

# No to a Greek-Turkish war in the eastern Mediterranean!

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Amid the escalation of threats and naval maneuvers between Turkey and Greece, Europe and the Middle East are teetering on the brink of war. This summer, Greek ships repeatedly collided with or threatened to exchange fire with Turkish vessels, their ostensible NATO allies, amid conflicts over maritime borders and access to undersea gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the outcome of the decade-long war in Libya. The sharpest warnings must be made. Were fighting to break out in the Mediterranean, it would threaten to escalate into a global conflict.

The risks are admitted openly by leading officials. Last month, before traveling to Athens and Ankara, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declared, “The tension is not just affecting the relationship between the EU and Turkey. A further escalation can damage all sides.” In Athens, he added, “The current situation in the eastern Mediterranean is equivalent to playing with fire. Every little spark can lead to catastrophe.”

A century ago, conflicts in the Balkans triggered by the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914 sparked the eruption of World War I in Europe, on August 4. Today, the imperialist powers are no more capable of halting the drive to a global conflagration than were their 20th century ancestors.

The revival of century-old Greek-Turkish territorial disputes is inseparably bound up with the collapse of US world hegemony, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the breakdown of the NATO alliance between America and Europe. It is, in particular, the fruit of the bloody wars NATO launched in Libya and Syria in 2011, in response to revolutionary uprisings of the working class in Egypt and Tunisia. The resulting scramble for profits and strategic advantage is tearing NATO and the region apart.

In 2013, in the initial stages of the Syrian war, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank described the maze of conflicts over eastern Mediterranean oil and gas reserves:

The oil and gas resources of the Eastern Mediterranean sit, however, at the heart of one of the most geopolitically complex regions of the world. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tensions between Israel and Lebanon, the frozen conflict on Cyprus, and difficult relations among Turkey, the Republic of Cyprus, and Greece all complicate efforts to develop and sell energy from the Eastern Mediterranean. The Syrian civil war has injected a new source of economic and geopolitical uncertainty, and standing in the background is Russia, which is seeking to enter the Eastern Mediterranean energy bonanza, and to maintain its position as the major supplier of oil and gas for European markets.

These conflicts are far more explosive today even than in 2013. Athens feels emboldened to confront Ankara, even though Turkey has eight times Greece’s population and a larger army, by French support. Paris is furious

at Turkish support for the Islamist Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya against France’s Libyan proxy, the Libyan National Army (LNA) of warlord Khalifa Haftar. It sees Turkey’s policy as an intolerable threat to its interests in its former African colonial empire. It has sought to weld Haftar’s other backers, especially Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), into a regional alliance with Greece against Turkey. Syria’s territorial stake in the eastern Mediterranean also inevitably involves its allies, Russia and Iran.

The debacle of the Middle East wars led by America over the 30 years, since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 eliminated the main military-political counterweight to NATO, is rapidly leading towards a new global war. France’s policy against Turkey reflects the European Union (EU) powers’ oft-stated determination to formulate an independent foreign policy from Washington. This involves an assertion of European imperialist interests against Washington, which has imposed trade war tariffs and sanctions on trade with Iran targeting Europe.

Washington is undoubtedly also preparing new wars, though it has remained largely silent on the Greek-Turkish conflict amid growing social protests and strikes at home over police brutality and the pandemic, and explosive tensions in the presidential election. There can be no doubt, however, that Washington is monitoring EU policy in the Mediterranean and planning its own wars.

Last year, on June 20, Trump aborted large scale airstrikes on Iran only 10 minutes before they were to be launched. In a speech four months later, US Ambassador to Greece Geoffrey Pyatt stressed the global significance of the eastern Mediterranean. He declared: “In an era of renewed great power competition and the largest hydrocarbon discoveries of the past decade, this global crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa has returned to the forefront of American strategic thinking. After years of taking the Eastern Mediterranean for granted, the United States has stepped back to take a considered, whole-of-government look at how we advance US interests...”

