

# Greece buys billions in French arms amid war tensions with Turkey

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On Saturday, conservative Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced a purchase of billions of euros in French weaponry and a large increase in the size of the Greek military. This massive increase in military spending, by a country which the European Union (EU) has devastated with billions of euros in draconian cuts to social spending over the last decade, marks a major escalation in Greece's ongoing military standoff with Turkey.

Mitsotakis indicated that Greece will purchase 18 Rafale fighter jets, four French naval frigates with naval helicopters, and a large supply of anti-tank weapons, torpedoes and missiles. It will also ask French firms to upgrade four Greek frigates that are already in service. Finally, Mitsotakis said that 15,000 more soldiers would be recruited to the Greek armed forces.

"The time has come to reinforce our armed forces. ... This is an important program that will form a national shield," Mitsotakis declared in a speech in Thessaloniki.

The sale comes after months of escalating threats and one direct collision last month between Greek and Turkish warships in the eastern Mediterranean, as Athens and Ankara lay competing claims to territorial waters and oil-rich seabeds in the region. In this dispute, Paris has aggressively backed Athens, sending several warships and fighter jets to the eastern Mediterranean to counterbalance Turkey's numerical superiority over Greece.

Paris also is seeking to undercut Turkey's position in Africa and specifically in Libya, where French President Emmanuel Macron backs warlord Khalifa Haftar and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan backs the Government of National Accord (GNA). Haftar and the GNA currently lead the two main

factions in the decade-long civil war in Libya triggered by NATO's war against the country in 2011.

On Thursday, Macron had met other southern European heads of state in a so-called Med7 summit (with Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Malta and Cyprus) in the Corsican city of Ajaccio. Beyond discussing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen the southern European powers seek new EU bailout funding, they pledged to renew France's plans for a Union of the Mediterranean, vetoed by Berlin a decade ago. They also issued joint criticisms of Turkey's maritime claims in waters also claimed by Greece or Cyprus.

The Med7 states adopted a statement calling to "renew the southern partnership between the European Union, its member states and our southern neighbors. We await with interest the November 27 regional forum of the Union of the Mediterranean." They also pledged to coordinate policy in the Sahel, where they aim to prevent African refugees from reaching Europe and to assist France's ongoing bloody war in Mali.

In addition to "hailing" multi-trillion-euro EU bank and corporate bailouts adopted to enrich the financial aristocracy during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Med7 states also criticized Turkey. They stated, "We reiterate our full support to Cyprus and Greece amid repeated threats against their sovereignty and aggressive measures by Turkey."

At a press conference during the summit, Macron declared that the Turkish government "today behaves in an unacceptable way" and should "clarify its intentions." He added that, from the standpoint of the Med7 states, "Turkey is no longer a partner in the Mediterranean region."

On Saturday, Erdoğan replied by criticizing France's neo-colonial policies in the region. He verbally attacked the French president: "Macron, this is not the last

problem you will have with me. You don't know history. You don't even know France's own history. Don't mess with me. Don't mess with Turkey." Citing France's bloody 1954-1962 colonial war in Algeria and to its complicity in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which 800,000 people were killed, Erdoğan added: "You cannot lecture us on humanity."

Erdoğan instructed Greece not to follow French policy, "do not take these paths. You will be left all alone." He added that Greece should "demonstrate good-neighborly behavior. Fortunately, we make our own decisions. Turkey can give any fight, if necessary."

All of these statements point to the urgent and growing danger of war amid a deepening breakdown of the NATO alliance and growing military tensions in the eastern Mediterranean.

France's arming of Greece and growing tensions with Turkey are the outcome of decades of war in the Balkans and the Middle East since the 1991 Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR. The bitter struggle over access to oil and gas profits and trade routes unleashed by the 2011 NATO wars in Libya and Syria are having explosive consequences. France is assembling an alliance including Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to isolate and threaten its ostensible NATO "ally," Turkey.

As for the Erdoğan regime, discredited by its draconian herd immunity policy targeting workers in Turkey, it is aggressively staking oil claims while striking a populist, "anti-imperialist" stance to try to limit growing opposition at home. This posture is empty, however: Turkey's GNA proxies in Libya are themselves the officially recognized product of NATO's neo-colonial 2011 war in Libya, which Erdoğan himself ultimately supported.

Above all, the fact that Greece will spend billions of euros on a major increase in its military arsenal underscores that the costs of these reactionary war threats are borne by the working class. While the EU has imposed tens of billions of euros in austerity measures since the 2008, slashing real income levels by an average 30-40 percent, Athens is nonetheless pledging to find billions to spend on armaments that would only be used in an all-out regional war.

The risk of such a conflict, amid a surge of global geopolitical tensions linked to Washington's war

threats against China and to the COVID-19 pandemic, is rapidly growing. These tensions are very directly involved in the region, as Russian warships and planes operate out of Syria, which also has a coastline nearby in the eastern Mediterranean.

One indication of growing great-power tensions in the region was Friday's announcement that Chinese troops will join forces from Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Myanmar, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Pakistan in joint military exercises in the Caucasus. The exercises are to involve 80,000 soldiers together with tanks and combat vehicles.

Returning to America from Qatar, where he had attended talks with the Taliban on Afghanistan, Pompeo stopped on Saturday in Cyprus and met with Republic of Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades. Noting that "crucial developments are taking place in the eastern Mediterranean," he said: "We remain deeply concerned by Turkey's ongoing operations surveying for natural resources in areas over which Greece and Cyprus assert jurisdiction over the eastern Mediterranean."

In an indication that Washington and Paris are now pursuing different and conflicting policies in the region, Pompeo called for de-escalation of tensions inside NATO: "Increased military tensions help no one but adversaries who would like to see division in transatlantic unity."

This was not, however, an appeal for a peace policy. Pompeo went on to demand that Cyprus cut its longstanding relations with Russia, amid the continuing standoff between US and Russian troops in nearby Syria. He told Anastasiades: "We know that all the Russian military vessels that stop in Cypriot ports are not conducting humanitarian missions in Syria, and we ask Cyprus and the president to consider our concerns."

The escalating chaos and divisions between the major regional and world powers underscore the urgency of the unification of workers internationally in a socialist, anti-war movement.



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