Turkish President Erdo?an meets Biden at NATO summit

Ula? Ate?çi
15 June 2021

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an met his American counterpart Joe Biden in a closed-door meeting on Monday during the NATO summit in Brussels. The two leaders then put a positive face on this first face-to-face meeting between them since Biden took office, though several significant disputes remain unresolved.

The meeting took place just weeks after the US State Department condemned "President Erdo?an's recent anti-Semitic comments," after Erdo?an attacked Biden for supporting the ongoing Israeli onslaught against the Palestinians. Calling Israel a "terrorist state," Erdo?an accused Biden of "writing history with blood on your hands."

Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Turkey was not acting like a NATO ally but violating "international law" over the issues, including the Armenia-Azerbaijan war, the eastern Mediterranean and Libya.

The *Washington Post* wrote: "The last time Biden met with the Turkish leader, during a vice-presidential visit to Ankara in 2016, it was to deny Erdogan's charges that the United States had helped plot a coup attempt against him."

Briefly remarking on his meeting with Erdo?an, Biden said, "We had a positive and productive meeting, much of it one-on-one. We had detailed discussions on how to proceed on a number of issues." He added, "Our two countries have big agendas. Our teams are going to continue our discussions, and I'm confident we'll make real progress with Turkey and the United States."

Facing a deepening economic crisis and growing social anger exacerbated by the homicidal response to the pandemic, as well as a far-right mobster's allegations that are undermining his government, Erdo?an issued a more detailed statement on the meeting. Despite his previous nationalist tirades against the US, he declared his commitment to the NATO imperialist alliance. He said, "We are going to increase our cooperation with the US. There is no problem between us that cannot be solved.

"We believe that cooperation between the US and Turkey will contribute to regional security," he continued. In fact, "regional security" created by the US-led imperialist wars in the Middle East and North Africa over the last 30 years has devastated Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and beyond, killed millions and turned millions more into refugees trapped in squalid camps.

In the summit communiqué, the NATO powers took the opportunity to "reiterate our appreciation to our Ally Turkey for hosting millions of Syrian refugees." Maintaining close military-strategic ties with the US and NATO, the Turkish ruling class willingly aids imperialist plunder.

Erdo?an added that there is "strong will" for US-Turkish cooperation, "based on mutual respect and interests in every field." However, no concrete progress was reported in the major diplomatic conflicts between Washington and Ankara.

These include first and foremost US support for Kurdish nationalist militias in Syria. Ankara sees a possible US-backed Kurdish state in Syria as a major threat to its national interests. On this, Erdo?an said, "Our expectation is that our allies cut their support to those terrorists," referring to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forces in Syria. Ankara considers the YPG as the same as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is banned in Turkey as a terrorist organization.

According to Al-Monitor, the Biden administration decided "to not extend a sanctions waiver granted by the Trump administration in April 2020 to American oil company," Delta Crescent Energy, whose waiver expired April 30, "to operate in northeast Syria."

However, it does not signal a major shift in US policy on Syria. Hundreds of US soldiers remain in the area controlled by Kurdish forces. Just last month, US Acting

© World Socialist Web Site

Assistant Secretary Joey Hood traveled to northeast Syria to meet senior officials of the YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia.

Last week, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar made similar anti-YPG calls to NATO at the opening ceremony of the NATO Maritime Security Center of Excellence in Istanbul. This initiative targets Russia, particularly in the nearby Black Sea. “Turkey has repeatedly called on its allies to fight together against the YPG/PKK and Daesh [ISIS] terrorist organizations in northern Syria, which threaten our national security and regional stability,” he said.

Boasting that “Turkey is among the top eight countries that contribute the most to the military budget with a rate of almost 2 percent of its GDP,” Akar repeated his government’s offer to build a so-called “safe zone” in northern Syria. He stated, “Time and again, we told our NATO allies about the need to create a safe zone in Syria.”

The NATO communiqué referred to Syria 12 times, announcing plans “to monitor and assess the ballistic missile threat from Syria. … We reiterate our determination to defend NATO territory and borders against any threats and to address challenges emanating from Syria.”

While Ankara focuses on preventing the building of a Kurdish enclave in its southern border, it also continues to back the NATO war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Significantly, the US media have begun a propaganda campaign to rehabilitate the main American proxy force in this war, Al Qaeda.

The other major topic without progress in the Biden-Erdo?an meeting was Turkey’s acquiring of a Russian-made S-400 advanced air defense system. “On the issue of S-400s, I told [Biden] the same thing I had in the past,” Erdo?an said.

Washington canceled Turkey’s participation in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and sanctioned the Turkish defence industry on the grounds that its use of the S-400s could compromise US security. Before the NATO summit, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, “Regarding the S-400 system, our policy has not changed.”

The only issue where agreement emerged is Turkey’s military presence in Afghanistan, including the maintenance of the Kabul international airport after US and other NATO forces depart. Erdo?an said, “US diplomatic, logistical and financial support is important for a sustained Turkish presence in Afghanistan.”

On Monday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said, “Some NATO countries, such as the United States and Turkey, are also in direct dialogue on how to make an international airport in Kabul sustainable. This is important for the continuation of diplomatic presence and assistance for both NATO allies and the entire international community.”

The Taliban have denounced this initiative in the service of imperialism, however. Its spokespeople told Reuters: “Turkey was part of NATO forces in the past 20 years, so as such, they should withdraw from Afghanistan on the basis of the agreement we signed with the United States on 29th Feb 2020.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained: “Underlying the divisions over the Afghanistan withdrawal are neither concerns over terrorism, nor, much less, the rights of women. At stake are geostrategic interests in a country that provided US imperialism with a beachhead in energy-rich Central Asia and a potential launching pad for wars against China, Iran or Russia.”

The US press presented Erdo?an’s willingness to reconcile only with its NATO allies as due to the deep political crisis it faces inside Turkey.

“Thanks to both the coronavirus pandemic and his mismanagement of the economy, he is now facing severe domestic strains, with soaring inflation and unemployment, and a dangerously weakened lira that could set off a debt crisis,” the *New York Times* wrote Sunday, adding: “So he has dialed back his approach, already softening his positions on several issues in the hope of receiving badly needed investment from the West—something Russia cannot provide.”

Erdo?an’s growing difficulties at home and swing back closer to its imperialist allies in fact reflects working class anger at “herd immunity” policies on the pandemic and at decades of war that is growing among workers in the United States, Turkey and internationally.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site