

Turkey put on a war footing

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President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has mobilised the military and police in a country-wide operation targeting both the Kurdish nationalist movement led by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the "left" and anti-war opposition in general, arresting more than 1,300 people on terror charges.

At the same time, Erdoğan has called for legislators with ties to the PKK to have their immunity stripped. This is aimed at closing down the HDP, the new pro-Kurdish Party which won 13 percent of the vote in the last election, depriving Erdoğan's ruling AKP of its majority.

In essence, the president has served notice that the country is at war, not just with Syria but also its own Kurdish people, and that no opposition will be tolerated.

The crackdown follows Turkey's decision to join the US-led intervention, ostensibly against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to topple the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Ankara has allowed the US to use its Incirlik airbase to conduct operations against ISIS in return for Washington's agreement on the establishment of a "safe zone" in northwestern Syria for "moderate Syrian opposition forces"—backed up by Turkish and American airpower.

While Turkey has carried out airstrikes against Islamic State positions in Syria, its real targets are PKK positions in northern Iraq and those of the PKK's allies, the PYD/YPG in Syria, which has carved out an autonomous zone in northern Syria along the border with Turkey. The PKK waged a separatist armed struggle against Turkey for more than 30 years that led to around 40,000 casualties, and is now one of the main combatants against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Turkey has reportedly launched three major airstrikes against PKK targets, with the last one yesterday involving 30 F-16 jets. Already, before the last air

strike, 190 PKK members had been killed and 300 wounded, according to Turkish officials.

Turkey's objective in establishing a "safe zone" is an attempt to prevent the Kurdish separatists from occupying a contiguous area alongside the Syrian-Turkish border, fearing that it will become an autonomous Kurdish territory that could spread into predominantly Kurdish areas of Turkey as well. It signifies that all attempts to reach a deal with Turkey's own Kurds have ended. The much vaunted "peace process" is dead, despite the nostrums of the political establishment.

Selahattin Demirtaş, co-chairman of the HDP, denounced the proposal for a "safe zone" as a ploy. "Turkey doesn't intend to target IS with this safe zone," he said. "The Turkish government was seriously disturbed by Kurds trying to create an autonomous state in Syria."

Ankara's increased involvement in the Syrian quagmire also comes amid heightened political and economic tensions within Turkey, with acting Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu trying to form a new coalition government.

The crackdown followed the suicide bombing of July 20 in the predominantly Kurdish south-eastern town of Suruç, which killed 31 activists, and injured hundreds more, who had planned to travel to the Syrian city of Kobane and assist in its reconstruction. According to a report in the Syrian news agency SANA, Demirtaş told as HDP meeting that the terrorist attack, which the AKP government attributed to ISIS, was actually the work of government agents bent on providing a pretext for military action.

The PKK accused the government of doing nothing to prevent the bombing or protect the people, and launched an offensive against the police and security forces, killing 15 people, burning cars and service vehicles, and blasting roads.

Prime Minister Davuto?lu said on July 28, “Turkey’s operations will, if needed, continue until the terrorist organizations’ command centers, all locations where they plan against Turkey and all depots used to store arms to be used against Turkey are destroyed.”

The raids and detentions have been accompanied by self-censorship in the Turkish media. After a meeting between Davuto?lu and the editors, the mainstream media whipped up an atmosphere of panic and intimidation to justify the escalation of the war against Syria and distract attention from widespread economic and social hardship.

An extraordinary session of parliament on July 29 was convened by the Republican People’s Party (CHP) to discuss forming a parliamentary commission to investigate the terrorist acts following the suicide bombing in Suruç. It highlighted yet again that the political elite is more concerned with the domestic opposition and Kurdish nationalism than the war against ISIS.

While the CHP proposal was rejected, legislators from the three opposition parties—the CHP, the fascistic MHP and pro-Kurdish HDP—blamed the government for escalating tensions, with HDP leader Demirta? calling for the government to resume talks with the PKK. Government spokesperson B?lent Ar?nç dismissed claims that the government had abandoned the so-called peace process.

The extraordinary session of Parliament came in the wake of a political assault on the HDP. According to the daily *H?rriyet*, on Wednesday July 29, the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office in the city of Diyarbak?r launched a criminal probe into Demirta? over his support for the Kobane protests against the government’s support for ISIS last October that resulted in the death of 35 people, including two police officers. Demirta? could face 24 years in jail if the prosecutors decide that he has a case to answer and his parliamentary immunity is lifted.

The Chief Prosecutor’s action followed Erdo?an’s call on Tuesday July 28, prior his visit to China, that “politicians linked with terrorist groups” should be stripped of their immunity.

Erdo?an said, “Those who exploit the people and the state’s tolerance and patience will receive the answer they deserve as soon as possible. Any step back is out of the question. This is a process and this process will

continue with the same determination.”

Earlier, Devlet Bah?eli, leader of the MHP, which is opposed to any concessions to Turkey’s Kurds, had written to demand the Supreme Court’s Chief Prosecutor’s Office investigate the HDP deputies.

Prior to these calls, Davuto?lu, leading a government delegation, had briefed the CHP and MHP leaders—but not the HDP leaders—on recent “anti-terror” operations, denoting the AKP government’s exclusion of the HDP from the state’s security business.

While the main opposition CHP, which has been in discussion over a possible coalition with the AKP, was silent on the issue, HDP leader Demirta? said that his party faced punishment simply for its electoral success. He called for the party to throw down the gauntlet, rather than disowning the PKK under conditions of a de facto war.

He told his parliamentary group on July 28, “Do you say immunity? Tomorrow, we will file a petition to the parliament... in order to strip us of our immunity from prosecution.” The following day, all 80 HDP deputies formally requested their immunity be revoked.

Thursday saw the opposition CHP also renounce their immunity following a move by prosecutors to strip nine deputies from the CHP, HDP and AKP of their legislative immunity.

HDP MP Pervin Buldan told reporters, “Let’s lift the immunities of all 550 deputies,” and “Let everyone be held accountable for their deeds.”

This is not the first time that Kurdish parties have faced politically motivated criminal charges. Indeed many MPs have faced years in prison. The present move to illegalise the HDP highlights the repudiation of the most basic norms of bourgeois democracy by the AKP government, under conditions where the overwhelming majority of the people are opposed to Ankara’s involvement in the wars in Syria and Iraq, and against the Kurds in Turkey.



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