

Oppose the Turkish military offensive in Syria!

The International Committee of the Fourth International
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The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) condemns the Turkish invasion of Syria targeting Kurdish-led militias. After Washington last week abandoned the Kurdish forces that were serving as its main proxy force in Syria, a rapid and violent military escalation is underway.

According to a Turkish Defense Ministry statement on Sunday, Turkish troops killed 550 Kurdish troops in the first five days of the offensive. At least four Turkish soldiers have also died. There are reports of many civilian casualties on both sides of the Turkish-Syrian border, as shells rain down on defenseless homes. As the Syrian army backed by Iran marches north to meet Turkish invasion forces and their Al Qaeda-linked Syrian “rebel” allies, the Middle East and the world are on the brink of all-out war.

Turkey has plunged into the maelstrom produced by three decades of imperialist war in the Middle East. “Operation Peace Spring,” as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government in Ankara calls its offensive, is neither a peace operation nor a war on terror. It is a drastic escalation of the eight-year war initiated by the CIA-orchestrated regime change operation in Syria, drawing in America, Europe, Turkey and Syrian “rebel” groups on the one hand, and Iran, Russia, China and the Syrian regime on the other.

After Washington and Berlin backed a failed 2016 coup to topple and murder Erdoğan for seeking a deal with Russia, Ankara aims to block the building of a US-backed Kurdish state in Syria.

This fratricidal Turkish-Kurdish conflict is the end product of the Middle East slaughter overseen by Washington and its European imperialist allies ever since the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991 removed the main military counterweight to imperialism. Since then, as US president Donald Trump himself recently admitted on Twitter, Washington has killed millions in wars based on lies—in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and beyond. These wars drove tens of millions from their homes, creating the greatest global refugee crisis since World War II.

Now Ankara is lashing out, seeking a militarist solution to intractable ethnic and class conflicts inflamed by decades of imperialist war. It aims to seize northern Syria, forcibly populate it with millions of Syrian Arab refugees living in Turkey and thus prevent the consolidation of a Kurdish state

along the Turkish-Syrian border. With this strategy, the Turkish bourgeoisie is moving towards disaster.

Ankara’s offensive, which implicates the Turkish ruling class in enormous war crimes, poses the danger of escalation into all-out war between all the world powers.

The ICFI condemns the arrest of those inside Turkey peacefully opposing this offensive. The Turkish offensive comes amid a global resurgence of class struggle—with mass protests for the fall of military regimes in Algeria, Sudan and Egypt, as well as the neo-colonial US puppet government in Iraq. Erdoğan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is well aware of mounting popular anger over a deteriorating Turkish economy and of the AKP’s accelerating collapse in the polls, to under 30 percent. Fearing a social explosion at home, it hopes to drown working class opposition in nationalist and militarist propaganda.

The ICFI intransigently opposes imperialism, including its attempts to remove Erdoğan via a coup. A century after a secular state emerged in Turkey in a war against the imperialist drive to carve up the Ottoman Empire, however, the Turkish bourgeoisie has proven itself incapable of finding any democratic solution to its internal conflicts, let alone securing its independence from imperialism. Indeed, to carry out his offensive, Erdoğan first sought to secure the approval of Washington and its European allies, who tried to murder him only three years ago.

The only progressive answer to the problems of war, ethnic conflict and authoritarian rule lies in establishing a democratic regime and overcoming ethnic divisions through the revolutionary struggle of the working class, unifying workers of all nationalities—Turk, Kurd, Arab, Iranian and Israeli—against imperialist war and the regional capitalist classes.

The developments in Turkey and throughout the region provide fresh confirmation of the world revolutionary strategy elaborated by Leon Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution. The bourgeoisie in Turkey, as in all countries of belated capitalist development, hopelessly tied to imperialism and fearing the working class, is incapable of resolving any of these problems. This task can be completed only through the independent struggle of the working class, leading all of the oppressed sections of society against both the native

bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Washington's blatant double-cross of its Kurdish allies is another bitter lesson in the bankruptcy of Kurdish nationalism as a strategy to advance the Kurds' democratic and cultural rights. The revelation of the Kurdish nationalists' role in imprisoning over 10,000 alleged Islamic State militia members under appalling conditions, on the orders of US and European imperialism, underscores the fraudulence of their claims to be overseeing a democratic regime in northern Syria.

