# Taliban advance in Afghanistan, refugee crisis stagger Turkish ruling elite

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As the Taliban seize large parts of Afghanistan following the US military withdrawal, conflicts are erupting in the Turkish ruling elite over their presence in Afghanistan. Warning of a wave of immigration from Central Asia, the bourgeois opposition parties are attacking the government from the right, seeking to divide the working class along national lines.

The withdrawal of US forces announced by President Joe Biden in April is now 95 percent complete, according to the Pentagon, and will be completed by the end of August. Only some 650 troops are left in Afghanistan to guard the massive US embassy and the Kabul airport. According to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, the Taliban has seized about half of the country's 419 district centers. Just last month, it held only 81 centers.

Many countries, including Russia and China, are signaling a compromise with the Taliban in anticipation of their likely military victory in Afghanistan. Officials from Turkey, the only NATO power with troops in the country apart from the US and Norway, which operates a field hospital, are stating that they see the Taliban as a potential Afghan government.

On July 20, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an said: "There are some issues that the Taliban are uncomfortable with. By negotiating this process with the Taliban, just as the Taliban made some of the talks with the United States, the Taliban should hold these talks with Turkey much more comfortably…" He added: "I believe that we will negotiate better and agree on these issues. … We have nothing against their beliefs."

While Erdo?an hypocritically criticizes "imperial powers" for their bloody 20-year war in Afghanistan, in which the Turkish ruling elites acted as accomplices, he aims to have a say in Afghan politics by moving closer to the same imperialist powers, especially Washington.

Erdo?an then described his government's approach on Afghanistan: "We also stood by our Afghan brothers against all imperial powers. … Now there is a new era. Three main authorities are seen here: NATO, the United States and Turkey. The United States announced its decision to withdraw from the region, but Kabul airport has been operated by Turkey for 20 years. And the United States also wanted Kabul airport to be operated by Turkey after that."

Then, he announced the conditions on which his government would serve as a lackey of imperialism, saying: "We are currently looking at this positively. But we have some conditions from the United States. … First, the United States will be on our side at the point of diplomacy, in diplomatic relations. Secondly, [the United States] will mobilize their means for us at the logistics point and will transfer whatever power they have to Turkey in terms of logistics. Also Turkey would need financial and administrative support during this process."

However, the Taliban have already said that foreign troops, including Turkish forces, should be withdrawn from Afghanistan and that remaining foreign forces would be considered hostile. Against Turkey's decision to remain in Afghanistan, the Taliban issued an 8-point statement titled "Statement of Islamic Emirate concerning extension of occupation by Turkish forces in Afghanistan" on July 13.

It concluded with this warning: "If Turkish officials fail to reconsider their decision and continue the occupation of our country, the Islamic Emirate and the Afghan nation—in line with their religious, conscientious and patriotic duty—will take a stand against them as they have stood against the two-decade occupation, in which case the responsibility for all consequences shall fall on shoulders of those who

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interfere in the affairs of others and make such ill-advised decisions."

The government's Afghan policy was tactically criticized by the bourgeois opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) despite the CHP's strong orientation to NATO and the United States. In a July 16 statement, party's spokesperson Faik Öztrak said: "Our Turkish soldiers are not a shield to be put in front of the Taliban, just because it makes possible a deal with Biden and America. ... Don't do this. Otherwise, Erdo?an and his AK Party will be responsible for all damages that [are] suffered [by] our soldiers."

The CHP made clear its nationalist and pro-imperialist orientation, however, by attacking refugees fleeing Afghanistan, with complete indifference for their plight. Öztrak continued: "Afghans fleeing the Taliban are transiting through Iran and flocking to Turkey. With whom did you agree to take these Afghans into our country? ... If the necessary measures are not taken, unfortunately, a new and great migration wave awaits Turkey."

Through its long border with Iran, Turkey is a transit point to Europe for refugees fleeing war, persecution and poverty from Central Asian countries devastated by imperialist interventions. Many also seek asylum in Turkey.

Along this route, immigrants face many deadly dangers apart from human trafficking, fraud, ill treatment and racist attacks. Many lose their lives trying to reach the shores of Greece by crossing the Aegean Sea in makeshift boats or while entering Turkey from Iran from Lake Van. Last year, 61 Afghan and Pakistani immigrants lost their lives when their boat sank in Lake Van. The nearly 5 million refugees and immigrants in Turkey, including at least 3.5 million Syrian refugees, represent a significant fraction of the 80 million refugees fleeing war and poverty worldwide.

The Turkish government is moreover building a wall on its Iranian border, following the policies of Fortress Europe and the US in building of a border wall with Mexico.

Turkish Deputy Minister of Interior ?smail Çatakl? recently announced that "with a budget of 108 million euros, which envisages the establishment of 141 surveillance and 109 communication towers, 85 command control centers and 329 wireless sensor sets on the eastern borders of our country, we will have opportunity of uninterrupted and effective surveillance thanks to the observation and communication towers and command control centers to be established on the 560-kilometer Iranian border."

CHP Chairman Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu reacted to these reactionary anti-refugee policies by blaming Syrian refugees for their economic difficulties and threatening to deport them. He said: "There are serious complaints. People who can't make ends meet and are unemployed complain about Syrians, and we may face much more serious dilemmas in the coming period as a society. We have to solve this problem."

In reality, the CHP itself bears direct responsibility for the horrific conditions facing Syrian refugees, as it supported NATO operations and Turkish cross-border military operations into Syria that have devastated the country over the last decade.

Recently, a far-right campaign has unfolded against refugees in Turkey, both in corporate and social media, aiming to disorient growing working-class opposition as anger builds at the ruling elites' criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This xenophobic lynch-mob atmosphere, especially incited by pro-bourgeois opposition parties and media, paves the way for fascistic attacks not only against refugees but against the entire working class.

CHP's right-wing nationalism against defenseless refugees also exposes pseudo-left groups, who have supported it against the Erdo?an government as a "progressive" alternative in last elections.

The fight against imperialist occupation and for the defense of refugees and democratic rights is inseparable from the unification of the oppressed masses of the Middle East and Central Asia, led by the working class in a common struggle for socialism. Borders must be opened and immigrants released from detention camps so they can study, live and work as they please with full democratic rights, including citizenship rights.

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