History shows such conflicts cannot be peacefully resolved under capitalism, whether or not a temporary Greek-Turkish peace deal is somehow reached. The collapse of US hegemony and the shifting of the center of gravity of global industry to the east, towards countries like Turkey and China, brings to unprecedented intensity the contradictions of capitalism that the great Marxists of the 20th century identified as the causes of the outbreak of world war in 1914: between world economy and the nation-state system, and socialized production and private ownership of the means of production. The conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean is a warning of the advanced state of the imperialist drive to a new world war.

The dangers must not be underestimated. There is no enthusiasm among workers in Greece, Turkey, France or other EU countries for a war, let alone one that could escalate into a global conflict. There is explosive opposition to war in the American working class and growing support for socialism. As capitalist governments around the world face growing social opposition and intractable international economic and geopolitical

contradictions for which they have no solutions, the danger that they could launch such a war, and escalate it into a catastrophic global conflict, is very real.

The last two years have also witnessed, however, a historic global eruption of class struggle. Strikes and protests erupted among US teachers and auto workers, with worldwide protests against police violence in America, and movements across Europe with the Polish national teachers strike, the Portuguese nurses strike and the French “yellow vests.” Anti-government protests erupted across Latin America, in India and particularly in countries surrounding the Mediterranean, with protests in Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Algeria. Back-to-work and back-to-school orders imposed as part of a brutal “herd immunity” strategy amid the pandemic sharpen class tensions in every country.

What stopped World War I after it erupted in the Balkans a century ago was the taking of power by the Russian working class, led by the Bolshevik Party of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky in the October 1917 revolution, and the formation of the Communist International to lead the working class in a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and imperialist war. The defenders of this strategic perspective today are the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement. Only an independent, international political mobilization of the working class against capitalism, to take state power and build socialism can halt the drive to war.

Against war, the turn is to the developing movement in the international working class and the struggle to arm it with Marxist consciousness of the necessity to build an international anti-war and anti-imperialist movement in the working class.

### **Historical and political roots of the Greek-Turkish drilling rights dispute**

The conflicts between Greece and Turkey over maritime borders and resources are rooted in unresolved problems of the 20th century. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne established land borders between Greece and Turkey. This event and the subsequent conflicts in the region underscore the invariably reactionary character of attempts to divide up the Balkans and the Middle East along arbitrary national-state borders dictated by imperialism.

The 1919–1922 Turkish war of independence, fought by the Turkish National Movement of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, defeated attempts by British and French imperialism to divide up the Anatolian territory of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat alongside Germany and Austria in World War I. In the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement—exposed before the world by the Soviet government in November 1917—London and Paris had agreed to carve out and create Iraq and Syria. They then attacked the present-day territory of Turkey, joined by Greece in 1919, to divide up the remains of the empire.

Against the imperialist-led colonial occupation in Turkey, Soviet Russia correctly supported the Turkish national resistance, which had strong support among workers and peasants, providing weapons and support to the Ankara government. Urgent military necessity also dictated Soviet policy: London and Paris, together with Berlin, Prague, Tokyo and Washington, had all invaded the Soviet Union, supporting the counterrevolutionary Whites in the Russian Civil War, in an attempt to crush the nascent workers state and restore a neo-colonial, anti-Semitic White regime in Russia. The Greek communists fought to mobilize opposition to the Greek occupation of portions of Anatolia among Greek soldiers.

This did not imply, however, that workers should support either the

Turkish bourgeois state, which sought to exterminate the Turkish communists and trampled on the cultural and political rights of Kurdish people, or the borders it agreed with imperialism. Enforcing these borders entailed horrific forced deportations of 1.6 million people in 1923, in an attempt to establish ethnically-pure Greek and Turkish states. Before its Stalinist degeneration, the Soviet government still based its policy on the perspective of an international socialist revolution that would lay the ground for the withering away of national borders within a world socialist federation.

The Turkish-Greek maritime borders were never settled, however, even after both countries joined the US-led, anti-Soviet NATO alliance after World War II. Greece retained islands dotted across the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, often a few miles off the Turkish coast, making the tracing of a sea boundary contentious and impossible in practice.

