

As Blinken's visit exposes Ankara's complicity, Italian, Greek, Turkish unions call for industrial action to halt Israeli genocide

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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Turkey on Monday as part of his Middle East tour amid Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and preparations for war against Iran.

Turkey, as a NATO member and an ally of Israel, is concerned that the war over Gaza and the possibility of a regional conflict targeting Iran might damage its interests. In addition to this, there is the overwhelming sympathy of the Turkish people for the Palestinians against the Zionist regime backed by the US and its NATO allies.

Blinken's visit was marked by Ankara's concerns over Washington's and its European allies' unstinting support for Israel's genocide and by its efforts to conceal its complicity in this crime in the face of growing popular opposition.

Instead of meeting Blinken, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan chose to travel to his hometown of Rize. When Blinken got off the plane, he was greeted with the lowest protocol by the deputy governor of Ankara. Despite a 2.5-hour meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, no joint press statement was issued.

Blinken made a brief statement before flying to Tokyo to attend the G7 summit. Claiming that they were working to "minimise civilian casualties" by normalising civilian massacres, he said: "Every country I talk to is looking for us to play a leading role with our diplomacy to try to make progress on all of these different aspects of the crisis."

Retired US Colonel Douglas MacGregor, who speaks for a faction of the US military command, commented on Blinken's visit to Ankara, stating: "There is no joint news conference. Afterwards he comes out and gives his side of whatever was discussed. We hear nothing from the Turks. He is never invited to speak with Mr. Erdoğan, the president."

MacGregor argued that US diplomacy had failed and that this policy threatened to isolate the US militarily in the region. Comparing Blinken's visit to Turkey with that of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, MacGregor pointed out that the Iranian top diplomat's visit included a meeting with Erdoğan and a joint press conference.

On Twitter on Tuesday, MacGregor speculated that conflicts between Ankara and Washington and Tel Aviv could escalate into an armed conflict. He wrote: "Turkish soldiers will eventually fight in Gaza. Erdoğan is sensitive to timing, he is mobilizing the country. This is going to happen. It's a mistake to dismiss him. Erdoğan is the one man in Middle East with the capability to destroy Israel."

The NATO imperialist powers' support for genocide in Gaza and their threat to attack Iran present the Turkish bourgeoisie with an impossible dilemma. On the one hand, it has the closest ties with imperialism and for decades has asserted its foreign policy interests through NATO. On the other, it is virtually impossible for the Turkish government to join the other NATO powers in supporting a genocide in Gaza and waging a US-led war on Iran.

Under these circumstances, the Erdoğan government is trying to prevent its strong commercial ties with Israel from being exposed or targeted by organising symbolic boycotts. State institutions and many municipalities have launched a "boycott of Israeli products" campaign, while pro-government groups staged demonstrations at some chain stores allegedly supporting Israel. Turkey's parliament, municipalities and schools reportedly will no longer sell products from companies that support Israel's war on Gaza.

The government's encouragement of such symbolic boycott protests mainly reflects fear of an eruption of

public anger against Israel's ongoing genocide and a mass strike movement by the working class. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, "Whatever their crocodile tears for the Palestinians now, all of these capitalist leaders in the Middle East are far more fearful of a mass movement developing in their own countries than they are opposed to Israel's criminal onslaught."

For years, Erdoğan has called Israel a "terrorist state," but Turkey has always maintained trade and military ties with Tel Aviv as part of its comprehensive military-strategic alliance with US imperialism.

According to the 2023 report of the Turkish Exporters Assembly, Israel was the 10th country to which Turkey exported the most in 2022, with US\$7.03 billion. The volume of exports and imports between Turkey and Israel has been increasing steadily for about 10 years.

According to a BBC report, "An analysis by the Bank of Israel, published at the end of April, says that for decades Israel has developed as an 'island economy' cut off from neighbouring Middle Eastern countries. Turkey is described in the report as 'the only exception in the region.'"

A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed between Turkey and Israel in 1996. Imports of industrial products from both countries are mutually exempt from customs duties. Turkey's main export to Israel is steel, a critical raw material for the arms and defence industries. Adnan Arslan, president of the Steel Exporters' Association, announced in 2022 that 65 percent of the steel used by Israel is imported from Turkish producers.

Beyond steel, machinery, plastics, cement products, textiles and motor vehicles are among the main products exported from Turkey to Israel. Turkish ports are also reportedly continuing to ship Azeri oil to Israel.

Turkey continues to host more than 10 US bases, which provide Israel with extensive military support. The Kürecik Radar Base in Malatya reportedly provides military intelligence to Israel.

It is the international working class, and not any bourgeois regime maneuvering to advance its own interests, that can stop the genocide in Gaza, which is emerging as the Middle Eastern front of a Third World War that also includes NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine.

For over a month now, millions of people around the world have been protesting against Israel's US- and NATO-backed genocide. Moreover, as the WSWS has been advocating, this opposition increasingly includes industrial action by workers to cut off military

support for Israel, as seen in the United States, Belgium, Spain and beyond.

In Turkey, as throughout the world and the Middle East, there is great popular anger against Israel's genocide in Gaza and the imperialist powers that give it unlimited support. However, the entire capitalist political establishment, including the pseudo-left parties and the leaderships of the trade union bureaucracy are doing their best to prevent this opposition from finding expression in the form of mass demonstrations and industrial action.

Turkish trade union confederations completely ignored the international appeal launched by Palestinian trade unions in mid-October to cut off military exports to Israel.

This silence was broken on Wednesday with a joint statement by a coalition of several transport unions in Italy, Greece and Turkey. USB Transport in Italy, ENEDEP-COSCO Dockers Union (Piraeus Port) and STEFENSON, PEMEN, PEEMAGE Maritime Unions in Greece and DİSK-affiliated Nakliyat-İTİ in Turkey called for industrial action against the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

In the statement, they declared, "we reaffirm our joint decision to stop and prevent any loading and unloading of weapons, war materiel or any means that could continue to fuel the massacre of the Palestinian people."

The WSWS and the Sosyalist Eritlik Grubu in Turkey support these calls and call for them to be extended. It is the international working class that must be mobilised on the basis of a socialist programme to stop the genocide in Gaza and end the imperialist war.



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