The Kurdish people is spread over Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The only viable strategy to defend their democratic rights, like those of the Turkish people, is a common revolutionary struggle of workers of all ethnicities to take state power and build the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The reactionary positions taken by the entire political establishment in Turkey expose the dead end reached by capitalism in the Middle East. The opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the traditional pro-war party of the Turkish ruling class, has supported Erdoğan's offensive, trying to lull workers to sleep about the danger of military escalation with speculation that a deal can be worked out with the Syrian regime.

This exposes the reactionary role played by the Turkish middle-class pseudo-left parties, which lined up behind the CHP against Erdoğan's AKP in this year's local elections. While the Labor Party (EMEP) called for "permanent unity" with the CHP, the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) ran its leader as a CHP candidate. They bear political responsibility for the CHP's moves to expel Syrian refugees from cities it rules, and now for Turkey's invasion of Syria.

The Kurdish-nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is calling on "international entities" to "take responsibility" and come to the Kurdish militias' aid. But the "international entities" to which the Kurdish nationalists appeal are the Pentagon, the CIA, the Democratic Party and their allies in Europe. What these entities are responsible for is decades of mass murder.

While uncompromisingly defending Kurdish and other oppressed people in the Middle East, the ICFI gives no support to the Kurdish bourgeois nationalists. The disastrous outcome of the US-Kurdish alliance in Syria—including the war crimes carried out in Raqqa and other Syrian towns in the so-called war on ISIS—vindicating the Trotskyist critique of bourgeois nationalism: it has served only to divide the Middle East along ethnic lines and betray its population by subordinating it to imperialism.

The Kurdish bourgeois nationalists, while using "socialist" rhetoric, historically sought out alliances with imperialist and bourgeois powers, from the CIA and Israel to the Shah of Iran, and the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. This produced a series of disasters. Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Massoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party supported

opposing sides and fought each other in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. The Kurdish nationalists, including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), welcomed the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003—though Washington had tacitly backed Baghdad's suppression of a Kurdish uprising after the 1991 Gulf War.

The Kurdish nationalists have now fallen afoul of bitter tactical conflicts between Ankara and Washington over Syria. Ankara supported the NATO war, arming the Islamist militias that Washington used as its shock troops. But Ankara recoiled when, after the defeat of the Al Qaeda-linked militias, the NATO imperialist powers turned to the People's Protection Units (YPG), the PKK's Syrian branch.

For a time, the AKP government had held peace talks with the PKK, hoping to use it to strengthen its hand in Iraq and Syria and to disorient working class opposition at home. But when the YPG began serving as the lead force in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia that was NATO's main proxy force in Syria, Ankara broke off the talks. Amid growing conflicts between Washington and Ankara over Turkey's developing ties to Russia, this has finally led to a bloody showdown.

The working class would pay a horrific price if it allowed itself to be drawn in behind the military operations of the rival capitalist powers in the Middle East. Its approach has to develop along an entirely different axis. Amid a developing struggle of the working class across the region, the decisive task is the political unification of the working class of all nationalities in a common revolutionary struggle against imperialist war.

The Sri Lankan Trotskyist movement's struggle for Permanent Revolution and the United Socialist States of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam, in the context of the United Socialist States of South Asia, is of profound relevance to the explosive crisis in Syria. The Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party indefatigably opposed the military suppression of the Tamils by the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, without adapting or capitulating to the Tamil nationalists. This record of principled struggle for socialist internationalism points the way forward in a proletarian struggle against the growing danger of world war in the Middle East.

The decisive political task remains the construction of revolutionary parties of the working class, sections of the ICFI, in Turkey and across the region, to lead it in the struggle for the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Central Asia.



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