

Trump-Erdogan meeting: A deepening war alliance between Washington and Ankara

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US President Donald Trump met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday on the sidelines of the 36th NATO Summit in Ankara. The meeting took place under conditions in which hundreds of anti-war protesters have been detained, demonstrations banned and the capital turned into a fortress by some 70,000 security personnel.

It points to the deepening alliance development of relations between Washington and Ankara based on the escalation of imperialist war.

Trump was received with great pomp, showering praise on Türkiye and Erdogan. Under Erdogan's leadership "Türkiye has become a very powerful country, militarily," the US president declared. "People don't know how powerful, actually," he said, adding that Türkiye has "great soldiers" and that the relationship between the two countries is better than ever.

"Türkiye has been in many ways much more loyal than other countries that we think would be loyal," Trump said. He even attributed his attendance at the summit to the Turkish president: "Frankly, if it weren't held in Türkiye, where my friend happens to be a very strong leader, a very strong person, it's possible that I wouldn't have attended."

These words, coming from the head of a US government that is waging a war of aggression against Iran, threatening to destroy its civilization, and backing Israel's genocide in Gaza, are a tribute to

Speaking to the press before the meeting, Trump asserted that the CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) sanctions imposed on Türkiye since December 2020 would be lifted. "We're going to be taking the sanctions off," he said, adding: "We don't want to sanction friends." As for the F-35 program, from which Türkiye was expelled, the US president stated that a sale was "certainly something we will consider." These moves are accompanied by the sale

of F110 jet engines to be used in Türkiye's domestically developed KAAN fighter jet: in late June, Trump formally notified Congress of the sale of 80 engines worth more than \$700 million.

Erdogan declared his confidence in Trump: "The F-35 issue is not a new one for us... On this issue, Mr. Trump always stands by his word. Here again, God willing, I believe a favourable decision on the F-35s will emerge from this leaders' summit."

The CAATSA sanctions were the product of a period of tension in Washington-Ankara relations that reached its peak a decade ago. The US arming and backing of Kurdish nationalist forces as its principal proxy force in the war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who was backed by Russia and Iran, triggered a conflict with the Turkish bourgeoisie, which regarded this as a threat to its own territory. At the same time, Ankara's opposition to certain critical moves by Washington, including the 2013 coup in Egypt, and its strengthening of ties with Moscow exhausted the patience of the NATO capitals, preparing the ground for the coup attempt of July 15, 2016.

After the coup attempt, which Erdogan managed to survive, his government moved to develop its relations with Russia further, while also seeking to mend fences with its imperialist allies. The most concrete expression of this orientation was the purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia. Moreover, in a direct challenge to US policy, Erdogan launched several military operations against the Kurdish forces in Syria and brought the northwest of the country under his control.

In response, Türkiye was expelled in July 2019 from the F-35 program, of which it had been a founding partner and from which it had ordered 100 aircraft. The six F-35A jets for which Ankara had paid \$1.7 billion were kept in hangars in the United States. During the first Trump administration, Congress invoked Section 231 of

CAATSA in December 2020 to impose the sanctions.

Today, not only Trump but also the European powers regard the Erdoğan government as a critical ally. They have shelved the hypocritical criticisms on democratic rights that they frequently voiced over the past decade. Just as they support the regime of Volodymyr Zelensky, who rules Ukraine without elections and has filled the prisons with political opponents, including socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, they have no principled objection to the presidential dictatorship Erdoğan has consolidated. On the contrary, they are following in his footsteps.

Ten years after the coup attempt, the transformation in the relations of the US and the European powers with the Erdoğan government is rooted in the global escalation of imperialist war. The NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the US-Israeli assault on Iran in the Middle East have increased, in the eyes of the imperialist centres, the geostrategic importance of Türkiye, which possesses NATO's second-largest army and connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, and Europe with Asia. For its part, the Erdoğan government has progressively abandoned its policy of "balance" between NATO and Russia, declaring Türkiye's role in the war agenda to be "indispensable."

The prospect of an F-35 sale to Türkiye has set off alarm bells in Israel. "It would destroy the power balance in the Middle East, because Türkiye, I think, has aggressive aspirations," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told CNN. "When you give them that power, you're going to see aggression in its wake." He branded Türkiye "a regime that's infected with the Muslim Brotherhood, which hates the United States."

Netanyahu's statements are another expression of the sharpening struggle for regional hegemony. The Turkish-Israeli rivalry and the risk of conflict—extending across the Middle East, including Syria, Lebanon and Iran, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus—are real. But neither of these two regimes, both allied with US imperialism, is progressive; each pursues the reactionary interests of its own ruling class.

Polls show that more than 90 percent of Türkiye's population opposes the war against Iran and the presence of US bases in the country. There is also massive opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and its broader aggression.

The support given to Erdoğan by the NATO powers, above all Trump, drew criticism from Özgür Özel, the elected leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), which is under political attack by the government.

Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP's presidential candidate, has been imprisoned since March 2025. Dozens of CHP mayors have also been arrested, and some removed from office. Last month, the CHP's elected leadership under Özel was itself removed. None of this figured on the agenda of the NATO leaders whom Özel was addressing, either before or during the summit.

Reacting to Trump's removal from his itinerary of a visit to Anıtkabir, the mausoleum of Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, Özel declared: "If the American president is to be greeted by children, those children should be holding pictures of the 165 girls killed in Iran!"

"One cannot march in step with those who have massacred 75,000 people in Gaza," the CHP leader said, adding: "We reject to the very end this submission to the Trump administration, of which Türkiye wants to rid itself as soon as possible. From now on, as before, we will continue to defend a fully independent Türkiye, to object to imperialism of every kind, and to resist it."

Özel's remarks on NATO reveal the real limits of his "objection to imperialism." Stating, "We attach importance to such a hosting. Of course, it must be hosted very well," Özel added: "But we will not be blindly bound to NATO." His objection is not to NATO and imperialist war, but to the fact that Trump—and, following him, the other NATO powers—back Erdoğan.

Indeed, in articles recently published in *Newsweek* and the *Financial Times*, the CHP leader addressed the imperialist powers of the NATO alliance, pledging that he and the CHP would defend the alliance's interests better and more reliably than Erdoğan. Otherwise, Özel warned, a social explosion in Türkiye would follow, with consequences that would spill over into the NATO countries as well.



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