

Tensions between Türkiye and Greece escalate amid deepening imperialist war

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Tensions between Türkiye and Greece are again mounting, accompanied by mutual accusations, military deployments and regional realignments. While Athens strengthens its ties with Tel Aviv, Ankara signed a military pact with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan last month.

According to media reports, Ankara transferred the 51st Commando Brigade, made up of some 2,000 professional commandos, from Hozat in the east of the country to the district of Söke in Aydın province—opposite the Greek island of Samos—at the end of August.

The Defence Ministry said it approved the deployment in June. It made this public, however, only after Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited Greece’s easternmost island, Meis, on September 12. The ministry declared it was closely following Mitsotakis’ contacts with military units stationed on the island, which lies one mile off the Turkish coast. It warned that creating a de facto situation contrary to the island’s demilitarised status was unacceptable.

One NATO member is carrying out a military deployment against another member of the same alliance. This escalation is a by-product of the imperialist war that is metastasising from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and tending to merge into a single conflict.

NATO’s imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine has turned Greece into the logistical hub of the continent’s south-east. The US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran and the genocide in Gaza have intensified the search of the national bourgeoisies across the region for alliances and military blocs to defend their own reactionary interests.

Rejecting all forms of nationalism, Turkish and Greek and workers must answer the escalating war and the danger of a new conflict by uniting in an international, socialist anti-war movement.

The maritime disputes between Türkiye and Greece date back to the first half of the last century. Tensions rose again over the summer and accelerated in recent weeks.

On September 20, the Turkish Navy launched the Denizkurdu-I/2026 exercise in the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara, the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean. Speaking on NTV on September 19, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan pointed to elections expected in Greece in the spring and claimed that Athens was escalating tensions in the Aegean for that reason. Fidan declared that the Turkish Armed Forces and the Coast Guard were in an “extremely sensitive” state and warned Athens against “adventurist” steps.

Both the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and that of Mitsotakis are united in stepping up militarism and fomenting nationalism to divide the working class. Both are accelerating social cuts at home while increasing military spending, and are facing mounting opposition from the working class.

The source of the Greek-Turkish tensions runs far deeper than

electoral calculations. Ankara maintains that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the 1947 Treaty of Paris conferred demilitarised status on the eastern Aegean islands, and it regards any departure from this as a threat. The Greek Foreign Ministry insists that Greece has the right to defend all of its territory. Speaking in Thessaloniki on September 6, Mitsotakis said that Greece retained the right to extend its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles and would do so when it saw fit. A 1995 resolution of the Turkish parliament treats such a step as a *casus belli*—and grounds for military intervention.

Ankara, which warns Athens against “adventurist” and “reckless” steps, is moving to give legal form to the claims of the Turkish bourgeoisie. It is doing so through the Maritime Jurisdiction Areas Law, drawn up in line with the “Blue Homeland” doctrine and expected to come before parliament in October. In August, responding to similar moves by Greece, Erdoğan declared “national marine parks” between Lemnos and Samothrace and off Fethiye and Kaş, the boundary of which runs just north of Meis.

While these tensions have flared repeatedly over decades, the recent escalation has gathered momentum together with developing imperialist war across the region. Greece has strengthened its military-strategic position, and above all its air defence capacity, through its full integration into NATO’s war against Russia. The port of Alexandroupoli, located on the Aegean Sea at the north-eastern tip of Greece, has become one of the main supply points for Ukraine.

In the defence budget it approved, the US Congress allocated funds specifically for modernising the nuclear submarine pier at the Souda Bay base on Crete and for the military railway fortification of Alexandroupoli. In return, Athens added an order for 20 F-35s, expected to be delivered in 2028-29, to its fleets of Rafale and F-16 Viper aircraft, and modernised its air defence capability. Türkiye, by contrast, was expelled from the F-35 programme by Washington and subjected to the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) after taking delivery of the Russian S-400 air and missile defence system in 2019.

In early September, referring to Greece’s modernised F-16s, its Rafales and the F-35s, Mitsotakis said: “This gives us a very significant advantage; I would even dare to call it superiority.” He added: “And this is an advantage that we could never simply leave unused.”

In response to Greece’s growing military capacity and regional role, Ankara is expanding military cooperation with its regional rival Israel, while deepening its ties with the imperialist powers on which it relies.

Türkiye is increasingly abandoning the balancing policy it pursued in NATO’s war against Russia and is seeking to act in line with Washington’s imperialist aggression in the Middle East. Türkiye

joined the “Coalition of the Willing” directed against Russia. The coalition’s establishment of a naval headquarters in Istanbul directed against Russia indicates Ankara’s deepening integration into the war.

