

US-backed Turkish government threatens violent crackdown

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The US-backed Turkish government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is threatening a massive police crackdown on anti-government protests which have spread over Turkey in the past two weeks.

Speaking to local leaders of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the Turkish capital Ankara on Thursday, Erdogan declared: “We have arrived at the end of our patience. I am giving you my final warning. We have not responded to punches with punches. From now on security forces will respond differently.”

Erdogan issued an ultimatum to protesters, threatening that “this will be over in 24 hours.” He declared that “this square belongs to the people of Istanbul, the people of the whole country, and to all international visitors. So we cannot allow lawbreakers to hang around freely in this square.”

He added, “We will clean the square. I have given orders to the interior minister.”

Erdogan’s threats came after a meeting with a group of opposition activists on Wednesday and proposals by his government to hold a public referendum to decide the fate of the contested Gezi Park in Taksim Square, the epicenter of the protests. Police attacks on demonstrators protesting government plans to bulldoze the park and replace it with a shopping mall ignited nationwide mass protests which the Turkish government is now desperate to shut down.

Already on Tuesday, riot police had launched a brutal police attack on the iconic Taksim Square in Istanbul, the main center of the protests. Since the beginning of the unrest, which has spread from Gezi Park in Taksim Square to 78 cities across the country including the capital Ankara, the Erdogan government has sought to drown the protests in blood.

Police have repeatedly attacked protesters on Taksim

Square and in other cities firing water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets. Since the first attack on May 31, six protesters have been killed, more than 5,000 have been injured and over 3,300 detained by the police.

On Thursday Ether Sarisuluk, 26, who had been on life support for 12 days, was pronounced dead. Reportedly he was injured in a crackdown by riot police when a tear gas canister hit his head during protests in Ankara.

The human rights organization Amnesty International criticized the Turkish authorities for excessive violence against protesters. “Never has there been a time when police violence was this widespread and this sustained. It is unprecedented,” Andrew Gardner, the group’s researcher on Turkey, told the British newspaper *The Independent*.

“Police have been using tear gas as a punitive measure, rather than for crowd dispersal as it is intended. There have been cases where police are firing directly at protesters, causing serious head injuries. They are also firing tear gas into buildings, which can be very dangerous,” Gardner said.

Erdogan’s plans to step up the violence against protesters are backed by Turkey’s allies in Washington and in the capitals of the European powers.

The Obama administration tacitly approved Erdogan’s massive crackdown on Tuesday, making no official comment. It also did not comment on Erdogan’s latest threats.

A group of European Union ambassadors reassured the Erdogan government during a meeting in Ankara. “The EU position was clearly stated by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, who said that the negotiations with Turkey will continue. Because Turkey needs the EU now more than ever,” one ambassador said.

He also stressed that the incumbent Turkish government is legitimate, as it has been elected by the people.

Commenting on whether the anti-government demonstrations can have an impact on the relations between the EU and Turkey, the EU ambassadors unanimously said “the suspension of the negotiations is certainly not in question.”

A resolution passed by the European parliament on Thursday praised what it called “moderate response” of Turkish President Abdullah Gül to the protests. At the same time, the resolution hypocritically criticized “the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Turkish police to break up peaceful and legitimate protests” urging the Turkish authorities to respect the rights of its citizens.

The support for Erdogan’s looming crackdown by Washington and the EU reflects imperialism’s strategic partnership with Turkey. Both Europe and the United States have substantial business interests in Turkey and want to prevent further protests and strikes by any means.

Above all, however, the imperialist powers regard the ongoing mass protests in Turkey as a threat to their plans to step up their war preparations against Syria.

Turkey is one of imperialism’s key allies in the ongoing war against Syria aimed at deposing Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and preparing for war against Iran. The pro-Western Sunni Islamist opposition forces in Syria are largely armed and supplied via Turkey, where the CIA is operating a command-and-control center in Adana. NATO has installed Patriot surface-to-air missile systems near the Syrian border, which are regarded as a prerequisite to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria.

The day after Erdogan’s threats the United States stepped up their propaganda to prepare for direct military intervention in Syria. The Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications for US President Barack Obama, Ben Rhodes, claimed in a written statement that “the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year.”

The claims by the US government are completely unsubstantiated and serve – as the lies about weapons of mass destructions (WMD) in Iraq ten years ago –

merely as a pretext to prepare for another neo-colonial war in the Middle East.

Washington’s intensifying war preparations against Syria will only drive it towards closer support for the Erdogan government, which has emerged as a key ally in the US-led war against Syria. The only force that can fight the imminent danger of a violent crackdown in Turkey and a wider imperialist war in the Middle East is the working class. The fight against Erdogan can develop only as an independent revolutionary struggle of the working class based on a socialist perspective.

Such a struggle must be directed against the middle class protest groups that have dominated the protests so far. As Erdogan’s deadline ran out, members of the Taksim Solidarity Group—a leading protest platform of 80 organizations and parties—met with the prime minister for emergency discussions early Friday after thousands of defiant protesters refused to leave Taksim Square.



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