

Crackdown on Turkey's pro-Kurdish party intensifies after dawn raids

Fri, 2021-03-19 17:04

ANKARA: Following its lawsuit to ban the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the Turkish government's crackdown against the party escalated on Friday morning, with dawn raids carried out on houses in Istanbul, Ankara and several other cities detaining dozens of people, including local HDP executives.

The government claims the HDP has ties with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which the HDP denies.

On March 17, a prosecutor filed a case with the Constitutional Court of Turkey to ban the HDP, the third largest party in the Turkish Parliament, representing 6 million voters at the 2018 election

The move, criticized by the US and the EU, was denounced by the HDP as a "political coup" not based on legal grounds.

"Even after all of (President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan's authoritarian repression against his political opponents, actually shutting down an opposition party always seemed like a bridge too far," Merve Tahiroglu, Turkey program coordinator at the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), told Arab News.

"Given that Erdogan himself has suffered from anti-democratic party closures throughout his political career, it may still prove too politically costly for him to pursue the closure of the HDP," she added.

Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) survived a closure case of its own in 2008 after an indictment brought by the then chief prosecutor, seeking to bar it and its leaders from politics. The Constitutional Court decided instead to cut the party's state funding due to its "anti-secular" practices.

According to Tahiroglu, the latest government moves to ban the HDP from the political scene, and the recent crackdown on party officials, aims to appease the AKP's far-right coalition partner, the Nationalist Movement Party.

But, she said, even the threat of closing down the HDP would benefit Erdogan by driving a wedge in the opposition coalition, forcing politicians to either come out in support of the move, thereby alienating liberal and Kurdish voters, or oppose the move, alienating nationalists.

On Thursday, former Turkish President Abdullah Gul, a staunch critic of Erdogan, warned that attempts to close the HDP will damage Turkey greatly, adding that similar moves against pro-Kurdish parties in the past had resulted in "Turkey's isolation."

Despite up to 600 officials facing expulsion from political life, the HDP is expected to regroup under a new brand, but with similar ideological beliefs, if officially closed.

“The ongoing crackdowns against the HDP are bad enough for Turkish democracy. But given the Biden administration’s emphasis on democratic values, the closure of an opposition party should be a red line,” Tahiroglu said.

In Ankara, Ozturk Turkdogan, the chairman of Human Rights Association (IHD), was also detained during the raids, with no official statement given as to why.

Turkdogan was recently criticized by Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu after he condemned the government for risking the lives of 13 people during a military operation in northern Iraq’s Gara Mountains, where Turkish hostages were being held, and were later executed, by the PKK.

Soylu reacted angrily to Turkdogan’s criticism, calling the IHD a “cursed association.”

The IHD has previously acted as an intermediary between the PKK and the state to return hostages, including 20 captives who were returned to Turkey in 2015.

Turkdogan also recently criticized the government’s new Human Rights Action Plan, claiming that it was little more than window dressing, and that it should include measures to protect human rights activists and associations.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) released a statement on Friday, calling for the immediate release of Turkdogan.

“The arrest and search of Turkdogan’s (house) continues a systematic pattern of misuse of criminal law to harass and persecute human rights defenders and lawyers in Turkey in recent years,” said the ICJ’s Europe and Central Asia Program Director Roisin Pillay.

“Turkdogan must be released immediately. If he remains in detention then he must be ensured immediate and confidential access to a lawyer, and be informed of the nature of any charges against him and brought promptly before a court.”



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Warnings over Turkish attempts to ban pro-Kurdish party Move to ban pro-Kurdish party would 'undermine democracy' in Turkey: US

[Turkey's Erdogan says Biden comments on Putin 'unacceptable'](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2021-03-19 12:19

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that Joe Biden's comments about Russia's Vladimir Putin, in which he said he thought he was a killer, were "unacceptable" and unfitting of a US president. In a TV interview broadcast on Wednesday, Biden said "I do" when asked if he

believed Putin was a killer, prompting US-Russia ties to sink to a new low. Putin later responded that “he who said it, did it.”

“Mr. Biden’s statements about Mr. Putin are not fitting of a president, and a president coming out and using such remarks against the president of a country like Russia is truly unacceptable, not something that can be stomached,” Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul.

“In my opinion, Mr. Putin has done what is necessary by giving a very, very smart and elegant answer,” he added.

Ties between Ankara and Washington, NATO allies, have been strained over a host of issues in recent years including Turkey’s record on human rights and freedoms, its acquisition of Russian defense systems and policy differences in Syria.

The United States, which along with other western allies has accused Ankara of straying from NATO and the western bloc, last year imposed sanctions on Turkey over the Russian defenses. Turkey called that a “grave mistake.”

Erdogan, who had a close relationship with former President Donald Trump, has yet to speak to Biden since he took office in January.

Turkey and Russia have developed strong strategic relations in recent years despite backing opposing sides in conflicts in Syria and Libya. Erdogan has frequently met with and held calls with Putin, whom he calls a friend.



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Russia recalls envoy to US for consultations as tensions mount White House says Biden in call with Russia's Putin called for Navalny release

[Palestinian killed by Israel army in West Bank](#)

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AFP

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Fri, 2021-03-19 11:58

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: A Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration in the West Bank on Friday, the Palestinian health ministry said.

