

As they escalate war against Russia, imperialist powers greenlight Erdoğan's police-state crackdown

Ulaş Sevinç
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In preparation for the 36th NATO Summit in Ankara on July 7–8, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government has declared war on basic democratic rights in Türkiye.

The Erdoğan government has implemented a de facto state of emergency in the capital and detained hundreds of people. The aim is to suppress the widespread opposition to the gathering of political criminals, headed by US President Donald Trump, who are waging a war of aggression against Iran, have made the genocide in Gaza possible and are creating the risk of a nuclear conflict in the war against Russia in Ukraine. Events in Ankara are the sharpest expression of the turn by the ruling classes worldwide toward war and dictatorship in the face of the insoluble crisis of the global capitalist system.

The Ankara Governorate announced a 13-day ban on demonstrations and press statements covering the period from June 28 to July 10. Over the weekend, more than 100 people were unlawfully detained during home raids conducted in 18 provinces. On Sunday evening, police attacked an anti-NATO march in Ankara and detained more than 100 people. Dozens of left-wing media outlets and organizations had their social media accounts suspended. This comes on top of the hundreds of detentions and more than 200 arrests in previous weeks.

Imperialist war abroad, in which the Turkish ruling class participates in pursuit of its own interests, and police-state repression against social opposition at home are two sides of the same coin.

The massive assault on basic democratic rights in Türkiye has the approval of American and European political and media institutions. Located at a crossroads connecting Asia and Europe, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, Türkiye is viewed as a key ally in the plans of all the imperialist powers—led by the United States—to wage war, dominate the Middle East and carry out the violent redivision of the world. It is considered critically important not only in terms of the war against Russia and Iran but also the war preparations targeting China, including disrupting the projects like the Belt and Road initiative. Erdoğan is also continuing to hold refugees fleeing the imperialist wars in Syria and Afghanistan in Türkiye on behalf of the European powers.

Trump's return to the White House in January 2025 has accelerated the crackdown on the political opposition in Türkiye. Ekrem İmamoğlu, mayor of Istanbul, the largest city in Türkiye, and the Republican People's Party's (CHP) presidential candidate—selected by 15.5 million voters—has been in prison since March 2025. Since then, police raids have been carried out on dozens of CHP-run municipalities. Shortly before the summit, the CHP's elected leadership was removed from office by court order, and several more mayors—including Ali Ercan Akpolat, mayor of Adalar—were arrested. Erdoğan is neutralizing the CHP, which emerged as the leading party in the March 2024 elections, through a political coup. All of this has been met with deafening silence in NATO capitals.

The presidential dictatorship Erdoğan has built with the approval of Washington and the European capitals serves as a model for governments grappling with the same crisis. Trump, who is signaling his intent to overturn or cancel elections and imprison his opponents, is following in Erdoğan's footsteps. While Trump praises Erdoğan at every opportunity, the Democrats and their media mouthpiece, the *New York Times*, are tacitly endorsing this repression in Türkiye.

On Monday the *Times* published an article under the headline “Facing Threats, NATO Finds New Value in Turkey.” “Global developments,” it wrote, “including the wars in Ukraine and Iran and the return of President Trump to the White House, have dealt Turkey a new hand, increasing the country's value in the eyes of its NATO allies.”

The *Times* referred in passing to the “extensive crackdown on Mr. Erdogan's political opponents,” while covering up what is actually happening. The unofficial newspaper of the US Democratic Party offered no protest, and it has made no effort to comport its claims that the Ukraine war is a war in defense of “democracy” against “autocracy” with the fact that the state serving in the front ranks of arming Ukraine is actively establishing a police state.

The summit's official agenda makes clear that this will be a summit aiming to expand rearmament and imperialist war. The Defense Industry Forum on July 7 is being attended not only by Ukraine but also by NATO's Asia-Pacific partners (Australia,

Japan, New Zealand, South Korea) and the Gulf States. The agenda thus extends beyond Russia—against which NATO has been waging a proxy war since 2022—to preparations for continued aggression against Iran and war against China.

The summit is focused on implementing the target, adopted last year of allocating 5 percent of GDP to military spending by 2035. The Trump administration has threatened that NATO allies will face the consequences if they fail to take the necessary steps to meet this commitment. According to Britain's *The Telegraph*, "Senior US officials reiterated on Sunday that failure to meet the 5 percent target would result in a 'less capable Europe and Canada' in the long term."

The run-up to the summit was marked by Trump's demand for a rapid increase in military spending and by disagreement over the future of NATO's war against Russia. US officials claim that the front in Ukraine has "frozen." While the European powers seek to escalate the war with strikes deep into Russian territory, Trump—meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Ankara on July 8 and conducting telephone diplomacy with Russian President Vladimir Putin—is pursuing a separate deal profitable for the United States. Far from reducing militarism, this inter-imperialist rivalry is accelerating it.

The trillions being poured into rearmament are being extracted from the working class through deep cuts to health, education, pensions and wages. Türkiye, which has NATO's second-largest army, increased its military spending by 7.2 percent over the previous year and by 94 percent over the past decade. This increase came amid a massive cost-of-living crisis, a significant decline in real wages and pensions, rising taxes loaded onto the backs of the working class, and tax breaks and incentives for big business.

The European powers seeking to provoke a direct NATO war against Russia are likewise attempting to finance their rearmament programs through enormous social cuts. This is accompanied by moves to reintroduce conscription. Because these measures—opposed by workers and youth—provoke growing resistance, the ruling classes everywhere are resorting to police state measures. The transformation of Ankara into a fortress with some 70,000 security personnel, together with the wave of preventive arrests, is a concentrated expression of this logic.

This turn is even more naked at the center of world imperialism. On July 3 at Mount Rushmore, Trump delivered a fascist speech—characterized by the WSWS as "anticommunist hysteria and the conspiracy for dictatorship"—declaring war on socialism and branding political opposition as the enemy within. This anticommunism expresses the fear of the financial oligarchy in the face of the threat rising from the working class.

The ruling classes' fear of social revolution is not unfounded. The same spiral of militarism and social austerity is fueling an ever-growing wave of class struggle worldwide. This year, Türkiye has witnessed significant signs of an independent

workers' movement; from warehouse workers to miners, from shipyard workers to teachers, sections of the working class have launched important struggles independent of the official trade union confederations. Energy, railway and hospital strikes in the United States, general strikes in Italy, and mass military desertions in Ukraine are the international signs of this upsurge.

The criminalization of opposition to war is a NATO-wide phenomenon. The NATO-backed Zelensky regime has imprisoned the Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk for more than two years on charges of "treason," because he fights for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war and opposes both the Zelensky and Putin regimes. His detention is being extended even though three separate expert reports have refuted the charges. Behind the Zelensky regime that imprisons Bogdan and the Erdoğan regime that jails anti-war activists and political opponents in Türkiye stand the imperialist powers.

These events also expose the failure of bourgeois opposition parties, such as the CHP, which, amid mounting repression appeals to the very same NATO powers for "democracy" and "social peace" and pledges to be a better ally than Erdoğan to deliver on their promises. In Türkiye and across the world, no faction of the bourgeoisie can consistently oppose imperialist war and defend democratic rights. That requires a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the ruling class.

The way to halt imperialist war and dictatorship lies in uniting and mobilizing the international working class on the basis of a socialist program. This is the perspective for which the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections in Türkiye and other countries—the Socialist Equality Parties—are fighting.



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