

As fighting spreads, Turkey moves to crush pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party

Halil Celik**18 January 2016**

Amid escalating military operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkish government is moving to crush the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which has 11 percent of the vote and 59 deputies in the Turkish parliament.

Yesterday, the Turkish army announced it had killed 19 PKK members in several districts across southeastern Turkey and seized weaponry from the PKK. It also said that a Turkish police officer had died during a PKK operation in the southeastern province of Siirt.

The escalating fighting comes after the HDP announced at the end of last year that it was considering pushing for an autonomous, or possibly independent, Kurdish state along the Turkish-Syrian-Iraq border. This provoked accusations of treason and escalating threats from the Turkish government against the HDP.

According to the state-owned Anatolian Agency, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu declared on January 6 that his government was "determined, driven and strict in the face of everyone digging up ditches in [southeastern districts of] Cizre, Silopi and Sur, as well as those who encourage terror in any illegitimate manner."

Davuto?lu included in his statement a clear warning to the HDP deputies: "We won't let anyone be silenced for voicing their opinions as an MP but we will also not put up with anyone who hides behind the armour of immunity and acts in a way that ignores a society's fate and the most basic human right to life," he said.

Davuto?lu's commentary comes after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for a criminal investigation into leaders of the HDP over their positions on Kurdish self-rule. "The statements of the HDP leaders are constitutional crimes. There are

investigations started by prosecutors against them. These should be followed up," Erdogan told reporters on January 1.

On Wednesday, January 6, Erdogan once again called for the arrest of more pro-Kurdish politicians. Speaking to village headmen invited to the presidential palace in Ankara, Erdogan demanded that HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdag be stripped of their parliamentary immunity.

"Both Parliament and the judiciary should take action against those who act as though they are members of a terrorist organization," he said.

Following the two-day congress of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), on December 26-27, prosecution offices of Diyarbakir and Ankara launched investigations against Selahattin Demirtas, co-chairman of the HDP over his remarks he made at the congress in favour of a greater self-governance of Kurdish people.

In recent days, Turkish security forces have launched raids on HDP offices and arrested scores of politicians, as well as mayors, whom Davutoglu accused of transferring state funds provided to southeastern municipalities to "dark channels". The two co-mayors of Diyarbakir's Sur district, and two co-mayors of the Silvan district of Diyarbakir, were among those arrested on charges of "disrupting the unity and territorial integrity of the state" for their statements on "self-governance".

Ankara's latest moves against Kurdish forces emerge directly from the drive for a new imperialist carve-up of the Middle East. The imperialist powers have increasingly used Kurdish militias in Iraq and Syria as proxies against both Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia. As the Turkish army responded by attacking Kurdish forces it saw as a threat to its

interests in Syria, fighting has spread to Turkey in the form of urban warfare.

As war threatens to spread across the entire Middle East, the Turkish government and the Kurdish nationalist forces are both seeking to cut deals with various imperialist countries and regional powers, to get crumbs from the planned redivision of the region. While PKK officials told *Le Monde* that they had support both in Moscow and in factions of the US foreign policy establishment, Turkey is marketing itself as a warmongering ally of US imperialism to mount an all-out assault on Syria.

The Erdogan government is using the escalating military operations in Kurdish-populated areas to press ahead with its plans to transform Turkey's fragile parliamentary system into a presidential dictatorship. Expressing the drive towards dictatorial forms of rule that is emerging across Europe, Erdogan said on January 6 that "Turkey has a need for determining its governance system in accordance with its own needs."

Last week, Erdogan provoked a firestorm of criticisms internationally when he suggested that Nazi Germany could serve as a juridical model for a Turkish presidential system in which the president had power in a unitary Turkish state. "There's no such thing as 'no presidential system in unitary states.' When you look at the world there are examples, including from the past. When you look at Hitler's Germany, you see this," he said after a visit to Saudi Arabia.

The Kemalist opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party have opposed the presidential system, while pro-Kurdish HDP had given signs before the last conflict that it would support a presidential system in return for a federal or semi-federal Turkey, where Kurds have their autonomous region.

Erdogan's renewed war against the Kurds and his insistence on a presidential system are bound up with the escalating tensions with the major regional powers in the Middle East, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the rapidly rising danger of all-out war.

Last week, the Turkish president criticised Iran for the attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Tehran and Mashhad by demonstrators, while defending the execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr by his Saudi ally. "Saudi Arabia took the decision to go ahead with the execution long ago and it was implemented

accordingly. Approving or not approving is another matter. But this is a matter for the domestic law of Saudi Arabia," Erdogan said.

With the predatory aim of dominating Syria and Iraq, Ankara has long backed Sunni forces in order to fuel sectarian conflict across the region, playing his part in the NATO powers' strategy of divide and rule, which has already turned the Middle East into a neo-colonial battle ground.



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