

Turkish drillship sails to Mediterranean amid tensions with Greece

Ozan Özgür
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The Abdülhamid Han, a drillship that Turkey purchased for \$180 million in November 2021, sailed from the southern city of Mersin on August 9 after a ceremony attended by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The ship will search for oil and gas in Turkish territorial waters 55 kilometers (34 miles) off Antalya in the eastern Mediterranean for two months. The Turkish Defense Ministry stated: “The Abdülhamid Han drill ship was escorted by floating and flying elements of our Naval Forces.”

In his speech at the launching ceremony of the Abdülhamid Han, Erdoğan lashed out at Greece and unnamed major powers backing it. He said, “When the Abdülhamid Han ship starts its operations, there will probably be those who will attempt to lord it over us by relying on their masters. ... As long as we do not take them seriously and do not see them as interlocutors, those who increase their arrogance will one day end up hitting their heads against the wall and coming to themselves.”

Erdoğan was referring to France and the United States, which have established close military-strategic ties with Greece. Greece has become a major military transshipment area in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, while Turkey is trying to play the role of a mediator due to its strong economic and military ties with Russia. In May, Erdoğan reacted to the visit of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to Washington by declaring that Mitsotakis “no longer exists” for him.

However, the announcement that the ship will be drilling in Turkey’s exclusive economic zone and not in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean has, for now, prevented a new escalation of tensions between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus.

With its drilling policy, which has accelerated especially since 2017, the Erdoğan government is trying to advance the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which depends on foreign energy sources for about 70 percent of its energy, and seeking an advantage over its regional rivals. Besides the Abdülhamid Han, three other drillships are exploring for hydrocarbons in the Black Sea.

According to the 2021 oil and gas sector report of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO), Turkey imported 59.2 billion cubic meters of the 59.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas it consumed in 2021. In other words, Turkey’s dependence on imports in gas supply was 99.3 percent in 2021. Turkey imported 44.9 percent of its gas in 2021 from Russia, 16.1 percent from Iran and 15 percent from Azerbaijan.

Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt are fighting over the massive hydrocarbon reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. The US and European imperialist powers, which are waging war against Russia in Ukraine and imposing harsh sanctions on Moscow, see these resources as an alternative to Russian gas for Europe. This was a major topic in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus during visits by US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland in early April.

Whether or not the Abdülhamid Han ship would enter the disputed waters has been discussed in the Greek political and media establishment for some time. CNN Greece posted a report that “Athens and Nicosia are on high alert,” as Greek and Cypriot authorities monitor the ship.

After Turkish officials announced the drillship’s route, the Greek daily *Ekathimerini* wrote: “The selected area was seen to signify, despite the show put on in Mersin on Tuesday and the rhetorical excesses, a desire for a period of calm in the Eastern

Mediterranean.”

However, it warned: “There is no sense of complacency in Athens, given the long-term characteristics of Turkey’s foreign policy. As Erdogan himself noted on Tuesday, after October the Abdulhamid Han will continue drilling elsewhere.”

Ekathimerini added that “the ‘milder scenario’ chosen by Erdogan in the first voyage of the Abdulhamid Han is due to the intervention of the United States, in order not to jeopardize the unity of NATO in one of the most critical phases of the Russian-Ukrainian war. ... This is certainly a possible scenario, in line with the prevailing perception that Greece has secured the support of Washington and some powerful European Union countries, against Ankara’s provocations.”

This points to the explosiveness of mounting Turkish-Greek tensions, which are kept in check, for now, in the context of a NATO war against Russia in Ukraine that threatens to spiral into an all-out global war between NATO and Russia. Significant sections of the Turkish ruling class, including the bourgeois opposition forces grouped around the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP), are calling for a more aggressive foreign policy against Greece.

Aytun Ç?ray, a leader of the far-right Good Party, a major CHP ally, criticized the government from the right, for not drilling more aggressively in the Mediterranean. Ç?ray said, “Operating at a point that will not disturb the US/EU is a move that is far from being a political or economic gain. It is also compatible with Greece’s claims.” CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdar?lu previously stated, regarding the disputed islands in the Aegean Sea held by Greece, “I will seize all of those islands.”

Both the Turkish and Greek ruling classes are facing growing working class opposition amid a deepening economic and social crisis. In Turkey, official annual inflation has reached 80 percent, and a new wave of strikes is erupting. In Greece, the government’s support for NATO’s war against Russia has led to mass protests and strikes.

In both Turkey and Greece, the governments and the bourgeois political establishment are united in the attempt to use militarism and nationalism to divide the working class, prevent strikes and suppress the growing struggles on both sides of the Aegean Sea.

Amid NATO’s war against Russia and growing US provocations against China, the great task raised by the eastern Mediterranean conflict is to unite the massive forces of the international working class in the struggle for socialist revolution against imperialist war and capitalism. This requires building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in the Middle East, in Europe and throughout the world.



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