Erdo?an’s September 22 speech to the UN General Assembly, delivered after US President Donald Trump had threatened to destroy Iran, demonstrated this alignment once again. While sharply attacking Israel and describing Gaza as the most inhuman and shameful concentration camp of our age, Erdo?an praised “President Trump’s efforts” towards a ceasefire. He referred to Iran only as a place name in a list of casualties and said nothing whatsoever about US aggression.

Türkiye continues to fuel Israel’s war machine with Azerbaijani oil and to allow bases on its territory to be used for Israel’s benefit. Nonetheless, Washington’s offensive against Iran and its allies, including the regime-change war in Syria, has intensified tensions between Türkiye and Israel as never before.

On August 31, as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan held the first meeting of their Mecca Defence Alliance in Istanbul. Greece and Israel signed the roughly €3 billion “Achilles Shield” agreement in Tel Aviv. Under the agreement, Israel will export air defence systems to Greece, while the Rafael company will build the Greek army’s national command and control network. Israel, Greece and Cyprus had already pledged trilateral military, energy and economic cooperation at the end of 2025.

The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, modelled on Article 5 of NATO, declares that an armed attack on any one of the three states will be regarded as an attack on all three. Shaken by the offensive of the Houthis Ansar Allah forces against Saudi forces and their allies in Yemen, the US-backed regime in Riyadh has invoked the agreement to call on Türkiye and Pakistan for military support. On September 19, Fidan said that Türkiye was ready to provide technical military assistance, even though the agreement has not yet been ratified by the Turkish parliament and has not come into force.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry announced on Friday that the chiefs of general staff of the three countries would meet “to discuss the provision of support to Riyadh within the framework of the joint defence agreement.” This underlines the danger that the war against Iran and Yemen will rapidly expand.

Another dimension of tensions among the regional powers is the struggle for control of resources in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. In 2011—responding to the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt—France, Britain and the United States overthrew the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, tearing the country apart and reducing it to ruins. Paris backed the warlord Khalifa Haftar in the east, while Ankara sided with the government in Tripoli. Through a memorandum signed with that government in 2019, Türkiye declared its own exclusive economic zone in the eastern Mediterranean. Through this, Ankara sought to block the EastMed gas pipeline project of Israel, Cyprus and Greece.

These conflicting interests brought the warships of two NATO allies to the point of open clashes in the Mediterranean. On June 10, 2020, the French frigate Courbet and three Turkish warships confronted one another.

In this atmosphere, France and Greece, both members of the European Union (EU), institutionalised their military rapprochement on September 28, 2021. The two countries signed an agreement stating that, in the event of an armed attack on either country’s territory, the other would come to its assistance, using armed force if necessary. The package included three Belharra frigates and 24 Rafale

fighter jets. Citing its sources, Greek daily *Kathimerini* reported in early March that France had brought Greece under its “nuclear umbrella.”

According to Greek daily *Ta Nea*, Athens has drawn up a three-stage plan against a possible Turkish attempt to intervene in survey work for the Great Sea Interconnector (GSI), the Crete-Cyprus-Israel electricity link. In the most extreme scenario, the Greek navy would be sent against Turkish warships. The plan envisages requesting support from Washington, the European Commission and NATO, as well as from Paris.

Ankara and Athens, both NATO members, are collaborating with the imperialist powers amid an escalating war to advance their reactionary geopolitical interests. At the same time, they are making the working class pay for their war preparations through a savage austerity offensive. Under the capitalist nation-state system, there is no progressive way out of these tensions and the danger of war.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) stated in “No to a Greek-Turkish war in the eastern Mediterranean!”, published amid the escalation of 2020:

History shows such conflicts cannot be peacefully resolved under capitalism, whether or not a temporary Greek-Turkish peace deal is somehow reached... Against war, the turn is to the developing movement in the international working class and the struggle to arm it with Marxist consciousness of the necessity to build an international anti-war and anti-imperialist movement in the working class.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party - Fourth International), the Turkish section of the ICFI, calls on workers in Türkiye and Greece to reject the reactionary nationalism of their own ruling classes. It calls on them to unite with their class brothers and sisters on both shores of the Aegean and internationally, on the basis of a socialist programme that expresses their common interests.

The only way forward for the working class lies in rejecting bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism that insists on defending the existing nation-states and borders, and in fighting for the United Socialist States of Europe and the Middle East. This also means fighting to build new sections of the ICFI in Greece and throughout the region.



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