A lasting dispute also emerged over Cyprus, the island strategically located off the coasts of Greece, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. Conflict exploded in 1974, when a coup by the CIA-backed Greek junta of the colonels put in power a far-right Greek Cypriot politician, Nikos Sampson, infamous for his attacks on Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish army invaded Cyprus, leading to the lasting division of the island and to the downfall of the Greek junta. Washington and the EU powers backed the Greek junta, however, and do not recognize the Turkish Cypriot enclave.

What sparked today’s military tensions between Greece and Turkey in the Mediterranean are international conflicts bound up with the bloody NATO wars in Libya and Syria. Facing revolutionary uprisings of the working class in January and February 2011 that toppled Tunisian President Zine El Abedine Bin Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, France, Britain and the United States launched an Islamist proxy war in Libya against the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) regime of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after briefly protesting against the wars, turned to support them.

These wars had far-reaching and unintended consequences. Arming Islamist and tribal militias in Libya and bombing the country to provide air support, the NATO powers destroyed the Libyan government in six months. As Libya dissolved into civil war between rival militias, many Islamist fighters also went to fight for regime change in Syria, mainly via Turkey. Despite billions of dollars in support from the CIA and the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms, however, these small, unpopular Sunni Islamist militias could not topple the larger, better-armed Syrian regime. By 2015, after the intervention of first Iranian and then Russian forces to back the Syrian regime, NATO’s Islamist proxies were facing defeat.

The shift by Washington, Paris and other NATO powers to using Kurdish militias as proxies in Syria ultimately led to a breakdown in Turkey’s relations with the imperialist powers. Ankara, in line with its traditional hostility to Kurdish nationalist sentiment inside Turkey, increasingly opposed US and European policy in Syria. After shooting down a Russian jet over Syria in November 2015, nearly provoking a war, it then sought better relations with Moscow. Washington and Berlin retaliated with a July 2016 coup attempt to murder Erdoğan; it failed, however, leaving Erdoğan in power and disillusioned with his nominal NATO allies.

NATO’s reliance on Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood (MB) forces after the Egyptian revolution also led to bitter conflicts across the region. Amid mass protests by the working class in Egypt, the military regime re-established itself via a 2013 coup led by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi, and a massacre of MB supporters. Like the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which do not tolerate the MB or any dissident Islamic group within their borders, the Egyptian junta was deeply hostile to the Libyan Islamist GNA. Their hostility extends to the Islamist AKP in Turkey, which is an ally of the MB and denounced the al-

Sisi regime in Egypt.

The imperialist powers pursued the Libyan war not only eastward to Syria, but also southwards into sub-Saharan Africa. Rampaging across its former colonial empire, French imperialism intervened in Ivory Coast to topple President Laurent Gbagbo, deployed troops to the Central African Republic, and launched in 2013 a war in Mali against Islamist militias in the north of the country. On this basis—and to prosecute the interests of its oil company, Total, against the Libyan GNA and the rival Italian energy corporation ENI—Paris also backed Haftar in Libya.

In this explosive international context, the final stages of negotiations of an Israel-Cyprus-Greece EastMed pipeline to transport gas to Europe via Greece and Italy last year provoked a bitter reaction from Turkey. In August, Erdoğan publicized a “blue homeland” map claiming large portions of the Aegean Sea. In November, after a bilateral maritime and military agreement with the Libyan GNA, Turkey claimed joint exploration rights in the eastern Mediterranean and, in December, began these explorations. Athens responded by expelling the GNA’s ambassador to Greece, and France and Italy announced they would send warships to Cyprus and the Greek island of Crete to defend them against Turkey.

The signing of the Israel-Cyprus-Greece pipeline deal on January 2 led to a new escalation of conflict across the region. Turkey retaliated by announcing it would deploy troops to support the GNA against Haftar’s offensive on Tripoli. This drew condemnation from the French and Egyptian governments. On the sidelines of the Berlin conference on Libya that month, which voted for an EU military mission to Libya, France and Greece announced a formal military alliance.

In April, Turkish forces in Libya intervened to crush the LNA’s advance on Tripoli and forced them to abandon much of the west of Libya, and in May Turkey announced plans to drill for oil directly off the Greek islands of Crete, Karpathos and Rhodes.

