

Turkey calls for mediation in Ukraine as US presses for war with Russia

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As the NATO powers led by the United States escalate their war drive against Russia over false allegations that Moscow is preparing to invade Ukraine, Turkey, a member of the NATO military alliance, is calling for de-escalation and mediation between Moscow and Kiev.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who is to meet with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov today, told CNN-Türk on Saturday that Ankara disagrees with US and European claims that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is “imminent.” He said: “If Russia attempts an invasion while this [negotiation] process is going on, it will not be right either. Even if there is no such situation, Western countries should be careful about making statements that cause panic in Ukraine.”

Çavuşoğlu stated that Turkey’s Russian and Belarusian sources had denied the Western powers’ claims. “Any tension, let alone a war, affects all of us,” he said, adding: “It disturbs the peace of all of us. It affects the economy, energy security, tourism and is important in all respects.” Calling for Russian-Ukrainian talks, Çavuşoğlu said: “We would gladly mediate if both sides agree.”

Despite Çavuşoğlu’s pose of neutrality, however, Ankara largely supports NATO’s Ukraine policy and the accelerating NATO war drive against Russia. It has supplied Kiev with critical Bayraktar TB2 armed drones. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made clear Ankara’s stance in mid-January, denouncing Russia: “These things cannot go on with a mentality of occupation. What did Russia do? It has usurped Crimea.”

“We sincerely believe that the crisis will be ended by peaceful and diplomatic means, within the framework of the Minsk Agreements,” he said during an official visit to Kiev earlier this month.

In fact, the use of Turkish-supplied drones in eastern Ukraine violates the Minsk agreements. Moreover, during Erdoğan’s visit, a free trade agreement was signed, as well as a Turkish-Ukrainian military deal to jointly produce Bayraktar drones. These drones played an important role in the victory of Turkish-backed Azerbaijan against Russian-

backed Armenia in the war that broke out in the Caucasus in 2020.

At the end of January, Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, told the Associated Press: “The fulfillment of the Minsk agreement means the country’s destruction,” signaling that Kiev refused to implement the agreement. Moscow then rejected Ankara’s offer to host a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Putin is expected to come to Turkey in the coming days, but only to meet with Erdoğan.

In the CNN interview, Çavuşoğlu also said, “Our only goal now is to prevent conflict and reduce tensions. ... We have shown how strong we are a NATO ally in this process, but we also need to have good relations with Russia.”

After his visit to Ukraine, Erdoğan also said: “We have serious bilateral relations with Russia at the moment. These relations are not ordinary.” His government is increasingly afraid of the devastating consequences of a NATO-Russia war, amid an explosive economic crisis at home.

The Turkish lira has lost a record amount against the US dollar this year, with official annual inflation reaching 48 percent in January. Amid a general impoverishment and a murderous policy of mass infection of the COVID-19 pandemic, the working class is beginning to take action. Turkey is witnessing an unprecedented wave of wildcat strikes in 2022.

Erdoğan criticized his NATO allies for provoking the conflict, declaring: “Unfortunately, the West has not contributed anything to the solution of this issue until now. I can only say that they are creating difficulties. ... When we look at the situation with the US, Biden has not yet been able to show a positive approach to this process as of now.”

The Turkish bourgeoisie has traditionally had deep military-strategic ties with the US-led imperialist powers. Home to many NATO bases, it has NATO’s second-largest army. Turkey sends about 50 percent of its exports to Europe. It has pursued a historical rivalry with Russia over the Mediterranean and Black Seas as well as ongoing

conflicts over Syria, Libya and the Caucasus between Moscow and Ankara.

As such, while voicing occasional impotent complaints about the NATO imperialist powers' drive to war against Russia, Ankara has aligned itself with it, despite Turkey's growing geopolitical, economic and military ties with Russia—especially after growing tensions between Washington and Ankara led to a NATO-backed coup attempt against Erdoğan's government in 2016.

Chief among these Turkish-Russian ties was the purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia, over sharp US objections. Washington responded by removing Turkey from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program and imposing sanctions on the Turkish defense industry, claiming that the S-400 system could put US and NATO security at risk.

There are deep economic ties, especially on energy. According to official data, 33.6 percent of Turkey's natural gas consumption in 2020 (16.2 billion cubic meters) came from Russia. The gas arrives via the Blue Stream and TurkStream pipelines linking Russia to Turkey via the Black Sea. TurkStream also supplies gas to Eastern Europe. There is also nuclear energy cooperation between Ankara and Moscow. While the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in the Turkish southern city of Mersin is still under construction, Erdoğan announced a possible new nuclear plant deal with Russia.

Turkey also imports more than 60 percent of its wheat from Russia, which is also the country sending the most tourists to Turkey.

Turkey, which borders the Black Sea neighbor like Ukraine and Russia, would quickly be drawn into a war due to its NATO membership, the Montreux Convention and its geographical location.

The 1936 Montreux Convention gives Turkey control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and regulates the passage of ships between the Mediterranean and Black Seas. It strictly limits the access of warships from countries outside the Black Sea region. After Erdoğan questioned the convention over his Canal Istanbul project, the Kremlin, which is a party to the convention, stressed the "importance of preservation of the 1936 Montreux Convention in order to ensure the regional stability and safety of the regional Black Sea straits regime."

At the end of January, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar confirmed his government's commitment to the agreement, stating: "Within the framework of the Montreux regime, we are in favor of the countries bordering the Black Sea living in peace, dialogue, tranquility and prosperity." He also added, "We have always argued that the status provided by Montreux is beneficial for all parties and that it is out of the question to give up on it in today's conditions."

Speaking to *Izvestia* Russian daily, Russian Ambassador to Turkey Alexey Erkhov said: "Tensions around Ukraine seriously worry Ankara, both due to geographical proximity and various regional military and political alliances. ... Therefore, Turkey, which does not want an escalation here, sincerely wanted to help the solution as much as possible, and such a desire is certainly worthy of praise."

Last week, he also told the Turkish daily *Türkiye*: "We are of the opinion that the disagreements between Russia and Ukraine are related to Kiev's non-fulfillment of the Minsk agreements. If our Turkish partners can penetrate the Ukrainians and encourage them to fulfill their previous obligations, we would welcome it."

Erkhov stressed that the conflict was not between Ukraine and Russia, but between NATO and Russia. "In fact, the core of the problem is not between Moscow and Kiev, but between Moscow and Washington, Moscow and Brussels, that is, Moscow and NATO. Essentially, it has been NATO's relentless advance to the East, towards Russia's borders, for years," he said.

To *Izvestia*, Erkhov pointed out that "the notorious Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and its so-called leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani have become extremely active in recent weeks." Al-Jolani was the founder of the Al Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, one of the main CIA proxy forces in the NATO war in Syria. Erkhov's remark that HTS "insistently advised foreigners to leave Idlib" shows that US-led NATO powers may prepare for another escalation in Syria as well.

The 2014 US- and German-backed far-right coup in Kiev came after Russia directly intervened in that war to prop up Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's and help prevent a direct NATO attack on Syria.



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