

Turkish foreign minister meets Putin as NATO escalates war against Russia

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Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan traveled to Russia to attend the BRICS meeting in Nizhny Novgorod and then met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Tuesday.

The visit comes amid a major escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine. “Russia can and must suffer strategic defeat in Ukraine,” was the declaration made at the end of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Sofia late May. This was followed by a green light for Ukraine to strike Russian territory with weapons supplied by the NATO powers, while various NATO leaders have publicly raised sending troops to Ukraine.

Commenting on these developments after NATO’s informal foreign ministers’ meeting in Prague, Fidan said, “As Türkiye, we support continued assistance to Ukraine, we support Ukraine possessing sufficient deterrence.” He continued by stressing the need “to back Ukraine’s territorial integrity and liberation.”

Fidan reiterated Ankara’s “full support for Ukraine” but expressed concern about the possible consequences of escalation. He said “it is another thing for NATO to take sides in this war. This leads to a greater crisis of regional proliferation.”

Under conditions of the US-NATO military escalation against Russia, the bankruptcy of Ankara’s maneuvering policy between these two nuclear powers becomes increasingly clear. Last week, while receiving the heads of international news agencies on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), Putin hinted that his “friendly relations” with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan might not continue.

He said: “The government in Türkiye has focused on obtaining loans, making investments, and receiving grants from Western financial institutions. This is

probably not a bad thing. But if it is related to the restriction of trade and economic relations with Russia, then the Turkish economy will lose more than it gains.”

Putin sent a remarkable warning message to his “friend” Erdoğan through journalists, stating: “While Türkiye cooperates with Ukraine in some areas, Ukraine tries to hit the pipelines carrying gas to Türkiye... Two drones were jammed by Russian electronic warfare systems and fell near the gas pumping station on the Black Sea coast. Please inform our friend President Erdogan about the facts regarding this matter. There are also continuous attacks with unmanned sea vehicles on ships protecting the energy infrastructure under the Black Sea.”

Ankara did not give any details on the Putin-Fidan meeting.

Putin said he welcomed Turkey’s interest in BRICS and would support Turkey’s desire to become a member of it, adding: “We note with gratitude the spirit of our Turkish friends to contribute to the resolution of crisis situations, including the crisis around Ukraine,”

In a statement, Fidan declared, “We are determined to continue all possible mediation efforts on Ukraine. Regarding Syria, we are doing our best to continue the stability policy that you, as two leaders [Putin and Erdoğan], have put forward.”

There are concerns in Ankara that an escalation of the war against Russia would damage the interests of the Turkish ruling class. Turkey has not joined the US and European Union (EU) sanctions against Moscow and has maintained trade with Russia since the start of the war.

Since February 2022, Ankara closed the straits from the Aegean to the Black Sea to both NATO and Russian warships under the Montreux Convention, and has called for a negotiated settlement. As part of this

policy, Erdoğan has brokered deals between Ukraine and Russia, such as grain and prisoner exchanges.

However, the Turkish capitalist political establishment has openly demonstrated its loyalty to imperialism by supporting Finland and Sweden's NATO membership against Russia. Erdoğan, who presides over a NATO member state in a strategic military alliance with US imperialism, has repeatedly emphasized that his government stands by Ukraine, while arming Kiev with Bayraktar drones against Russia.

Turkey is close to a number of flashpoints such as the Black Sea, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans. A direct NATO war with Russia would bring into question the use of the straits, the Black Sea and NATO bases in Turkey in the conflict. At the same time, Israel's genocide in Gaza threatens to expand to target Turkey's neighbor Iran.

Since early May, Erdoğan has had two friendly meetings with Özgür Özel, the leader of the Republican People's Party, which is considered much more openly in favor of a pro-NATO policy. These "normalization" or "détente" talks are a product of the ruling class's need for its two main parties to unite on a pro-NATO foreign policy and waging class war against the working class at home.

The ongoing cost of living crisis and the decline in real wages are fueling discontent among workers, while state repression against elected Kurdish politicians is provoking social anger.

The Erdoğan government also faces incessant protests for its complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza. To cover up his government's complicit role, he makes almost daily hypocritical statements condemning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Yet Turkey continues to act as a transit country for the transport of Azerbaijani oil to Israel, and US and NATO bases in the country continue to aid Israel in its genocidal war and provocations against Iran.

Prior to his visit to Russia, Fidan held official talks in China on June 3-5, where he announced Turkey's willingness to join BRICS. Turkey has sought to further develop economic and political ties with China and was the first country to sign an intergovernmental cooperation agreement under the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, Ankara's maneuvering policy is also

undermined in the Asia-Pacific as the US-led imperialist powers have escalated their war preparations and economic war against China.

Speaking at a press conference with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, Fidan reiterated his government's support for the "One China" policy. He said, "Turkey fully supports China's territorial integrity and political sovereignty. We fully support China against the armed terrorist groups. We would like to express here that we disagree with international attempts to stir up trouble in China and stop its economic development."

Despite these supportive messages, the passage of a Turkish military ship through the Taiwan Strait during Fidan's visit to China sparked anger in China. According to news reports, the Chinese navy followed the ship during its passage. Turkish authorities have not commented on the purpose of the Turkish military ship's presence.

The Taiwan Strait is often the scene of US military provocations against China. In late May, "the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its associated battlegroup were conducting 'routine' operations in the vicinity of Taiwan in the Philippine Sea... [T]he US Navy and the Royal Netherlands Navy conducted joint operations in the South China Sea," as the WSWS reported. That same week, China organized military exercises in the strait shortly after the inauguration of Taiwan's pro-independence president, Lai Ching-te.

While Fidan criticized the US-led economic war against China, a few days later Turkey followed the US lead and announced an additional 40 percent tariff on cars imported from China. This raised the tariff from 10 percent to 50 percent.

The Biden administration quadrupled the tariff rate on electric vehicles imported from China to 100 percent last month. Recently, the European Commission also decided to impose an additional 25 percent tariff on electric vehicles imported from China.



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