The situation escalated rapidly this summer. In June, when the French frigate Courbet tried to stop Turkish ships carrying cargo to Libya, Turkish warships briefly illuminated it with their targeting radar, indicating they were ready to open fire. The Egyptian junta then declared it was preparing plans for a full-scale invasion of Libya, which were adopted in July. In early July, unidentified warplanes rumored to be French or UAE Rafale fighters bombed the Watiya airbase in Libya, destroying key radar installations and wounding Turkish intelligence officials.

Greece also began negotiating Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) deals on maritime borders with Italy and Egypt, a prelude to Athens demanding such talks with Ankara. Turkish officials have however rejected such talks, as the UN Convention on Laws of the Sea, which Turkey does not recognize, would allow Greece to demand a 12-mile zone around each of its islands studded across the Aegean. This would turn virtually the entire Aegean into Greek territorial waters, letting Athens blockade trade bound for Istanbul and Turkey’s major northern cities.

After Turkey’s July 21 announcement that it would dispatch the Oruç Reis exploration vessel escorted by 12 warships to waters off the Greek island of Kastellorizo, Athens placed the Greek military on full alert. Fake text messages in Greece purporting to be from the Defense Ministry and calling on the population to “mobilize” for a “military incident” caused panic. Ultimately, a clash was reportedly only averted by a call to Ankara from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, after which the Turkish ships turned away from the disputed area.

In August, as Greek and Turkish warships stepped up patrols—in one case, a Greek ship opened fire on a Turkish boat, wounding three people—Paris stepped up its campaign. It held joint naval exercises with Egypt and then with Greece; France and the UAE also both sent fighter jets to Greece. French President Emmanuel Macron announced he would draw “red lines” against Turkey, threatening it with war. Now, at the urging of Paris, the EU has agreed to prepare economic sanctions to try to

strangle Turkey.

The working class cannot support any of the capitalist governments leading this dangerous escalation.

Paris, while it drapes its policy in rhetoric on international law, is defending its imperialist interests and its oil profits in its former colonial sphere. It continues the leading role Paris played in pushing for war in Libya, which ended in the devastation of the country and the building of EU detention camps where human rights groups have documented that refugees are enslaved, raped and murdered. These events, and not the speeches of Macron, a former investment banker, reveal the political content of imperialist rhetoric on law and human rights.

A key force driving Macron’s policy is fear and anger at the ongoing international resurgence of the class struggle—a fear now intensified by mounting working class anger over the pandemic. Having brutally cracked down on protests at home, like the “yellow vest” movement and this year’s transit strike, Macron is also violently hostile to the movement developing among workers in former French colonies oppressed by imperialism.

The past year saw million-strong anti-government protests in Lebanon and Algeria, mass protests against Gbagbo’s ouster in Ivory Coast, and strikes and protests in Mali against the French war. Erdoğan’s verbal criticisms of Paris for its imperialist arrogance infuriate French officials. Macron, who on his visit to Lebanon last month after the port explosion spoke with those he met about the country’s former French colonial overlord, General Henri Gouraud, is determined to legitimize French colonialism and continue the imperialist plunder of Africa and the Middle East.

The right-wing government of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was elected by default last year, as voters threw out the Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government. Syriza, a middle-class party based on a fusion of Stalinism and identity politics, had carried out a stunning political betrayal: elected based on promises to end EU austerity, it trampled on repeated votes by the Greek public against austerity. It imposed the largest single package of social cuts in Greek history, while building a network of squalid EU detention camps for refugees.

To outflank Syriza’s right-wing record from the right while continuing its austerity policy, Mitsotakis has relied on police state policies, anti-immigrant measures, and anti-Turkish nationalism. Greek security forces worked with fascist Golden Dawn members to beat and shoot Middle East refugees crossing the Greek-Turkish border. Mitsotakis has included many well known sympathizers of the Greek junta, including Development Minister Adonis Georgiadis and Agriculture Minister Makis Voridis, in his cabinet. From this inevitably flows a militarist, anti-Turkish policy.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government is seeking with its aggressive drilling policy to assert the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which depends on imported oil and gas, and counteract its collapse in the polls. Workers’ anger is mounting over the brutal back-to-work policy amid the COVID-19 pandemic, falling purchasing power and continuing wars in the Middle East. Within certain limits, Erdoğan welcomes EU criticisms, which let him pose as an anti-imperialist, stoke Turkish nationalism and try to smother rising class conflict in Turkey.