"A citizen who was shot in the head with live ammunition died," the ministry said, adding the incident happened in the village of Beit Dajan, near Nablus. The Israeli army did not immediately comment on the report.



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Israelis rally against West Bank annexation plan
EU to push Israel to ditch West Bank annexation plans

[Egypt to implement raft of family planning measures and services](#)

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Thu, 2021-03-18 01:39

CAIRO: Egyptian Minister of Planning and Economic Development Hala Al-Saeed has said a study is underway to issue a Family Insurance Fund for Egyptian families using birth control, in cooperation with the Financial Regulatory Authority, as part of a national project of family development.

The goal of this project is to control population growth, as a way to improve the quality of life of Egyptians, the minister said, adding it would include the economic empowerment of women aged 18 to 45 by providing job opportunities and encouraging them to achieve financial independence.

The minister said that criteria for benefiting from the insurance scheme will include periodic family examinations every six months and breast cancer tests, in addition to the obligation to wait a specified period between having children, and only having a certain number of children per family. The first stage of the scheme will take place over a period of three years, she said.

During the first phase, 2 million women will be trained as part of the National Initiative for Women's Empowerment. Smaller projects are also planned for about 1 million women.

Al-Saeed said there will be coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education to formulate programs for young people to raise awareness of family planning regulations. Television programs on the issue of family planning will be part of this plan to raise national awareness.

In addition, an online platform, the Egyptian Family System, will automate the services of the Family Insurance Fund with links to units of health and family development. The project will also include providing family planning methods free of charge to all, said the minister.

She indicated that the project also aims at raising the efficiency of Al-Takamol hospitals by creating family-planning units, providing vaccinations and primary care services.

Clinics to monitor women's health, nurseries for the children of working

women and provision of necessary care and support needed for Egyptian women will be part of this program, with 1,500 female doctors trained in family planning methods, in addition to increasing the participation of NGOs that provide family planning services.

Twelve million home visits, 30,000 seminars and 500 activities targeting 6 million women will also form part of the program.

Legislative intervention is being planned to develop a regulatory framework governing the policies taken to control population growth. It includes the criminalization of child marriage, and expanding the scope of punishment to include children's guardians. Child labor and the failure to register births will also be tackled with punitive measures.



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[Iran poses 'major threat' to Middle East and beyond](#)

Fri, 2021-03-19 01:00

CHICAGO: Diplomats at a press conference Thursday hosted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) warned that a buildup of ballistic missiles by Iran poses a "major threat" to the Arabian Gulf, the Middle East

and western nations.

NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee spokesperson Ali Safavi, former Italy Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi and Walid Phares, the co-secretary general of the Transatlantic Parliamentary Group on Counterterrorism, said the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the Iran nuclear deal, has failed to curb Iran's militant attacks through proxy militias in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.

The officials argued that US President Joe Biden and European leaders need to take a "tougher stand" against Tehran and its ongoing nuclear and ballistic missile program.

Phares, who is also an adviser to the anti-terrorism caucus of the US House of Representatives, said that the focus has always been on curbing Iran's nuclear program. But the regime has also built up a formidable arsenal of ballistic missiles that are being used in "four battlegrounds" in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.

"The problem is that over the past five years, the regime has displayed and continues to display a behavior that would endanger Iran, its people, the Middle East, Europe, the US and the international community," Phares said.

"Any return to the Iran deal cannot just go back to Tehran and deal with the technical matter of counting the points that Iran is doing or not doing. It has completely changed. We are talking about the geopolitics of the whole region."

Phares said negotiations must also include a focus on "Iran's behaviors" and its use of militant proxies in the Middle East.

"Through its militias, Iran has established control of Iraq with some exceptions," Phares said. "It has been able to penetrate the country with its own militias. But those militias are not only controlling the government, economy and banks. They are actually engaged – as is the case in Yemen – in suppressing the population."

In Syria, where 700,000 people have been killed and 5 million have been displaced, Phares said the Bashar Al-Assad regime is fully backed by the Iranian regime. He also noted that in Lebanon, Hezbollah has openly touted its allegiance to Tehran.

"What we are dealing with now is an Iranian regime in a quasi-occupation of four Arab countries. There cannot be a return to an Iran deal without resolving the 'Khamenei imperialism' that is occupying half of the Middle East," Phares said in reference to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his foreign intervention policies.

Terzi called the JCPOA, which was signed in 2015 and attempted to restrict Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon, a "flawed deal" and "total failure."

He noted that Biden wants to pursue an agreement that will end the attacks from proxy groups like the Houthis and prevent the situation from worsening.

“This is a major issue and a major question mark. We see a cautious approach but up to now, I do not consider it a weak approach by the Biden administration,” Terzi said.

“There is a willingness by Biden to deter attacks, especially against American interests. But more in general to avoid at least a scaling up of the existing aggressive strategies by proxies of the Iranian regime.”



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France's Macron urges Iran to 'stop worsening' nuclear crisis Election looming, Iran's Rouhani says hardliners sabotage goal to lift sanctions