

# Turkish government steps up repression of political opponents

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Turkey has been rocked by a series of suicide bomb attacks in Istanbul and the southeast of the country that have killed at least eight people.

In Istanbul, two women from the outlawed Revolutionary People's Liberation Army Front (DHKP-C) reportedly linked with the government in Syria, attacked the US consulate, calling it the "chief enemy of people in the Middle East and in the world." One of the assailants was wounded and detained, but the other escaped.

The DHKP-C previously claimed responsibility for a 2013 suicide attack on the US embassy in Turkey's capital Ankara. It threatened further action, declaring, "Our struggle will continue until imperialism and its collaborators leave our country and every parcel of our homeland is cleared of US bases."

In a separate incident, three police officers and seven civilians were injured in a car bomb attack on a police station in the Sultanbeyli area of Istanbul. Two of the suspects and a police bomb disposal expert were killed in subsequent clashes.

In the southeastern province of Sirnak, four police officers were also killed in a roadside bomb and at least one soldier was killed and seven injured after Kurdish gunmen fired on a military helicopter.

Turkey is becoming engulfed in an all-out civil war between the government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which waged a separatist armed struggle for more than 30 years resulting in some 40,000 casualties. The PKK has resumed its bombing attacks on the security forces, killing around 30 military, intelligence and police personnel in almost daily attacks over the last three weeks.

The PKK action has ended a two-year-old ceasefire, playing into the hands of Turkey's President, Recep Tayip Erdogan and the interim Justice and

Development Party (AKP) government, which agreed last month to join the US and its Gulf allies in their attempt to overthrow the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. Washington launched the offensive under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), its former ally, which has seized vast swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, cutting across US interests in the region.

After months of equivocation, Ankara finally allowed the US to use its Incirlik airbase in southeastern Turkey to bomb ISIS positions. In return, Washington agreed to the establishment of a "safe zone" in northwestern Syria for "moderate Syrian opposition forces," backed up by Turkish and American air power. This is a flagrant violation of Syria's territorial integrity and constitutes an act of war that is almost certain to widen the conflagration.

It also gave the nod to Ankara's real target, the PKK in northern Iraq and its allies, the PYD/YPG in Syria, which have carved out autonomous areas along the border with Turkey. Turkey's purpose in establishing a "safe zone" is to prevent the formation of a contiguous Kurdish controlled area along the border that could lead to an autonomous Kurdish territory in Turkey as well.

Washington gave its agreement despite the fact that the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, the PYD/YPG and the PKK have been the most effective fighting forces against ISIS. But this evidently was a price worth paying to have Turkey on board.

Ankara joined the US-led coalition following the July 20 suicide bombing in the predominantly Kurdish border town of Suruç, which killed 31 activists, and injured many more people, who had planned to travel to the Syrian city of Kobane and assist in its reconstruction. While the government attributed the

bombing to ISIS, the Kurds accused the government of organising a false flag operation to provide the pretext for military action in Syria. The PKK accused the government of doing nothing to prevent the bombing or protect the people.

Ankara's broader political objective is to open up the Incirlik airbase to other air forces from France, Britain, Belgium and Canada, and thus get NATO rather than just US backing for its war drive against Syria. At the same time, Washington is pressing for Turkey to open up Malatya and Diyarbakir air bases to operational flights.

Turkish forces have made a show of bombing ISIS targets. However, they have reserved their heaviest firepower for airstrikes against PKK positions in northern Iraq, in an effort to get the KRG to expel the PKK.

Yesterday, Idris Baluken, the deputy parliamentary group chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), accused the government of committing a war crime. He claimed that an Interior Ministry official had told him that six fighters of the People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of Syria's Democratic Union Party (PYD), had been handed over to Ahrar Al Sham, a coalition of Islamist militias that includes the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front.

While praising Ankara's active participation in the anti-ISIS coalition, Turkey's allies are nevertheless concerned that the Turkish offensive in northern Iraq will endanger the effectiveness of the US-led coalition and stoke up the already tense situation in Turkey.

The launching of war on two fronts testifies to the determination of Erdogan and the AKP to suppress the working class and hold on to power on behalf of the financial and corporate elite at all costs. War abroad, coupled with the renewed civil war at home, serves to deflect the mounting anger over social, economic and political issues, sow divisions within the Turkish working class, and create the conditions for an even more authoritarian form of rule.

Over the last few days, more than 1,600 people have been arrested, mostly PKK members, ISIS supporters and members of the DHKP-C, but also some trade unionists and left-wing activists. Many Islamists have since been released.

The police have broken up peaceful anti-war demonstrations with the utmost violence, while the

authorities blocked more than 90 news websites on August 3, including the mainstream Evrensel and Ozgur Gundem. The only news media widely available are those that toe the government line. To step outside the boundaries of what the government deems acceptable means imprisonment.

The AKP is trying to close down the HDP under the mantra of "fighting terrorism." One of its co-leaders, Selahattin Demirtas, now faces a judicial investigation over his support for last October's protests against the government's aid to Islamists fighting the Syrian Kurds in Kobane. Supporters of the opposition Gulenist movement founded by US exile Fethullah Gulen, former allies of the AKP, are also being targeted for their support of investigations into leading AKP figures for corruption.

The reckless turn to war and authoritarianism, after several years of covert support for Islamist militias in Syria, took place within weeks of the June 7 elections in which the HDP, the new pro-Kurdish Party, won 13 percent of the vote. The result deprived the AKP of its majority and halted Erdogan's move to amend the constitution in favour of an executive presidency.

Acting Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has until August 23 to form a coalition government. Should he fail to do so, either with the secular Republican People's Party (CHP) or the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), new elections must be held, probably in November.

Now, rather than form an unstable coalition government, it would appear that Erdogan and the AKP have deliberately stoked the conditions that will enable him to suppress all opposition and emasculate or outlaw the HDP in order to achieve a majority in new elections.



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