The Erdoğan government’s record confirms Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution: in countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is incapable of establishing democratic rights or opposing imperialism. A reactionary bourgeois regime maneuvering between various great powers, the Erdoğan government’s policies have led only to disaster. It has adapted to the imperialist wars in Libya and Syria while continuing the oppression of the Kurdish people inside Turkey and adopting a murderous “herd immunity” strategy on COVID-19. The struggle against war and to defend the lives, livelihoods and democratic rights of workers and oppressed sections of the middle class depends on the international unification of the struggles of the working class, drawing

behind them the other oppressed classes, in a revolutionary struggle for socialism.

### **The unraveling of American imperialism's world hegemony**

The war danger in the eastern Mediterranean vindicates the warnings and analyses the ICFI has made over a period of decades. The ICFI has long emphasized that the insoluble geopolitical contradictions of capitalist society in the era of globalization would again pose before billions of workers the alternative of world war or world socialist revolution. The Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 vindicated Trotsky's warnings of the counterrevolutionary nature of Stalin's nationalist theory of "socialism in one country." It did not, however, resolve the contradictions of capitalism that had led to the outbreak of World War I and the Russian revolution, or put an end to the era of world socialist revolution opened in October 1917.

Analyzing the 1999 NATO war in Serbia and ongoing bombing of Iraq, WSWS Editorial Board Chairman David North pointed to the significance of the explosive geopolitical conflicts unleashed by the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He wrote:

Just as the development of imperialism witnessed the efforts of the major powers to parcel out the world at the end of the last century, so the dismantling of the USSR has created a power vacuum in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia that makes a new division of the world inevitable. The principal significance of Yugoslavia, at this critical juncture, is that it lies on the Western periphery of a massive swathe of territory into which the major world powers aim to expand. It is impossible for the US, Germany, Japan, France, Britain, and the other powers to simply look passively at the opening of this area. A struggle is unfolding for access to the region and control over its raw materials, labor and markets that will far outstrip the last century's "scramble for Africa."

Warning of "a series of wars to come," North noted that "the potential for a conflict with Russia has actually increased," and the impact of the disappearance of the Soviet Union as the common enemy uniting US and European imperialism: "The European bourgeoisie will not be content to forever accept a subordinate station to the US. Its position would be continually eroded as the US sought to press its advantage."

North also drew attention to the implications of the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in China, and China's industrial growth based on access to world markets and modern technology: "Open conflict between the US and China is inevitable. A historically oppressed country and not an imperialist power, China is well on its way to the restoration of capitalism: it aspires to be a major regional economic power. Such a development, as the present anti-Chinese hysteria in US newspapers reveals, is vehemently opposed by a substantial sections of the American ruling elite."

The complex entanglement of wars and conflicts around the eastern Mediterranean dispute reflects the extremely advanced state of the crisis analyzed by the ICFI two decades ago. US imperialism's attempt to counteract its economic and social decline by using military force—in a broad arc running from the Balkans and North Africa across the Middle East to Central Asia—has failed.

The imperialist wars launched in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya

and Syria (2011) ended in debacle. Fought for world domination but marketed to the public with lies—as a war on Islamist terror, a hunt for nonexistent "Iraqi weapons of mass destruction," and as support for a democratic revolution in the Middle East—they have discredited the political establishment. Tens of millions of people participated in worldwide protests against the Iraq war in 2002-2003. These wars have since caused millions of deaths and forced tens of millions to flee their homes.

These wars have set the stage for a collapse of the NATO alliance and the drive towards a new world war. In Europe and in the Middle East, US imperialism faces significant great power rivals. In Europe, Germany announced the re-militarization of its foreign policy in 2014, for the first time since the fall of the Nazi regime at the end of World War II. Since 2016, when Brexit prevented London from vetoing their plans, Berlin and Paris have repeatedly pledged to design an EU military policy independent of Washington.

