

Terrorist attack in Istanbul leads to stepped-up police-state measures, militarism

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Sunday's terrorist attack on Istiklal Avenue, one of Istanbul's most crowded streets, killed six people, including two children. Two of the wounded remain in serious condition in intensive care.

As after countless terrorist attacks in Turkey and internationally in recent decades, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government has responded by suspending basic democratic rights and drastically restricting the public's access to information and the Internet. This has been accompanied by an anti-refugee campaign launched by far-right forces on social media after the alleged perpetrator was officially identified as Syrian.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all workers to oppose the efforts by the ruling elite to use this dirty attack to suppress the working class and eliminate basic democratic rights by promoting nationalism and militarism.

Authorities have announced that 48 people have been detained so far, including the suspect who allegedly planted the bomb that exploded on Istiklal Avenue. According to a statement of the Istanbul Security Directorate yesterday, the female suspect who allegedly planted the bomb was "trained as a special intelligence officer by the [Kurdish nationalist] PKK/PYD/YPG terrorist organization" and entered Turkey "illegally to carry out attacks in Turkey via Afrin-Idlib [in Syria]" about four months ago.

In footage of the early Monday morning raid on the alleged attacker, Syrian national Ahlam Albashir, and in her photographs taken in police custody, she appears to have been terrified.

An unnamed senior Turkish official told Reuters that they had not ruled out that she could be linked to Islamic State (ISIS), casting further doubts on the credibility of official statements. In recent months, tensions between Ankara and its Islamist proxies in Syria have been growing. It was recently announced that Hayat Tahrir al-

Sham (HTS) had entered Afrin, which is under the control of the Turkish army and its proxies, exploiting disagreements within the Turkish-backed "Syrian National Army" (SMO).

The Istanbul Security Directorate statement claims that Albashir "stated that she received instructions to carry out an attack in Istanbul from the PKK/PYD/YPG terrorist organization's headquarters in Kobani, Syria, and that she carried out the bombing on Sunday, 13.11.2022 at 16:20 and then fled."

Neither Albashir's lawyers nor the lawyers of the more than 40 detainees have issued any statement, however, or claimed responsibility.

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu's statements, however, signal further escalation of tensions between Turkey and its US-led NATO allies. Soylu publicly accused Washington, which backs the YPG in Syria, and declared that they rejected the condolences of the US Embassy in Turkey: "We have received the message given to us. We know what the message given to us is. We reject the condolence message of the US Embassy."

Soylu declared that Turkey's alliance with Washington is questionable, adding: "The alliance of a state that sends money to Kobani from its own Senate should be discussed. We are not treacherous to anyone, but we have no more power to tolerate these treacherous acts. We will give a very strong response to the message we received." Soylu's vow for a "strong response" might signal a new Turkish military operation against YPG militias in Syria.

After the NATO-backed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016, the Erdoğan government and its Islamist proxies launched multiple invasions into Syria to prevent an YPG-led enclave. This May, Erdoğan announced that the Turkish army was preparing a new offensive against Syrian Kurdish forces. However, he backed down in the face of opposition from both the United States, which occupies northeastern Syria, and Russia and Iran, which

back Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

After the 2016 coup attempt, Soylu was one of the most outspoken voices accusing the US of being behind the coup. Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara claims led the putschist officers, still resides in the United States. In a statement in Uzbekistan on Saturday, Erdoğan again accused the US and its European allies of protecting the coup plotters.

Erdoğan said, "Who is protecting them [pro-Gülen elements] right now? First and foremost Greece. They flee to Greece, they flee to Europe. They have always fled here; they live in Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, Denmark, England, America." Then he attacked Biden, stating: "And America is hiding this man [Gülen]. Who is hiding him? Biden is hiding him ... If you ask me where the center of terrorism is, I will tell you this right now [the US]." Erdoğan had previously said that the US was the "source of terrorism" in Syria.

According to T24, the US Embassy in Ankara said: "The United States unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and stands in solidarity with our valued NATO ally Turkey," in response to Soylu. In reality, Washington and Ankara are at odds, not only on the Kurdish question, but even more importantly on the war against Russia.

Yesterday, the PKK, the YPG and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG is the backbone, issued separate statements denying all ties with the terrorist attack in Istanbul. On the other hand, the PKK has claimed for some time that the Turkish army uses chemical weapons in its ongoing operations against it in Iraq.

According to ANF News, the PKK declared: "We have nothing to do with this incident, and it is well-known to the public that we would not target civilians directly or approve of actions directed at civilians," adding: "Turkish officials pointing Kobanê as a target in connection with this incident reveals the aspect of their plan."

"Our forces have nothing to do with the Istanbul attack," SDF commander Mazlum Abdi wrote on Twitter, while the YPG called the allegations "a planned theater play prepared by AKP and Erdoğan."

However, Duran Kalkan, a leader of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), the umbrella organization including the PKK and the PYD, said in an interview in April that they would target cities.

In a TV interview after the Turkish army launched an offensive targeting PKK forces in Iraq, Kalkan declared: "The guerrillas are not playing defense, they are

attacking. They will attack where [the Turkish government] least expects it. This will be not only on the fronts, military targets and positions, but all over Northern Kurdistan, all over Turkey, wherever the AKP-MHP attack us. It will be in the cities. Everywhere is a battlefield."

The truth is that no statement of the US government, Ankara or of the Kurdish nationalists can be trusted. After the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, US imperialism turned the region into a war zone from Iraq to Afghanistan, Libya to Syria, killing millions of people and creating millions more refugees. And now the US-led NATO powers have escalated war with Russia in Ukraine, raising the specter of global nuclear war.

Both the Turkish ruling elite and the Kurdish nationalist leaderships have been largely complicit in this 30-year imperialist war and the catastrophes that have ensued. Ankara, for all its conflicts with Washington, remains a critical NATO ally in the Middle East, while the PKK-YPG has become the main US proxy force in Syria. All these forces are enemies of the democratic aspirations of the oppressed peoples, including the Kurds.

The terrorist attack in Istanbul has paved the way for Ankara to escalate both militarism abroad and police-state measures at home to suppress social opposition as well as basic democratic rights. With official annual inflation reaching 85 percent and 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line, Turkey is heading for presidential and parliamentary elections in June 2023, if not sooner. Faced with growing social unrest, Erdoğan risks losing the election.

Against all efforts to divide and suppress working people, it is critical to mobilize the working class on a revolutionary basis, independent of the entire pro-imperialist bourgeois political establishment. This means uniting workers and youth in Turkey, the Middle East and internationally on the basis of a socialist program against imperialist war and bourgeois rule, rejecting all forms of nationalism and militarism.



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