

Türkiye unveils its first intercontinental ballistic missile amid an intensifying imperialist war

Hasan Y?ld?r?m
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Held in Istanbul on 5 May, the SAHA EXPO (International Defence, Aviation and Space Industry) 2026 Fair reflected Türkiye's efforts to showcase its military technologies. The fair was attended by over 1,700 companies from more than 120 countries. Over 140 official delegations and more than 200 commercial procurement delegations attended.

The exhibition featured a variety of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), air defence systems, electronic warfare technology and AI-enabled defence technology. Baykar unveiled a new AI-enabled UAV with a 1,000 km range, while Roketsan showcased four missiles.

The Y?ld?r?mhan missile, which is currently under development by the Ministry of National Defence's R&D Directorate and has not yet been tested, was the most attention-grabbing item at the fair and made headlines in the international press. With a range of 6,000 kilometres, the Y?ld?r?mhan is Türkiye's first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and can carry a payload of up to 3,000 kilograms. Its ability to reach speeds of Mach 25 and perform sudden manoeuvres classifies it as a hypersonic missile.

An article published in *The Bulwark* interpreted this development as a symbol of the dismantling of the "liberal international order" that was underpinned by US military power. It comments that Türkiye, which boasts the second-largest land army in NATO is now declaring that it can target not only its neighbours but potentially all continents.

According to *Quwa*, a Pakistan-based defence news website, the "Y?ld?r?mhan ICBM program has achieved domestic production of its liquid-fuel propellants. The objective across all of these tracks is to ensure no single foreign supplier can shut down a Turkish weapons program by withholding an engine or a propellant."

The Y?ld?r?mhan missile is just one of Türkiye's initiatives in the defence industry. In recent years, the country has made significant strides in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, as exemplified by the Bayraktar TB2. It is also developing an air defence system called the Steel Dome, similar to Israel's Iron Dome system. While developing the KAAN, a new-generation fighter jet, it has launched two large

amphibious assault ships: the TCG Anadolu and the TCG Trakya. Türkiye's domestic tank project, the Altay, entered army service in 2025.

The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an is investing heavily in the defence industry, both to equip the Turkish Armed Forces and to expand arms exports. According to an analysis published by *TRT World*, Türkiye's defence exports exceeded \$10 billion in 2025, marking a 48 percent increase.

Turkish-made UAVs played a significant role in Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Türkiye is also helping Ukraine produce and supply UAVs for its war with Russia.

Despite the progress made by its defence industry in recent years, Türkiye remains dependent on imports.

Türkiye imported 70 percent of its military equipment in 2002, a figure which dropped to 30 percent by 2024. However, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association's 2024 reports examples of import dependency including semiconductors, processors, and engine and power transmission systems used in platforms such as the Altay main battle tank and the T129 ATAK military helicopter, which is derived from the A129 Mangusta.

The cost of this "success" in the defence industry — the war economy — is being borne by the working class. While Türkiye's defence spending has risen steadily over the past decade, wages have been eroded by chronic inflation. Meanwhile, the proportion of the budget allocated to education, healthcare and other essential public services has declined.

Amid the rhetoric about "national defence", approximately 2,000 workers fall victim to workplace fatalities each year due to a lack of safety measures. The massacre that took place on 24 December 2024 at an ammunition factory in Bal?kesir, in which 11 workers lost their lives, is an example.

When workers try to resist the assault on their working and living conditions, they find themselves facing an ever-more repressive state apparatus. The recent detention of 110 miners in Ankara is one of the most striking examples of this.

The massive investments made by the Erdo?an government in

Türkiye's defence industry must be viewed in the context of the global war that is unfolding, Türkiye's geopolitical position and the interests of the Turkish ruling class.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, US-NATO imperialism has waged countless wars of aggression and regime change in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa, aiming to establish complete domination over markets, resources, energy and trade routes. NATO's eastward expansion has provoked a war with Russia in Ukraine. In response to its own long-term decline and China's economic rise, the US is attempting to place Beijing's critical trading partners, such as Venezuela and Iran, under a colonial yoke and is essentially preparing for war with China.

The fact that the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie are tied to imperialist powers through thousands of military, financial and political connections, coupled with Türkiye's geographical location at the centre of many of these flashpoints, inevitably draws it into the vortex of these wars.

Türkiye was one of the key supporters of the war for regime change in Syria. Meanwhile, NATO's war against Russia is showing signs of spreading into Turkish territorial waters in the Black Sea. The US-Israel war against neighbouring Iran also poses a risk of drawing Türkiye into the conflict. Although Ankara is calling for a ceasefire and a negotiated solution in Ukraine and Iran, in practice it is siding with the US and NATO in their aggressive actions. While Ankara condemns Iran's self-defence measures, the bases in Türkiye continue to serve US interests. Following the outbreak of war, NATO's Patriot air defence systems were deployed to the *İncirlik* and *Kürecik* bases.

However, the Erdoğan government fears that its imperialist allies might target it as well during certain points of conflict and is therefore striving to develop a more "independent" defence industry. The failed NATO-backed coup attempt targeting Erdoğan in 2016 was a critical turning point.

Ankara viewed the US move to make Kurdish militias its primary proxy force during the war for regime change in Syria as a direct threat to its border security. Ankara's policy of manoeuvring between the US-NATO alliance and China and Russia further escalated tensions, which erupted violently in the 2016 NATO-backed failed coup attempt targeting Erdoğan.

Following the suppression of the coup, Türkiye purchased S-400 air defence systems from Russia, but during the first Trump administration Congress imposed CAATSA sanctions on Türkiye. Türkiye was excluded from the F-35 fighter jet program. While the sanctions remain in place, the S-400 systems that have entered the inventory of the Turkish Armed Forces remain idle at the request of the US.

Amid the deepening rift between the US and Europe, the Erdoğan government is seeking to strengthen its cooperation with the Trump administration while also working to bolster its ties with European allies. As part of the "Coalition of the Willing" against Russia, Türkiye has established a naval

headquarters in Istanbul with Britain and France. There are growing calls for European powers to leverage Türkiye's geopolitical position and its burgeoning defence industry.

Türkiye is also engaged in growing regional competition with both Israel and its NATO ally Greece. While Israel receives substantial military aid and political support as the US's "spearhead" in the Middle East, Greece has significantly expanded and modernized its air force. Greece has served as a key base, particularly in NATO's war against Russia. Last December, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus held a summit in Jerusalem. The leaders agreed to deepen trilateral cooperation in "security, defence, and military matters" to protect "critical regional infrastructure" in the Mediterranean.

The *Greek City Times* reported that the *Yıldırımhan* has caused serious concerns in Greece and Israel. Israeli analyst Shai Gal wrote, "Turkey is not building missiles simply to defend its territory, but is building range to determine who lives under Turkish pressure." Israeli intelligence services assess that missiles with such a range are ultimately designed to carry nuclear warheads.

While the competition and tensions between Türkiye, Israel, and Greece are real, Ankara's efforts to develop its defence industry have nothing to do with anti-imperialism. A government serving the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie has neither the capacity nor the will to oppose imperialism. These forces bear responsibility for dragging Türkiye into the vortex of war and, far from "defending" the people, are preparing to drive workers and youth into war for reactionary interests.

The only social force capable of resisting imperialist war is an international working class that has secured its independence from its own ruling class and state. In Türkiye, this requires uniting Kurdish and Turkish workers with their class brothers and sisters in the Middle East and internationally on a socialist program grounded in their common class interests; freeing them from the grip of nationalist and religious ideologies; and building their own revolutionary political leadership. The *Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal*, (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) is fighting for this perspective.



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