

Greek forces fire on a ship in Aegean Sea amid rising danger of war with Turkey

Ozan Özgür**13 September 2022**

On Saturday, the Greek coast guard opened fire on the Comoros-flagged ship *Anatolian*, as it sailed in international waters 11 nautical miles off the Turkish island of Bozcaada at the Aegean Sea entrance of the Dardanelles, further escalating tensions between Turkey and Greece.

The ship's 18 crew members were not injured, but many bullets hit the ship's wheelhouse. The two Greek coast guard boats that fired on the ship left the area before the Turkish coast guard boats arrived at the scene. The Turkish coast guard released footage taken by the ship's crew of the incident. It shows Greek coast guard units opening fire and bullets hitting the ship. Turkey protested the incident and demanded an immediate investigation.

The Greek daily *Proto Thema* reported that the Greek coast guard rejected Turkey's claims. It claimed that before the incident took place northwest of Lesbos Island, a suspicious Comoros-flagged ship moving towards the Turkish coast did not stop despite the calls and warnings of the Greek coast guard, and then they fired warning shots into the air.

The Greek daily *Ta Nea* cited diplomatic sources, who said that problems "involving fishermen or migrants in the Aegean Sea could start with an accident" that could escalate tensions between the two countries and even lead to a military clash.

Dimokratiki, published on the Island of Rhodes, reported that Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou will visit four islands neighboring Turkey this week, as well as islets that are not inhabitable according to the Lausanne Treaty but are armed by Greece.

Tensions between Greece and Turkey over the Aegean Sea islands, hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and maritime borders have escalated throughout the US-NATO war with Russia. Greece has become an important military transshipment base in the war, while Turkey seeks to play a mediating role due to

its important economic and military ties with Russia. Turkey's decision to increase trade ties and criticize NATO's efforts to prolong the war, rather than join sanctions against Russia, has angered Western capitals.

In early September, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an accused Greece of "occupying" the islands, saying: "Greeks! Look at history. If you cross the line any further, there will be a heavy price to pay. Don't forget Izmir," a reference to Turkish forces' decisive defeat of Greek forces who occupied Izmir, in western Turkey, in 1922. He added, "Your occupation of the islands does not bind us. We will do what is necessary when the time comes. As we say, we could come all of a sudden one night."

In June, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavu?o?lu threatened to invade the islands, saying "the sovereignty of these islands will be discussed" if Greece does not stop arming them.

On Friday, Erdogan accused Washington and other NATO powers of applying double standards to Turkey and Greece, saying: "On the one hand, there are [Greece's] violations in the Aegean Sea, harassment of some of our planes on NATO missions, and aggressive actions up to radar locking with S-300 missiles [at the end of August]. Have you ever heard anything about Greece's S-300s from those who are talking about our S-400s? The S-300s belong to Russia, and the S-400s also belong to Russia. But there is no objection for it [Greece]."

The United States imposed a series of sanctions against Turkey in April 2021 due to Turkey's purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia.

Turkey's state-owned Anadolu Agency reported: "Turkish jets engaged in NATO missions over the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas on Aug. 23 were harassed by a Russian-made S-300 air defense system stationed on the Greek island of Crete." In response to a question from an Anadolu reporter, "Greek S-300s locked

on Turkish F-16s on a NATO mission, do you think this is acceptable behavior?" Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Patrick Ryder said, "I have nothing to say about this."

On September 1, the Turkish Foreign Ministry sent letters signed by Çavuşoğlu to 25 European Union (EU) capitals, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres explaining Turkey's position and views on the resolution of the Aegean issues.

Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias asked NATO, EU states and the United Nations to formally condemn what he called "outrageous and increasingly aggressive talk by Turkish officials." Peter Stano, Borrell's spokesperson, said: "The continuous hostile remarks by the political leadership of Turkey against Greece and the Greek people raise serious concerns."

In response to President Erdogan's belligerent remarks, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said, "I say to them in a language they will understand, don't bully Greece." Asked by the Associated Press whether the recent escalation could be the prelude to an armed conflict, he replied: "I don't believe this will ever happen. And if, God forbid, it happened, Turkey would receive an absolutely devastating response."

As the US-led NATO powers escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine, they are concerned that growing tensions between Greece and Turkey could fracture the alliance. A US State Department spokesperson said, "At a time when Russia has again invaded a sovereign European state, statements that could raise tensions between NATO allies are particularly unhelpful," before adding: "Greece's sovereignty over these islands is not disputed. We call on all parties to refrain from rhetoric and actions that could further escalate tensions."

Jim Townsend, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense on European and NATO policy, said: "Whatever little cracks can appear in European unity, Putin can make them even larger and in fact split the rock. So, it not only undercuts European unity but also can spill over into NATO councils if one or the other country uses NATO as a weapon to hurt the other."

At the end of May, Erdogan claimed that the nine military bases established by the US in Greece were targeting Turkey, stating: "Look, Greece currently owes €400 billion to Europe. There are 9 American bases in Greece right now. So against whom are these bases being

established, why are these bases there? This is what they say: 'Against Russia...' This is a lie. ... They are not honest. Their attitude towards Turkey in the face of all this is obvious."

On the other hand, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who met with her Greek counterpart Dendias in Athens last week, reiterated French support for Greece. Asked how France would support Greece in a conflict with Turkey, she said, "We signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement and Article 21 describes exactly this situation. It provides for mutual solidarity if both parties agree that there is an armed attack in the country of one of the parties."

The Turkish and Greek bourgeoisies, which are threatening a major war over their reactionary geopolitical interests in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, both face growing working class opposition amid a deepening economic and social crisis ahead of national elections in 2023. This is why they are uniting in an attempt to use militarism and nationalism to divide the working class, prevent strikes and suppress growing struggles on both sides of the Aegean.

The Greek, Turkish and international working class must be warned: The threat of war is extremely serious. Only the mobilization of the working class on a socialist program can prevent the outbreak of such a war, which would plunge millions of workers and youth across the region into a new catastrophe. The way forward lies in the revolutionary struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe and the Middle East. This requires building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in the Middle East, in Europe and beyond.



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