the state apparatus propose further steps. According to the newspaper *Milliyet*, Sabri Uzun, the head of the secret service department of the central police authority, referred in the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the events at Semdinli to discussions between British authorities and the Irish Republican Army. These had led to an armistice and the possibility of the IRA being disarmed, he said.

The wider background to the dispute is the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, which have destabilized the whole region. Faced with widespread Iraqi resistance, the US occupiers have been forced to rely heavily on the Kurdish nationalists in the predominantly Kurdish north of Iraq, which borders Turkey. The region now enjoys extensive autonomy as Iraqi Kurdistan. The Turkish-Kurdish nationalist organization PKK maintains its main base in this region and sends its fighters to intervene in Turkey.

Erdogan wants to avoid any state crisis and has the support of liberal and pro-Islamic newspapers, which see both public prosecutor Sarikaya and opposition leader Baykal as equal threats to the stability of the country. For their part, nationalist forces are increasing their activities in a more aggressive and self-confident manner, knowing that they can exploit increasing opposition inside the European Union to Turkish entry. They also reckon that intensified US war preparations against Iran will increase the market value of Turkey and its military for American imperialism.

As we warned in an article in November 2005: “There is evidently an extreme right-wing faction active in the Turkish state apparatus, which is no longer prepared to accept the official policy of halfhearted liberalization and symbolic concessions to the Kurds in order to cuddle up to the EU. These forces, which are intent on using the gangster methods of dirty war, cannot be stopped by the establishment of which they are an integral part. Genuine democracy and a resolution of the Kurdish question cannot be expected from the US or European Union. What is called for is a common offensive of the Turkish and Kurdish working population on the basis of an international socialist perspective.”



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