

War danger surge as Ukraine demands Turkey close straits to Russia, Israel bombs Syria

Ula? Ate?çı
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As President Vladimir Putin announced yesterday that Russia launched a “special operation” to protect the “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk from the Ukrainian military, the war threatens to rapidly spread across the Middle East and rest of the world.

Yesterday, only hours after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in Damascus, Israel launched multiple missile attacks on the city. They hit targets at 1:10 a.m., killing three Syrian government soldiers. Syria’s state-owned SANA news agency reported: “Air defense system confronted the missiles and downed most of them. The aggression caused some material damages.”

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes on Syria since Washington and the other NATO powers launched their war for regime change in Syria in 2011. Tel Aviv has targeted positions it claims to belong to Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian forces, as well as Syrian government positions. Both Russia and Iran have provided militarily decisive support to the Assad government in the decade-long war instigated by NATO powers and their regional allies.

While Moscow had largely been silent on earlier US-backed Israeli strikes on Syria, the February 9 strikes that killed one soldier and wounded five, provoked a strong condemnation from the Russian government.

It described these attacks as “illegal,” adding: “Russia strongly condemns the Israeli raids on Syria, and calls for an end to them.”

Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mikdad announced on Wednesday that the aim of Russian Defense Minister Shoigu’s visit to Syria was “to send a message to the whole world that Russia and Syria are strong, and that the battle that the two countries are waging for security and stability all over the world is one.”

Mikdad reaffirmed “Syria’s support for Russian President Putin’s decision to recognize the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk republics from Ukraine,” before adding: “the West is currently acting against Russia, in terms of hostile practices and campaigns aimed at offending it, similarly to what it did against Syria during the terrorist war.” He also condemned US and Turkish military forces in his country as “occupiers.”

Syria’s other major ally, Iran, also blamed NATO for provoking the Russian invasion of Ukraine and called for a peaceful settlement. As Iran faces the threat of a US-led war and crippling US sanctions, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said yesterday: “The Ukrainian crisis is rooted in NATO provocations. We do not see resorting to war as a solution. … Establishing a ceasefire and focusing on a political and democratic solution is a necessity.”

In reality, however, military tensions have surged in the Middle East as the NATO powers made clear they would make no concessions to Russia. After Syrian and Russian fighter aircraft began joint patrols of the airspace along Syria’s borders in mid-January, 15 Russian warships carried out naval exercises off the Syrian coast last week.

Yesterday, Israeli activated air raid sirens after a drone crossed into Israeli airspace from Lebanon undetected by Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system.

This war danger is the culmination of the devastating consequences of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine plays into the hands of the US-NATO powers and increases the danger of a world war. Above all, however, these tensions are the product of 30 years of uninterrupted NATO imperialist wars in the Middle East and Central Asia and its reckless encirclement against Russia, made possible by the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

NATO imperialist wars that caused millions of deaths and wounded in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have relentlessly stoked the risk of a new world war. Thus, this month, US Lieutenant General Erik Kurilla, nominated to take over Central Command that oversees Middle East operations, told the Senate Armed Services Committee the Russia-Ukraine conflict could spill into Syria.

China's increasing commercial influence in the Middle East is also seen as unacceptable by Washington. After signing a 25-year commercial and military treaty with Iran in 2020, Beijing recently included Syria into China's "Belt and Road" global industrial infrastructure project.

Turkey lies at the heart of both the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts immediately to its north and to its south, respectively. Having armed NATO-backed Islamist "rebel" militias in Syria but also having repeatedly invaded Syria to prevent US-backed Syrian Kurdish nationalist militias from establishing a state on its border, Turkey has played a bloody role in the Syrian war.

Yesterday, lining up with its NATO allies, Ankara condemned Russia's decision to recognize Donetsk and Lugansk and its "special operation" in Ukraine. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an stated that his government found the military operation of Russia against Ukraine "unacceptable" and "rejected" it, adding: "This step, which we consider contrary to international law, is a heavy blow to the peace, tranquility and stability of the region."

A massive contradiction underlies Erdo?an's policy. Ankara supports NATO's Ukraine policy and its accelerating war drive against Russia, supplying Kiev with critical Bayraktar TB2 armed drones. It signed a military alliance with Ukraine in 2020. During Erdo?an's visit to Kiev in early February, a free trade agreement was signed, as well as a Turkish-Ukrainian military deal to jointly produce Bayraktar drones.

However, Ankara also has critical military and economic ties with Moscow. Despite US objections, it purchased S-400 air defense systems from Kremlin. It supplies around one-third of its natural gas from Russia through direct pipelines. Russia is building the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in the southern Turkish city of Mersin. Turkey also imports more than 60 percent of its wheat from Russia.

Referring to Ukraine and Russia, Erdo?an said on Wednesday: "We cannot give up on either. We have political, military and economic relations with Russia. We also have political, military and economic relations with Ukraine."

But whatever Ankara's ties with Moscow, Ankara forms part of NATO's war drive against Russia and has supported Kiev in the conflict.

Yesterday, Ukrainian Ambassador Vasyl Bodnar said: "Turkey should not remain neutral in this conflict." He asked Ankara to close the Turkish straits to Russian ships. 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.

Bodnar also provocatively demanded that in order to prosecute war with Russia, Turkey should help Ukraine this year become "a member of NATO within the context of the Madrid Summit. I am sure that if Ukraine is accepted into NATO then Ukraine will win and Russia will lose this war."

These developments are a serious warning. A conflict could erupt if Turkey closed the straits to Russian vessels or clashed with Russian forces in Syria or the Black Sea. Moreover, it could lead to an all-out war between the NATO alliance and Russia, in accordance with NATO's Article 5, which states that "an armed attack against one or more 'parties' will be considered an attack against all of them."

While the NATO powers, whose policy of mass infection during the COVID-19 pandemic has led the death of millions of people, provoke a war threatening the entire planet, there is mass popular opposition to war. Hundreds of thousands of tweets were sent yesterday in Turkey with the hashtags "No to War" and "Stop the War."

The only way out of the current danger of world war is to mobilize the deep opposition to war that exists and build a socialist anti-war movement within the international working class.



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