On the Mediterranean coast and across the Middle East, Washington now faces entrenched great power opposition. Its wars have consolidated pro-Iranian regimes in Iraq and in Syria, which is also backed by Russia.

China, which Washington has identified as its single greatest global rival, is also increasingly influential. As its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has developed energy, infrastructure and industrial projects across the Middle East, it has emerged as the largest trading partner for countries such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In July, it reportedly offered Iran a treaty involving \$400 billion in investment and assurances of mutual defense in case of US attack.

This represents a decisive setback for US imperialist foreign policy as its leading strategists formulated it in the 1990s. In 1997, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski called Eurasia the "world's axial super-continent" and asserted: "What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and historical legacy... In a volatile Eurasia, the immediate task is to ensure that no state or combination of states gains the ability to expel the United States or even diminish its decisive role."

As the NATO alliance now breaks apart in the eastern Mediterranean, US imperialism sees potential enemies and rivals scattered across the Eurasian landmass, including inside NATO itself.

These extraordinarily sharp conflicts preclude any peaceful, long-term resolution of the eastern Mediterranean crisis by NATO. When German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas addressed a meeting of French officials after his return from Athens and Ankara, he stated: "The United States looks at the rest of the world ever more directly through the lens of its rivalry with China... American readiness to play the role of a global power ensuring stability has fallen."

As the Marxist movement insisted after the outbreak of World War I, responsibility for the war danger rests not with one or another imperialist state or politician, however aggressive, but with the capitalist nation-state system as a whole. European imperialism is no alternative to the bankruptcy of US imperialism. Indeed, the initial attempt of Paris and Berlin to operate their own foreign policy in the Mediterranean has rapidly triggered an explosive conflict. It is also far from certain that the interests of German and French imperialism, which fought each other in two world wars in the last century, will prove to be compatible as they set out to loot ever larger portions of the globe.

### **The pro-war role of the petty-bourgeois parties**

The only way to halt the capitalist powers' spiral towards a new world

war is the international unification of the struggles of the working class against war, the pandemic and capitalism on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program. The upsurge of the international class struggle since 2018 and the growing audience for socialism among workers and youth shows that the basis of such a policy exists in the objective situation. The principal obstacle remains the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class.

Even as they rise up in struggle independently of or against established trade unions and parties, workers still face the residual influence of the pseudo-left parties of the affluent middle class. These forces, based on a fusion of Stalinism and identity politics, consciously oppose revolution and seek to tie workers to the capitalist nation-state system. During the mass uprisings of the Egyptian revolution between 2011 and 2013, they propagandized for workers to support whichever faction of the Egyptian bourgeoisie—at first a military junta, then the Brotherhood, and finally the Sisi dictatorship—was preparing to take power. This finally led in 2013 to the consolidation of the Sisi military dictatorship and the crushing of the upsurge of the Egyptian workers.

Now they are working to tie workers in Greece and in Turkey to the war drive by demanding they support the national governments and armed forces in each country. The most striking example is the Syriza party in Greece. A coalition between fragments of the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) and anti-globalization movements based in the post-1968 middle class student movement, Syriza aggressively supports the militarist line of the Mitsotakis government.

In Greece, Syriza leader and former prime minister Alexis Tsipras reacted to the eastern Mediterranean stand-off with a jingoistic appeal for a mobilization of the Greek military against Turkish vessels: “The way in which these illegal seismic activities must and can be prevented is known to our Armed Forces since October 2018, when they attempted it effectively. We have full confidence in their abilities.”

The KKE itself gave a twist to Tsipras’ chauvinist remarks, calling for a “patriotic stance” in defense of Greek national interests and denouncing “cosmopolitanism.” It asserted, “We must all put first the Greece of the workers, farmers, struggling self-employed traders and craftsmen, scientists, men and women, the young and pensioners. And not for a Greece of monopolies, cosmopolitanism, big capital and their political handlers who come in many forms.”

