

NATO-Russia war inflames conflict between Turkey and Greece

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Amid the ongoing US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, tensions are rising dangerously between NATO member states Turkey and Greece in the Aegean Sea. The two countries are holding war games aimed at each other, trading accusations of disregarding international treaties, and violating each other's borders with jet fighters and warships.

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) Ephesus 2022 exercise, held in the Aegean Sea and attended by more than 10,000 military personnel, ended last week. Thirty-seven countries, including the United States and Italy, participated in air, sea and land drills. Held in Seferihisar, only 1.5 kilometers from the nearby Greek island of Samos in the Aegean Sea, the exercise was based on the scenario of a "military landing on an island." It was widely treated in Turkish capitalist media as a threat against Greece.

Greek media reported that during Greece's naval exercise Storm 2022, which ended on May 27, Turkey sent "two F-16 fighter jets that violated Greek airspace, reaching just two 2.5 nautical miles from the northern port city of Alexandroupoli."

During the Ephesus 2022 exercise, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accused Greece of militarizing Aegean Sea islands in violation of international agreements. He warned Athens 'one last time' on this: "We invite Greece to stop militarizing the islands that have non-military status and to act in accordance with international agreements. I'm not joking, I'm speaking seriously."

Threatening to militarize Turkish islands if necessary to threaten Greece, Erdoğan said, "We again warn Greece to avoid dreams, statements and actions that will lead to regret, just as they did a century ago," a reference to the Turkish war of independence against the British-backed Greek invasion in 1919-1922.

A week ago, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu accused Greece of violating its peace treaties with Turkey: "But what is another reason for Greece to be aggressive? Greece's violation of the status of the islands given to it in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and 1947 Paris Treaty under the condition of not militarizing them [Greek islands in the Aegean Sea], and our raising this violation within the framework of international law."

Cavusoglu added: "The sovereignty of the islands will be questioned if Greece does not end its violation." This threat to "question" Greece's sovereignty over islands it controls amount to a threat to invade them and go to war.

The Greek Foreign Ministry reacted to the Ephesus-2022 exercise and statements by Turkish officials on Twitter, writing, "Ankara poses a threat to regional peace and security." On Thursday, Greek government spokesman Giannis Oikonomou dismissed the Turkish claims, calling them "Ahistorical claims and baseless myths that can neither challenge nor, let alone, substitute for international law and international treaties."

Accusing Erdoğan of provocation, Oikonomou threatened, "It is clear to everyone that our country has upgraded its geostrategic and geopolitical footprint as well as its deterrent capacity to be able at any time to defend its national sovereignty and sovereign rights."

A century after World War I began in the Balkans, NATO and the bourgeois governments in the region again risk plunging the world into a catastrophic war. In 2020, tensions between Turkey and Greece over natural gas and sea borders in the eastern Mediterranean were defused by EU and especially German mediation. Greek-Turkish talks resumed. However, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned,

“History shows such conflicts cannot be peacefully resolved under capitalism, whether or not a temporary Greek-Turkish peace deal is somehow reached.”

The US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine has now inflamed the Greek-Turkish conflict, turning the Aegean into an undeclared second front in the NATO-Russia war.

The right-wing government of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has unabashedly aligned itself with Washington’s moves against Russia. The Greek port of Alexandroupoli in the northern Aegean Sea has been transformed into a major US military base. Alexandroupoli is also being used to deliver weapons to Ukraine and to NATO forces along the border with Ukraine in Romania.

The Turkish bourgeoisie has pursued a cynical, two-faced policy on the NATO war on Russia. On the one hand, it has backed NATO’s Ukraine policy, including the far-right coup NATO backed in Kiev in 2014, and armed Kiev with armed Bayraktar TB2 drones. On the other, it has kept diplomatic channels with Russia open, greeting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Ankara, and posed certain obstacles to the most aggressive NATO moves targeting Russia.

Ankara closed the straits linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea coast of Ukraine and Russia to both NATO and Russian warships, blocking a NATO naval attack on Russia. It also threatened to veto NATO’s plans to absorb Sweden and Finland and post NATO troops on Russia’s northern border with Scandinavia. The Turkish government was not objecting to the war, however, but continuing its long-standing targeting of the Kurdish people: it denounced Sweden and Finland for having ties to Kurdish-nationalist organizations.

Washington responded to this veto threat by inviting Mitsotakis to give a speech denouncing Turkey in the US Congress. During his enthusiastically received speech, Mitsotakis blamed Turkey for the division of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus and demanded a halt to US F-16 sales to Turkey. US President Joe Biden also gave Mitsotakis strong support.

Erdo?an condemned Mitsotakis' trip, declaring that Mitsotakis “no longer exists” for him. Erdo?an added that he viewed the US-NATO bases in Greece, targeting Russia and growing Chinese economic influence in the region, as a threat to his government,

saying, “And, most importantly, there are nearly a dozen bases in Greece. Whom does Greece threaten with those bases?”

Workers in Greece, Turkey and internationally must be warned: the danger that the conflicts in the Black Sea and the Balkans will escalate uncontrollably into a world war is very great. In the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, prices are spiraling out of control as the financial aristocracy massively increases its wealth. This has provoked strikes and protests internationally, and capitalist governments are all terrified of the international eruption of the class struggle.

In Greece, there have been protests against the arrival of NATO forces, including the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, to threaten Russia. Strikes have also broken out among rail workers against being forced to ship US tanks towards the Ukrainian and Russian borders. This follows a decade of savage austerity imposed by the European Union and both Mitsotakis’ New Democracy and the pseudo-left SYRIZA (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) governments.

In Turkey, the last year has seen an eruption of health care strikes against the official mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and wildcat strikes in auto, steel, mining, shipbuilding and other industries against the devastating surge in prices. A one-day nationwide strike by over 100,000 doctors in Turkey is set to begin today.

Erdo?an and Mitsotakis are nearly at war with each other, but they are united in the attempt to use militarism and nationalism to divide the working class and suppress the growing struggles on both shores of the Aegean Sea. It is impossible to tell where their reckless military adventurism ends, and where their incitement of anti-worker chauvinism begins. The decisive question this poses is unifying workers’ struggles internationally in a socialist, anti-war movement to bring down these governments and transfer power to the working class.



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