US military buildup against Russia escalates Turkey-Greece tensions

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US plans to deploy naval forces to Alexandroupoli, which serves as an important transshipment center in the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, are further escalating tensions between Greece and Turkey.

Last week, the Greek daily *Kathimerini* reported that the "US Navy is interested in Alexandroupoli port," adding, "Senior US military officials have proposed further deepening and expanding the port with a view to hosting and supplying US Arleigh Burke-class destroyers."

These destroyers "carry guided missiles and have expanded electronic warfare capabilities." The US deployment of these ships in the northern Aegean Sea would be an important step to encircle Russia and increase US-NATO combat power in the region.

These plans and Greece's ongoing aerial rearmament are creating fear in Ankara. Greece received its first two F-16 military jets from the United States last week, as part of a $1.5 billion program to modernize its fighter fleet. There are growing concerns in Ankara that Greece could have a stronger air force than Turkey in the next decade.

This military build-up on the Balkans is part of NATO's relentless eastward expansion and its militarization of Eastern Europe since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The additional protocol to the Mutual Defense and Cooperation Agreement signed between the US and Greece in 2019 included the modernization of the Suda Military Base on the Greek island of Crete, the renovation of Larissa Airport, the military strengthening of the Stefanovikeio Air Base between Volos and Larissa, and the expansion and modernization of the Alexandroupoli port. These steps, constituting the Greek leg of the US-NATO war preparations against Russia, have largely been realized.

In addition, the US signed military cooperation agreements with Romania and Bulgaria, both of which became NATO members in 2004. US troops were deployed in military bases there which opened in the early 2000s.

These bases are of strategic importance in the US-NATO war against Russia, to arm Ukrainian forces with NATO weapons. Turkey's decision to close the Turkish straits between the Aegean and Black Seas to all warships immediately after the war in Ukraine began, in line with the Montreux Convention, further increased the importance of the port of Alexandroupoli. *Kathimerini* reported: "Thousands of soldiers, tanks, helicopters and other supplies for US and other NATO forces have been quickly and effectively deployed to Eastern Europe."

At this point, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an raised objections to the growing US military presence in Greece, in particular the Alexandroupoli base, near the Turkish border.

In May, Erdo?an charged that the nine military bases built by Washington in Greece were aimed at Turkey: "Look, Greece currently owes €400 billion to Europe. There are nine 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."

Moreover, Turkish officials made bellicose statements questioning Athens' sovereignty over the islands and making open threats on the grounds that Greece had illegally armed them. On Sunday, Turkish state-owned Anadolu Agency reported: "Video footage [taken by Turkish army] showed that the landing ships carried military vehicles donated by the US to the islands of Midilli (Lesvos) and Sisam (Samos)."

Moreover, Ankara accused Athens of getting a radar lock on Turkish warplanes on NATO missions with S-300 missiles in late August and early September. In early September, Greek coast guards fired warning shots at a

merchant ship in the Aegean Sea.

Ankara, which has strong energy, trade and military ties with Moscow, is concerned that the US-NATO war against Russia could harm the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Turkey's approach towards Russia is different from other NATO member states. Ankara has tried to act as a mediator, organizing a "grain corridor" from Ukraine under UN auspices or the recent "prisoner exchange" between Ukraine and Russia. While the NATO imperialist powers prepare for nuclear war with Russia, Erdo?an is calling for a "negotiated settlement."

While Ankara continues to sell armed drones to Ukraine and opposes Russia's annexation of Crimea, it is also strengthening its economic and political ties with Moscow and does not participate in the US-led sanctions against Russia. In fact, it has recently faced accusations of violating sanctions through banks and some ports in Turkey.

In the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, in NATO wars in Syria and Libya, Turkey has sought a deal with Russia rather than with its NATO allies. The Erdo?an government is trying to maneuver between its NATO allies and their major targets, i.e. Russia and China. The tensions caused by this policy, which feeds the drive by NATO powers such as the United States and France to strengthen military ties with Greece in Eastern Europe, already erupted once, in 2016, in a failed coup attempt against Erdo?an.

Erdo?an's visit to Uzbekistan for the 22nd summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), after which he declared his goal of joining the organization, has further angered his allies in NATO capitals.

Erdo?an spoke to the PBS channel in New York after the 77th UN General Assembly just following the SCO summit. Asked, "You intend to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This organization includes Russia, China, and Iran. Do you want your country to be part of the east or part of the west?" Erdo?an responded, "I have to say very clearly that we are part of the world, neither of the east nor the west ... But the European Union has been stalling us for 52 years ... We may inevitably be in a situation of seeking different things."

Erdo?an hypocritically attacked Greece, posing as a "defender" of refugees, during his speech at the UN General Assembly. Holding a photo of two children who drowned in the Aegean Sea, he said, "Greece is turning the Aegean Sea into a refugee graveyard with its unlawful and reckless push-backs. It is high time for Europe and United Nations institutions to say 'Stop' to these atrocities that constitute crimes against humanity."

Responding to Erdo?an in the UN, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said, 'The boats carrying the desperate people President Erdo?an is talking about are leaving the Turkish shores in broad daylight," and blamed Turkey for the crisis. "If President Erdo?an wants to talk about red lines," he continued, "then I say this: Turkish claims over the sovereignty of Greece's islands are baseless and unacceptable. Questioning the sovereignty of Greek territory crosses a red line for all Greeks."

In reality, the Turkish and Greek governments, which have supported the imperialist wars in the Middle East and are part of the European Union's reactionary deal against refugees, are jointly responsible for the catastrophe facing refugees drowning in the Aegean Sea, held in camps, or forced to stay in misery in Turkey.

The danger that the capitalist governments of Turkey and Greece, faced with growing working class opposition and explosive geopolitical tensions, could provoke a war is very serious. Despite the aggression of the Turkish and Greek bourgeoisies, there is no enthusiasm or support for war among the workers. According to a recent poll, 64 percent of people in Turkey believe that there is no enmity between the Turkish and Greek peoples.

In order to prevent a devastating war, this anti-war sentiment, which is dominant among the working class on both sides of the Aegean, needs to be mobilized into a conscious and organized movement on the basis of an international socialist program advanced only by the International Committee of the Fourth International.