In a joint statement, the KKE and the Stalinist Turkish Communist Party (TKP) come out in support of the Lausanne treaty and the capitalist nation-state system in the Balkans. They declare that they are “against border violations and the questioning of international Treaties that have defined the borders in the region,” and “against the change of borders and the Treaties that define them.” This means that the KKE and TKP reject a struggle to unify workers across these borders and accommodate to the imperialist wars and intrigues that underlay the international treaties. This means the KKE and TKP today would side with the capitalist state against each other in case of war.

In Turkey, the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), the traditional party of the Turkish ruling class, has sanctioned President Erdoğan’s government’s eastern Mediterranean policy. CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu previously stated, regarding disputed islands in the Aegean Sea held by Greece, “I will seize all of those islands.” Nevertheless, a raft of parties including the Left Party (formerly the Freedom and Solidarity Party, ÖDP) and the Labor Party (EMEP) and the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP), are oriented to and support the CHP, backing CHP mayoral candidates in last year’s local elections.

The Kurdish nationalist People’s Democratic Party (HDP), which similarly backs the CHP as a lesser evil against Erdoğan, has issued a statement declaring that all the natural resources in the region “around the Cyprus Island belong to both Turkish and Greek Cypriot peoples, and these resources should be used by them together and simultaneously.”

Noting proposals for talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, it called for “keeping all political, diplomatic and legal channels of dialogue open.”

The HDP’s statement exemplifies the bankruptcy of Kurdish bourgeois nationalism. Its allies inside Syria have functioned as proxies of America, France and other imperialist powers. Within Turkey, it seeks alliances with reactionary bourgeois parties like the CHP, which are hostile to the democratic rights of the Kurdish people and oriented to the EU. These policies reflect the HDP’s rejection of an orientation to the international working class: it has nothing to propose when war tensions mount, even as all diplomatic channels are kept open, because the different imperialist and capitalist powers towards which the HDP has oriented are driving towards war with each other.

In France, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI), which is supported by the Stalinist French Communist Party, have both maintained a deafening silence on the Greek-Turkish dispute. These parties enthusiastically supported the Libyan war when NATO first launched it in 2011. NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot led calls for Paris to arm Libyan “rebels.” LFI, which has close ties to the officer corps and the police trade unions, is a pro-war party that supports the re-implementation of the draft in France.

A particularly reactionary role falls to the elements of this pseudo-left milieu who seek to tie workers to these nationalist organizations, while posturing as internationalists. This is the function of the Revolutionary Workers Party (DİP), the Turkish affiliates of the Workers Party (PO) of Argentina and its Greek sister party, and the Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK) of Savas Michael-Matsas.

Their hostility to the working class is underscored by their support for Syriza’s treacherous election promises in January 2015. The EEK called for a “powerful United Front of all workers’ and popular organizations ... from KKE, Syriza, Antarsya to EEK, the other left organizations, anarchist and anti-authoritarian movements.” It knew that Syriza is a pro-capitalist party, however. To cover its tracks, it advised voters to support Syriza but also “to demand from their leadership to break with the bourgeoisie, the political staff, all opportunists and suitors of capital’s power.”

As for DİP, it declared in the run-up to the elections: “We will be so happy at how strong the camp of the working class and the toilers led by Syriza will emerge out of the election.”

Their joint statement today on the Greek-Turkish dispute tries to paint the reactionary nationalist politics of the pseudo-left milieu in internationalist colors. It criticizes the Greek and Turkish bourgeoisie for not securing more of the oil profits, and instead letting it go to the oil companies of the major imperialist powers: “The fact of the matter is that the ruling classes in each country are offering the lion’s share in the partition of the natural riches of the Mediterranean to the great powers that pose as their protectors. This is a fight between the Totals and the ENIs and the Shells and the BPs and the Exxons, not between the workers of Greece and Turkey!”

Denouncing the Israeli state for usurping Mediterranean oil wealth from “its rightful owners, the Palestinian people,” it concludes with a bankrupt appeal: “Let us step up class war against war! The main enemy is within our own countries—the Greek and Turkish capitalists, their governments and regimes, at the service of their imperialist patrons.”

