

# Turkey denounces Greece as tensions mount in NATO over war with Russia

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On May 23, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan bitterly denounced the May 16 trip by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to Washington. Declaring that Mitsotakis “no longer exists” for him, Erdoğan made clear that he viewed the trip by Mitsotakis as a breach of trust with far-reaching implications for the NATO alliance.

Erdoğan denounced Mitsotakis for involving the United States in Greece’s conflict with Turkey in the Aegean Sea. “We had agreed with him not to include third countries in our dispute. Despite this, he visited the US and spoke to the Congress, warning them not to give F-16 [fighter jets] to us,” Erdoğan said. He also accused Greece of harboring supporters of the failed NATO-backed military coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016 that nearly succeeded in assassinating Erdoğan.

Erdoğan also let it be known that he viewed the US building of NATO bases in Greece, targeting Russia and growing Chinese economic influence in the region, as a threat to his government. He said: “And most importantly there are nearly 10 bases in Greece. Whom does Greece threaten with those bases? Or why are these bases being created in Greece?”

As he threatens to veto US-backed plans for Finland and Sweden to join the NATO alliance against Russia, Erdoğan has repeatedly denounced NATO bases in Greece and stated that Turkey’s decision not to veto Greece’s return to NATO’s unified military command was a mistake. Last Thursday, he said: “What happened when [Greece] went back? For example, America has now established a base in Alexandroupoli,” a Greek city near the border with Turkey.

The visit of Mitsotakis to Washington undoubtedly placed significant military and strategic pressure on the Turkish government. Mitsotakis wrote on Twitter that his meeting with Biden “demonstrated how Greece/US relations are at an all-time high—in trade, investment, and

defense.” He also said that “we will launch the process for the acquisition of a squadron of F-35 aircraft. And we do hope to be able to add this fantastic plane to the Greek air force before the end of this decade.”

Turkey was excluded from the F-35 program by the United States following its purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia after the NATO-backed 2016 coup failed.

The rising Greek-Turkish conflict and tensions inside NATO go hand-in-hand with a dangerous escalation in the Aegean Sea. Greece’s *Kathimerini* reported on “a large-scale Greek naval exercise, Storm 2022, which is currently underway and will be completed on May 27,” amid mutual allegations of airspace violations between Greece and Turkey. It wrote that Turkey sent a message with “two F-16s fighter jets that violated Greek airspace, reaching just two 2.5 nautical miles from the northern port city of Alexandroupoli.”

Turkey claimed Greece violated its airspace twice this week, and that it replied to those violations Friday “based on reciprocity and in accordance with” Turkish Air Force’s rules of engagement.

*Kathimerini* also criticized Turkey for having “resumed its practice of allowing boats packed with migrants to depart from its coast for the Greek islands in the eastern Aegean. ... It was the first instance in some time that such a large number of migrants tried to enter Greek territorial waters from the Turkish coast.”

It is apparent, however, that the Aegean conflict is now bound up with the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, and US plans for military escalation against Russia and China.

Erdoğan boasted of assisting NATO in the war against Russia in Ukraine. He said, “Even in the war in the north of the Black Sea, about which everyone likes to talk big, it is us who have given the most significant, concrete and beneficial support to Ukraine.” Turkish arms sales to Ukraine rose from \$2 million in the first quarter of 2021

to \$60 million in the first quarter of 2022. He added that his government “exerts the sincerest efforts to first reach a ceasefire and then to achieve lasting peace in the region by maintaining political and humanitarian relations with Russia.”

Ankara has closed the Dardanelles and Istanbul straits between the Aegean and Black Seas to both Russian and NATO warships since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The NATO-Russia war threatens workers internationally, and in particular in the Balkans and the Middle East, with a catastrophic nuclear war. Erdo?an’s statement Thursday that “the outbreak of a new world war will benefit neither the region nor the world” points to mounting concerns in the Turkish bourgeoisie over these dangers. Washington’s war aims against Russia in Ukraine—to first take back Crimea and the Donbas, carve up Russia, and install a neo-colonial regime—are similar to its policy against countries across the Middle East, including potentially Turkey itself.

The danger of a world war driven by the imperialist powers, led by Washington, cannot however be fought by bourgeois regimes like the Erdo?an government. Politically reactionary, tied to imperialism and fearful above all of the working class, it is both unwilling and unable to mobilize and unite mass opposition that exists internationally to imperialist war. That task falls to the working class.

While Erdo?an is threatening to veto Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO, he is only doing so in the context of horse-trading with the NATO imperialist powers to give him a green light for further attacks on the Kurdish people and military operations in the Middle East.

When Erdo?an announced that he would veto Sweden and Finland joining NATO on the grounds of their support for the Kurdish-nationalist People’s Protection Units (YPG), he is targeting US policy. While Washington supports the YPG as a proxy force occupying the north of Syria against the Russian-backed government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the Turkish bourgeoisie is determined to prevent the emergence of a YPG-led Kurdish state on its borders.

To this end, Erdo?an, who has repeatedly invaded Syria since 2016, occupying parts of the country, threatened a renewed Turkish invasion of Syria: “We are starting to take new steps soon regarding the remaining parts of the works which we have launched to create 30-kilometer-deep secure zones along our southern borders.”

Erdo?an has demanded that Sweden and Finland stop supporting the YPG in Syria as well as the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which his government bans as terrorist groups. He has discussed this in a flurry of meetings with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

On Monday, Erdo?an said: “We have said that these countries have to choose between providing practical and political support to terrorist organizations and expecting Turkey’s consent to their NATO membership, and they have to show this with explicit signs.”

However, US officials still predict that Erdo?an will capitulate to pressure to admit Sweden and Finland into NATO. On Tuesday, Deputy US Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said Washington is “confident that Finland and Sweden will be able to resolve those [concerns] with the Turks directly.”

In reality, there are growing signs that the NATO war on Russia threatens to provoke a regional conflagration across the Middle East. Ankara’s preparations for new attacks on the YPG militias come amid claims that Russia is reducing its military presence in Syria to reinforce its forces in Ukraine. There have been several reports that Iranian forces are deploying into Syria to replace Russian troops who are being drawn off to fight on the Ukrainian front.

Yesterday, in an article titled “How the Ukraine crisis could make the Syrian civil war worse,” the *Washington Post* wrote: “Some might view a reduced Russian role in support of Assad’s regime as a positive development. But our assessment is that these shifts could create significant risks of renewed fighting as well as escalate tensions between Israel and Iran.”

The growing danger of regional and even global war emphasizes the urgency of developing the growing struggles in the working class into a unified international movement against imperialist war and for socialism.



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