

Turkish president visits Berlin as US-European conflict in Middle East rises

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived yesterday for a three-day visit to Berlin, amid explosive conflicts between Washington and the European Union (EU) in the Middle East. During his visit, Erdogan will attend a state banquet with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and meet twice with Chancellor Angela Merkel.

It was barely concealed that Erdogan was traveling to Berlin in order to seek an ally against Washington. He is facing an economic crisis and currency collapse unleashed by Trump's tariffs and trade war measures targeting Turkey; and his government is bitterly opposed to US use of Kurdish nationalist fighters as proxy forces in the bloody NATO proxy war in Syria. It is also clear, moreover, that Washington is moving against his government at the same time as tensions surge between US and European imperialism.

Germany recently joined France and Britain in seeking to devise a common mechanism with China and Russia to evade US sanctions against Iran. Top EU officials have called for a push to use the euro as an alternative to the US dollar. Powerful forces in the European bourgeoisie are manifestly considering direct challenges to what American imperialist strategists see as core US national security interests.

"The dramatic developments in the world make it indispensable for both Germany and Turkey to open a new page in bilateral relations, to leave aside their differences and focus on their common interests," Erdogan wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the day before arriving in Berlin. "With respect to our disagreements, we should keep all dialogue channels open, continue our exchanges, and by showing maximum empathy, we should try to understand our mutual sensitivities," he added.

Erdogan also denounced the Kurdish-nationalist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the "Fetullah

Terrorist Organization," (FETÖ) the name he has given to Turkish supporters of the coup launched against him with US and German support in July 2016. "The PKK and FETÖ members and their organizations are using various instruments, including manipulations and fake news, to sabotage our bilateral relations," he wrote. The Erdogan government is particularly enraged by US reliance on Kurdish nationalist forces in its proxy war in Syria.

Late last month, as the Turkish economy staggered and the lira plunged in currency markets, Berlin made clear that it would try to counteract Trump's tariffs aimed at Turkey and prevent an economic collapse that could bring down the European economy, as well.

"The federal government is closely following developments in Turkey. A stable, prosperous and democratic Turkey is in our interest," German government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said. She added: "As you know preparations are continuing. Ahead of President Erdogan's visit, the finance minister will meet with his counterpart here."

While German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said yesterday that no plans for direct economic aid to Turkey would be settled at the Erdogan summit, talks between Berlin and Ankara have proceeded rapidly over the last month. On September 5, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas traveled to Turkey. After high-level economic talks with Turkish officials on September 21, German officials stressed that they valued Turkish aid to pursue the EU's draconian anti-refugee policy, by detaining Syrian refugees in Turkey to keep them from seeking asylum in Europe.

Erdogan's release of German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yucel, whom he had detained on terrorism charges arising from the July 2016 coup, also laid the basis for a warming in relations between Berlin and Ankara.

Plans have been mooted for Berlin to offer export subsidies to German firms exporting to Turkey, that is, for

Berlin to pay German firms to ship their products to Turkey even if the Turkish banks cannot pay for them—limiting the disruption to German industry from any financial crash.

“We have very close economic cooperation. More than 7,500 German companies are active in Turkey,” said German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, who called for a “new era” in relations between Germany and Turkey. He added: “We are sharing common geostrategic interests. ... We would like to stabilize the region, which is very often characterized by civil wars and refugees.”

This draws a sharp contrast with the collapse in relations between Turkey and the United States. As he imposed trade tariffs on Turkey that sent the lira on a downward plunge, during which it lost 40 percent of its value, Donald Trump tweeted: “I have just authorized a doubling of Tariffs on Steel and Aluminum with respect to Turkey as their currency, the Turkish Lira, slides rapidly downward against our very strong Dollar! Aluminum will be 20 percent and Steel 50 percent. Our relations with Turkey are not good at this time!”

Fundamental political relations underpinning world capitalism after World War II—including free trade and the NATO alliance between America, Europe and Turkey—are rapidly collapsing. On many military and financial conflicts, as US imperialism escalates war in an attempt to use its military muscle to strengthen its fading global hegemony, Washington and the EU now find themselves on opposing sides.

As Berlin remilitarizes its foreign policy and seeks to emerge as the dominant force in a militarist EU, factions in both Berlin and Ankara are considering reviving longstanding strategic ties between the two countries, stretching back to Germany’s Baghdad Railroad plans prior to World War I.

This plan played a major role in stoking inter-imperialist tensions in Europe before the outbreak of the war in 1914. Today, US war plans are again bringing tensions to the breaking point. As Washington tears up the Iranian nuclear treaty and re-imposes financial sanctions on Iran, to cut it off from the world economy and prepare for war, it faces opposition from the major EU powers in alliance with the principal targets of US foreign policy, China and Russia.

While European firms have largely abandoned Iranian markets, the EU is proposing mechanisms to evade US sanctions targeting Iran. On September 24, they met with Chinese, Russian and Iranian officials to agree to a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) funding scheme. The

proposal consists of financing continuing purchases of Iranian oil independently of the US dollar-denominated financial system, paving the way for a broader challenge by the euro to the dollar.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced the SPV plans the next day, stressing that they are unacceptable to Washington. He said he “was disturbed and, indeed, deeply disappointed to hear the remaining parties in the deal announce they’re setting up a special payment system to bypass US sanctions.” He added: “This is one of the most counterproductive measures imaginable.”

On September 12, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker had already called for building up the euro as a global reserve currency challenging the US dollar. He called it an “aberration” that the EU pays for its energy imports in dollars though only 2 percent of these imports come from the United States. “We will have to change that. The euro must become the active instrument of a new sovereign Europe,” he said.

The vast implications of such proposals, as war spreads across the Middle East from Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya, underlies the rapid shift towards the right in official politics, and the constant incitement of nationalism and chauvinism in official European politics. It entails an explosive growth of European militarism, the intensified exploitation of the working class in Europe and internationally, and the preparation of devastating, great-power wars.

The election of a neo-fascist government in Italy, the coming out of broad sections of Germany’s Grand Coalition government in favor of neo-Nazi demonstrations in Chemnitz and Dortmund, and the imposition of a permanent state of emergency in France come as countries across Europe pledge to divert hundreds of billions of euros from social spending into military spending.



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