The EEK and DİP have a long history of sounding the drums of war and siding with their own bourgeoisie in times of crisis. When in 2010 Israel assaulted the Mavi Marmara, a ship carrying humanitarian supplies, killing nine Turkish citizens, the DİP did not appeal for a mobilization of the Turkish, Israeli and international working class. Rather, it appealed to the Erdoğan government to “Send warships, take back aid ships from Israel!”

The perspective of the EEK and D?P is to divide up the resources of the region between the artificial states created by the imperialist division of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, it is impossible to peacefully divide up the region's resources between its complex, overlapping ethnic groups, for the same reason it is impossible to trace boundaries for nation-states in the region. The region and its profits are divided by imperialist wars, in which the ex-colonial and semi-colonial bourgeoisies inevitably play a subordinate role.

The working class cannot assign itself the hopeless and reactionary task of carrying out a division of profits and territory among nation-states in the place of the bourgeoisie and criticizing the capitalist class for not defending the national interest well enough against other nationalities. This bankrupt perspective, advanced by the EEK and the D?P, in any case rapidly devolves into the perspective of Syriza and the CHP. It means, as the Greek and Turkish navies face off in the Mediterranean and the Aegean to divide up oil profits, to rally workers for war for profits against the foreign enemy.

### **For an international movement of the working class for socialism and against war**

The reactionary lie that workers and soldiers in Greece and Turkey are enemies destined to shoot each other must be rejected and opposed. The fight against war and for a rational development of the productive forces in the Mediterranean places the working class before the task of wresting control of Eurasian and global supply chains from the plunder and anarchy organized by the financial aristocracy. This great struggle requires a ruthless break with the nation-state system and all bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties.

Explaining in his 1929 work *Permanent Revolution* the perspective that had underlain the October Revolution and the founding of the Soviet Union and the Communist International, Trotsky wrote:

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state. From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion, only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.

The turn now is to the international working class, which has been immensely strengthened by three decades of the globalization of production. Since 1980, the industrial working class alone has nearly quadrupled, from approximately 250 million to nearly 1 billion human beings. Overall, the working class grew by 1.2 billion between 1980 and 2010. The percentage of the global labor force consisting of peasants has fallen since 1991 from 44 to 28 percent, as hundreds of millions of rural people move to the cities to find work.

Over 1 billion people are expected to join the ranks of the working class in Africa alone in the next century. The fear of the French bourgeoisie in particular at the explosive strikes and protests in its former African colonies is bound up with projections that by 2050, 85 percent of French

speakers worldwide could live in Africa, many of them in rapidly-industrializing sub-Saharan African countries. This would be a total of 700 million people, compared to France's current population of 66.5 million, and a projected 2050 population of 74 million.

The international eruption of the class struggle since 2018 reflects explosive political anger at staggering levels of social inequality and military-police violence produced by capitalism. The wave of mass protests and class struggles, including in dozens of former colonial and semi-colonial countries, also reflects the growing strength of the international working class and of the productive forces created by 21st century industry and economy.

The unification of the titanic forces of the international working class in a socialist struggle against imperialist war and capitalism is the great task posed by the Mediterranean dispute. The way forward is a revolutionary struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe and the United Socialist States of the Middle East, against the EU and the Treaty of Lausanne settlement, as part of a world socialist federation. This means at all points advancing revolutionary class unity with struggles by workers of other nationalities against petty-bourgeois appeals for national solidarity with capitalist exploiters in each country.

The last two years of the class struggle have, moreover, again confirmed the great lesson of the October Revolution and the 20th century: the working class cannot by spontaneous strikes and protests improvise an international organization and revolutionary strategy against capitalism and imperialist war. The struggle for internationalism and for socialism against the petty-bourgeois parties that seek to herd workers behind bourgeois warmongers in each country can only be waged consciously. It requires a revolutionary political leadership in the working class. Only the Trotskyist movement can lead the struggle for a break with the prevailing nationalist orientation fostered by Stalinist and bourgeois-nationalist parties over decades.

This requires building sections of the ICFI in countries across the Middle East, Europe and internationally to unify the developing movement of the working class in a worldwide movement for socialism. The ICFI appeals to its supporters and to readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to give active support, contact the ICFI and fight to build it as the international revolutionary leadership of the working class in the struggle against war.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**