

Turkey gripped by protests against Erdogan government

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Opposition to the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to mount in Turkey, following the suicide bombings that claimed close to 130 lives at a peace rally Saturday.

The suicide bombs—the deadliest in the history of the Turkish Republic—went off as people began gathering in front of the Ankara Train Station for a “Labour, Peace, Democracy” anti-war rally.

The organisers of the rally, the Confederation of Progressive Labour Unions (DİSK), the Public Workers Labour Unions Confederation (KESK), the Chamber of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), issued a joint statement convening a two-day general strike beginning yesterday and continuing today.

Thousands attended funerals of those slain in the towns of Tunceli and Suruc yesterday, while hundreds marched on a mosque in a suburb of Istanbul where other funerals were held, denouncing Erdogan as a murderer.

All efforts by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to exploit the attacks politically and mount a crackdown have backfired. Although Erdogan issued a statement condemning the “heinous” bombings, he has not spoken in public since the attack. He left this to Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who said Sunday that groups including Islamic State (IS), the PKK and the far-left Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party–Front (DHKP-C) were all capable of carrying out such an attack and that “Work is continuing to identify the corpses of the two male terrorists who carried out the suicide bombings.”

The claim that the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) would attack a march by its own supporters was made even as Davutoglu and the media said that IS was the most likely culprit. He told NTV, “Looking at how the

incident took place, we are probing Daesh (IS) as our first priority. DNA tests are being conducted ... We’re close to a name, which points to one group.”

Security sources said the investigation would be “completely focused” on IS, noting that 36-40 arrests had been made, related to an IS faction in Turkey, known as the Adiyaman Ones, named after the southern province, including several potential suicide bombers. The *Haberturk* newspaper quoted police sources that one of the Ankara bombers was suspected to be the brother of the Suruc suicide bomber Abdurrahman Alagoz.

The July bombing of a pro-Kurdish youth rally in the southern town of Suruc on the Syrian border killed 33 people. The PKK blamed the bombing on the government, due to its collusion with Islamist opposition groups in Syria, including Islamic State. The bombing signalled a resumption of military hostilities between the government and the Kurds.

Erdogan had hoped to utilise anti-Kurdish sentiment to secure 400 AKP MPs in the June 7 general elections so he could change the constitution to grant himself absolute authority. Instead, the AKP lost its overall majority for the first time since it came to power in 2002, largely due to the pro-Kurdish HDP securing 13.12 percent of the vote and 80 parliamentary seats to become Turkey’s fourth biggest party.

Unwilling to form a coalition with any of the opposition parties, the AKP called new elections for November 1 and whipped up a climate of fear and intimidation in the hope of securing an increased majority. However, a recent survey by Metropoll found that the AKP would only increase its vote by 1 percent—and that was before the suicide bombing.

Most people believe that the AKP either allowed the attack to take place or even had a direct hand in it. The

BBC reported its correspondent, Mark Lowen, as saying that critics of the Turkish government believe it is using Islamic State “as a scapegoat—and that murky elements of a so-called ‘deep state’ are to blame for the bombings, aiming to shore up [Erdogan’s] support ahead of the elections.”

Announcing the calling of the general strike, TTB President Bayazit İhan said, “We know who the murderers are, they’re the ones whose dreams of dictatorship fell through in the June 7 general election. They’re the ones who have plunged Turkey into a war because they couldn’t get their 400 MPs.”

Kani Beko, president of DİSK, said, “We are not unfamiliar with these massacres: on May Day 1977, in the towns of Maraş and Sivas; and recently with the killings in Diyarbakır and Suruç; we have seen similar attacks. We have lost our friends here, in a meeting that was authorized 20 days ago. We will continue struggling until this fascist AK Party government and its tradition of murders are held accountable.”

The pro-Kurdish HDP, which had a major presence at the peace rally, supported the strike call.

Addressing tens of thousands of mourners in the capital at the weekend, the HDP’s co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş said, “The state which gets information about the bird that flies and every flap of its wing was not able to prevent a massacre in the heart of Ankara.”

“The AKP’s hands are red with blood and they support this terror,” he told reporters at HDP headquarters in Ankara. “It reminds us of the Suruç explosion.”

Also at the weekend, hundreds of people, many wearing doctors’ uniforms, gathered at the main train station in Ankara to lay red carnations but were blocked by riot police.

Lawyers at an Istanbul courthouse Monday chanted, “Murderer Erdogan will give account.”

The board of the Ankara Bar Association has filed a criminal complaint against the minister of the interior, the governor of Ankara, Ankara’s police chief, the head of intelligence and other officials on charges of “professional misconduct” to find out who was responsible for the bombing.

Erdogan is set on continuing a policy of military escalation against the Kurds, while trying to combine this with efforts to secure a key role in the US intervention in Syria, which utilises the threat from

IS—the sworn enemy of the Kurds—and is proposing to provide the Kurds with arms and air support.

On Saturday, the PKK announced that it would unilaterally suspend all attacks before the polls. But the Turkish army still conducted more air raids on southeast Turkey and northern Iraq, killing 49.

The HDP said that it is considering cancelling all of its election rallies, stating, “Our electorates feel under constant threat in every social space and political activity they attend.”

There have been 120 coordinated attacks on the party’s offices around the country, while protesters have attacked newspapers accused of misquoting Erdogan. A number of journalists have been arrested, including the editor-in-chief of the English-language newspaper *Today’s Zaman*, Bülent Keneş.

None of this is improving the AKP’s election prospects. The HDP has been bullish in its response. “We’re eager for the election, whereas the dictator in the palace is fleeing the election,” said its honorary president Ertuğrul Kurucu.

In such circumstances, Turkey’s future may not be decided at the ballot box. The entire country is unstable, wracked by ethnic, political and class tensions and is ready to erupt at any moment. The *Financial Times* commented, “Recent polls indicated that Turkey could be heading for another coalition government after November’s vote. But the bombings in Ankara at the weekend indicated how violent, unpredictable and volatile Turkish politics has now become.”



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