

Turkey threatens to expel US, NATO ambassadors

Ula? Ate?çi

25 October 2021

Relations between Turkey and several of its major NATO allies, including the United States, Germany and France, are close to the breaking point after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ordered the foreign ministry to declare 10 ambassadors to Turkey *persona non grata*.

Erdoğan was thereby threatening to expel the ambassadors of Canada, France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United States. Most are NATO allies of Turkey. However, on October 18, their ambassadors had signed a joint statement titled “Statement on Four Years of Osman Kavala’s Detention.”

Yesterday, the US Embassy in Turkey issued an official statement on Twitter to ease tensions. Retweeted by all other embassies, it stated: “In response to questions regarding the Statement of October 18, the United States notes that it maintains compliance with Article 41 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic relations.” This article specifies that ambassadors “have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs” of the state where they work.

Last night, after a cabinet meeting, Erdoğan also sought to ease tensions, declaring: “Our aim is not to cause a crisis but to protect the interests of our country. We believe they [ambassadors] will be more careful in their statements now. With the statement they made today, they turned back from slandering our judiciary.”

Osman Kavala, owner of the Kavala Group, is a millionaire businessman. His companies reportedly have ties to NATO, the Turkish Armed Forces and the Istanbul Police Department. He participates in several foundations, including the Open Society Foundation of American-Hungarian billionaire George Soros.

In their statement, the 10 ambassadors had declared: “The continuing delays in his trial, including by merging different cases and creating new ones after a previous acquittal, cast a shadow over respect for democracy, the rule of law and transparency in the Turkish judiciary system,” before adding that they “believe a just and speedy resolution to his case must be in line with Turkey’s international obligations and

domestic laws. Noting the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on the matter, we call for Turkey to secure his urgent release.”

Kavala was accused of financing the 2013 mass protests in Gezi Park but was acquitted in 2020. However, he was immediately rearrested on charges of aiding the NATO-backed attempted 2016 coup against Erdoğan and spying for Washington. The European Court of Human Rights demanded his immediate release two years ago. His arrest has been strongly criticized by the European political and media establishment since 2017.

Moreover, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) agency downgraded Turkey to a so-called “grey list” on Thursday, for allegedly not blocking money laundering and terrorist financing.

According to Reuters, the International Monetary Fund has found that “grey-listing reduces capital inflow by an estimated 7.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), while foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio flows are also hit.”

Turkey is in the throes of a major financial and economic crisis and a collapse in living standards for millions of working people. The Turkish lira has fallen over 20 percent against the US dollar since early September, reaching a historic low. Official annual inflation rate has hit 20 percent, and working-class opposition is rapidly growing. There has been a surge of strikes and a sharp decline in votes for Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Facing this internal crisis accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, including over eastern Mediterranean gas resources and the NATO wars in Libya and Syria, top Turkish officials reacted sharply to this unprecedented joint diplomatic move. As the 10 countries’ ambassadors were summoned to the Foreign Ministry to protest their statement, Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gül said: “According to our Constitution, no ambassador can give advice to our courts or tell them to do anything.”

Erdoğan was harsher than his officials. On Saturday, in the northwestern province of Eskişehir, he said: “I gave the

necessary order to our foreign minister and said what must be done: These 10 ambassadors must be declared *persona non grata* at once. You will sort it out immediately.” He added, “They will know and understand Turkey. The day they do not know and understand Turkey, they will leave.”

After this threat of a historic break in the traditional military-strategic alliance between Turkey and the US-led NATO alliance, Abdülkadir Selvi, a columnist close to Erdoğan at the daily *Hürriyet*, sent a calculated signal. In an article yesterday, while supporting Erdoğan’s outburst, Selvi called for calm, warning against “breaking ties with the Western world.”

He wrote: “It takes 15 minutes to make the deportation decision [for ambassadors], but then it can take us 15 years to sort things out [with these countries]. I’m worried this will hurt us the most.” He then listed possible retaliatory measures reportedly being discussed in Europe and North America: “To remove Turkey from the Council of Europe; suspend membership negotiations with the EU; withdrawal of EU funds, and a decision of the US and Canada to act jointly against Turkey.”

The Turkish bourgeoisie is deeply attached to the US-led NATO alliance and especially the European market. On Tuesday, TÜSİAD, a major Turkish business federation, expressed its growing concerns, endorsing ties with Washington and the European Union (EU). Its president Simone Kaslowski declared: “The cost of separation from the world is very high, and the damage is irreversible,” adding: “We think it will be important for Turkey to be a respected member of the rule-based global system in the face of the threats and opportunities of the future.”

On Saturday, the *New York Times* reported: “The Biden administration was the driving force behind the letter, in keeping with the president’s policy of publicly calling out states over human rights violations.” A State Department spokesperson said: “The US was aware of the reports [on Erdoğan’s order] and was seeking clarity from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” according to Reuters.

European Parliament President David Sassoli tweeted: “The expulsion of ten ambassadors is a sign of the authoritarian drift of the Turkish government. We will not be intimidated. Freedom for Osman Kavala.”

While the German Foreign Ministry said: “We are currently in intensive consultation with the nine other countries concerned,” Bundestag Deputy Speaker Claudia Roth (Green Party) demanded that Turkey be sanctioned, the German daily *Bild* reported.

Despite Erdoğan’s efforts, US-Turkish relations have been in a mounting crisis since President Biden took office. Biden, who was vice president during the 2016 NATO coup attempt in Turkey, declared his support for Turkey’s

Republican People’s Party (CHP)-led bourgeois opposition before becoming president.

Erdoğan, who did not meet Biden at the UN General Assembly in September, told reporters: “It is my hope that, as two NATO countries, we should treat each other with friendship, not hostility,” adding: “But the current trajectory does not bode well. The point we have reached in our relations with the United States is not good. I cannot say things have gotten off to a good start with Biden.”

While the diplomatic crisis appears temporarily resolved, conflicts between Turkey and its NATO allies remain deep. To avoid spoiling good relations with Beijing, Erdoğan has not supported US government accusations that China is perpetrating a “Uyghur genocide.” Moreover, Ankara acquired a Russian-made S-400 air defense system and made other military deals with Moscow, though these are unacceptable to Washington.

Moreover, Biden’s support for Kurdish nationalist militias in Syria—the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the People’s Defense Units (YPG)—still leads to conflict between these two NATO states. After the recent UN summit, Erdoğan stated: “Biden started to carry weapons, ammunition and equipment to terrorist groups [i.e., the YPG]. We are not going to watch this by standing idly by.”

Writing to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi this month, Biden said: “the actions by the government of Turkey to conduct a military offensive into northeast Syria ... further threatens to undermine the peace, security, and stability in the region, and continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.”

On October 15, after two Turkish security personnel were allegedly killed in a YPG attack, Erdoğan signaled a new invasion of Syria targeting US-backed Kurdish forces, stating: “The terrorists of the PKK, YPG and PYD are running wild in entire Syria, not only in the northern part. The leading supporters of them are the international coalition and the US.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact