

Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu resigns amid mounting government crisis

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Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu suddenly announced on Wednesday his decision to step down as chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and therefore as prime minister. At a press conference, following the meeting of the Central Executive Board of his party, Davutoglu said that the AKP would organise an extraordinary congress to elect his successor.

The resignation is a reflection of deep conflicts within the state, in the midst of Turkish involvement in the Syria civil war and growing tension with Russia, as well as a renewed, bloody civil war with its own Kurdish minority.

Davutoglu resigned after fistfights repeatedly erupted inside the parliament over Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's moves to crush the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP). Last week, and again on Monday, AKP and HDP deputies fought each other in the General Assembly, as the AKP threatens to lift HDP deputies' parliamentary immunity to allow their trial on terrorism charges.

A barely veiled conflict between Davutoglu and Erdogan had been growing in the days before Davutoglu's resignation. On April 29, the AKP's central executive committee, stacked with Erdogan loyalists, voted to deprive Davutoglu of his right as AKP chairman to appoint regional party officials. Before an emergency meeting with Davutoglu on Wednesday, Erdogan bluntly and publicly told him, "You should not forget how you got your post."

After the April 29 meeting, there was media speculation over Davutoglu's political future. Rumours were spread that Erdogan would replace Davutoglu with someone like Transport Minister Binali Yildirim, his close ally, or Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, his son-in-law.

Erdogan blandly dismissed Davutoglu's resignation, stating that "it is the prime minister's own decision." However, Davutoglu made clear it was his response to deep divisions in the AKP.

"I have never negotiated for any post or position over the values and principles I have," he said, stating that he was angered by the decision to strip him of his powers as party chairman. He added, "As a result of my own examination and consultations with my friends with political experience, including our president, I have come to the conclusion that instead of changing colleagues, it's much better to change the party chair for the unity of the AKP. ... [T]he fate of the AKP is the fate of Turkey."

Calling for loyalty to Erdogan, Davutoglu cryptically added, "No one should dare to initiate new plots."

With Davutoglu's resignation, explosive conflicts inside the Turkish government and bourgeoisie are coming to the surface.

A former foreign minister, Davutoglu is well aware that Turkey has suffered a heavy blow as Erdogan's policies have simultaneously undermined Ankara's relations with the United States, the European Union (EU) and Russia. The AKP has also overseen unprecedented social inequality, poverty and unemployment. Nearly half of the Turkish population lives below the poverty line, while a tiny elite appropriates a vast and growing amount of wealth.

Though he was always careful not to criticise Erdogan publicly, Davutoglu has distanced himself from the president on many controversial issues. These include Erdogan's attempt to concentrate power in his hands by building a "presidential system" and repressive measures against the press, such as pre-trial detention of journalists.

The rift between Erdogan and Davutoglu in the

Islamist AKP marks a new stage of the AKP regime's disintegration, faced with the political aftershocks of the revolutionary upsurge in Egypt in 2011 and the ongoing war launched by NATO that year in Syria. After some initial hesitation, the AKP joined the NATO war drive. The 2013 coup that toppled an Islamist-led regime in Egypt, led by President Mohamed Mursi, came amid the June 2013 protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park—both of which threatened the AKP government.

Since then, Erdogan has carried out an ever more bellicose policy, both internationally and inside Turkey. He stoked a civil war against Turkey's Kurdish minority and nearly provoked war with Russia when, with US backing, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter plane over Syria last November. It is increasingly obvious that with his calls for a "presidential" system, Erdogan is trying to deal with insoluble political contradictions by imposing an authoritarian regime.

The AKP is pushing to remove the immunity of 129 deputies, nearly a quarter of the total number, through a constitutional amendment, as the destruction and loss of life in ethnic Kurdish cities continue to rise.

On Tuesday, May 3, the Turkish parliament's constitutional commission embraced an AKP proposal to add a temporary clause to the Turkish constitution lifting the deputies' immunity. The proposal was approved with the support of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), while the HDP voted against it.

During the session of the commission, AKP deputies physically assaulted HDP MPs, who denounced the commission's decision as a "coup." After the physical attack against them, the HDP officials decided to withdraw from the commission.

Speaking at his party's weekly group meeting that same day, HDP Co-President Selahattin Demirtaş stated that they would discuss other alternatives if HDP parliamentarians were arrested and prosecuted. He said that "citizens...could form multiple parliaments if they wanted." He called for support to the HDP and invited the CHP to join them in opposing the AKP.

After supporting the AKP's so-called peace process with the Kurds, the HDP has faced repeated denunciations by Erdogan and Davutoglu for supporting a "terrorist organisation," that is, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Ankara's attitude to

the "Kurdish question" shifted radically over the course of the Syrian war, as a Russian intervention devastated AKP-backed Islamist forces, and the US and European imperialists embraced Kurdish forces led by the PKK's Syrian offshoot as a new proxy in Iraq and Syria.

Davutoglu has supported the AKP's brutal and aggressive policies both in Syria and inside Turkey. He recently denounced calls for autonomy in the mainly Kurdish-populated southeast of Turkey, saying that deputies cannot be forgiven "for hiding behind the shield of [parliamentary] immunity" if they support terrorism. He also reportedly played a crucial role in negotiating the filthy deal with the EU in which Turkey agreed to prevent refugees from fleeing Syria to Europe.

It is Erdogan, however, who emerged as the main instigator of attacks on press freedom and of the witch-hunt against the HDP. While he was earlier the initiator of the so-called peace process with the PKK, the Turkish president, in a close alliance with the army and the MHP, frequently accuses HDP deputies of being extensions of the PKK and has demanded that judiciary bodies prosecute them.

Davutoglu's departure and the ongoing attacks on Kurdish nationalists plunge not only Turkey into political uncertainty, but also its imperialist patrons, who rely on Turkey as a useful ally for their war plans in the Middle East and for imprisoning millions of refugees trying to flee the region.

"Davutoglu has been the cooperative, Western-oriented face of the government, particularly important in pushing through the refugees deal with the EU," foreign policy consultant Ian Bremmer told *UK Business Insider*. "It's going to be a dangerous time to be in the opposition."

Soner Cagaptay of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy said that if Erdogan continued to consolidate his power, "it will render the country so brittle politically that when Erdogan leaves office one day, there will be nearly no institutions left standing to keep the country together."



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