

On the Escalating Greek-Turkish Tensions

By Max Bonham, *The Internationalist Socialist League (Israel/Occupied Palestine)*, 30 April 2018, www.the-isleague.com

“Once I’ve seen so many dreadful things— my sons butchered, my daughters hauled away, their houses ransacked, their little children tossed down on the ground in this murderous war.” (Iliad, Book 22)

“Rome creates a desert and calls it peace” Tacitus

“Shameless—armored in shamelessness—always shrewd with greed! How could any Argive soldier obey your orders, freely and gladly do your sailing for you or fight your enemies, full force? Not I. no.

It wasn’t Trojan spearmen who brought me here to fight. The Trojans never did me damage, not in the least, they never stole my cattle or my horses, never in Phthia where the rich soil breeds strong men did they lay waste my crops. How could they? Look at the endless miles that lie between us ...”

(Iliad, Book 1, 174-184)

The Greek-Turkish relationship

The causes for recent breakdown are varied, but the major ones are:

- i. increase in maritime and airspace incursions;
- ii. the refusal of the Greek courts to hand in the Turkish officers who have fled to Greece after the failed 2016 military coup in Turkey;
- iii. Turkish officials commenting on the Lausanne treaty;
- iv. Recent detainment of two Greek soldiers who accidentally crossed the Greco-Turkish border; [1]
- v. Gas drilling operations in the east Aegean;
- vi. Islands split along the maritime border: (see Map below)

The New York Times describes the latest incident:

“Last week, a low-flying Turkish helicopter had passed provocatively close to a military base on the nearby Greek island of Ro, drawing warning shots from soldiers. That incident was followed three days later by the death of a Greek fighter pilot who crashed, his government said, after attempting to intercept a Turkish aircraft that had entered the country’s airspace. In all, the number of incursions by Turkish military ships and jets into Greek territory has spiked in recent months, according to Greek officials, stoking concerns of a new military conflict in a region where Turkey is already embroiled in the war raging in Syria.” [2]

While those escalations are a worrying trend, it seems that a full blown war is still a long way to go. The people don’t seem ready:

“With the people of Turkey, we don’t have problems,” said Mr. Raftis, 58. “The problem is with Erdogan, with the Turkish government. They want to make Turkey bigger.”

In addition, the current government in Greece is bankrupt and will have a hard time mobilizing the population.

Additionally, both Greece and Turkey both belong to NATO, with the U.S. still an important ally of Turkey despite its turn towards Russia. Furthermore, Turkey plays a central role containing the Syrian refugees, which Turkey can threaten to release, and those migrants first stop in Europe would be Greece, a prospect which the EU and Greek elites certainly want to avoid at all costs.

The “leftist” Greek Prime Minister has said that:

“Greece can defend its sovereign rights from one end of this country to the other,” said Mr. Tsipras, as the cliffs of Turkey loomed in the distance over his right shoulder. “We won’t negotiate, we won’t bargain, we won’t cede an inch of Kastellorizo land.”

What is even more shameful is the support of most of the Greek left for the nationalist anti-Turkish propaganda. KKE has also, since the 1940’s, capitulated to Greek chauvinism regarding Macedonia. While left wing support to causes of national liberation can be legitimate as far as oppressed nations are concerned, this is clearly not the case here. Greek propaganda has painted Erdogan as a fascist, and although it is false and hypocritical, the capitalist Turkish government does have some harsh authoritarian shades to it.

In order to counter Turkey, Greece is seeking an alliance with Israel and Cyprus. One of the alliance’s goals is to sort out the issue of Mediterranean gas deposits, some of which are actually in Lebanese territory. Greece has also increased its military joint training and economic activities with Israel. [3]

It would be wrong to paint Greece as the victim in this Greek-Turkish conflict as both are semi colonies. In addition, Greece has historically the sympathies of the Christian West.

While the rivalry can be traced back hundreds of years, as the quotes about the Troy war will attest, the major more modern events are Greece independence from Ottoman rule in the 1830’s, Greece invasion into Turkey after WWI, the treaty of Lausanne in 1920 which restored Turkey’s control over Asia Minor, and the Turkish invasion into Cyprus in 1974.

Turkey undoubtedly *has* been seeking an expansionist policy in recent years. Erdogan’s rhetoric is part of his post-coup attempt to stabilize his government and quell domestic criticism. Erdogan’s vision of a restored neo-Ottoman empire is certainly reactionary.

To reiterate, in a case of war just between Turkey and Greece the RCIT calls for revolutionary defeatism on both sides. This means socialists must not support the war efforts in each country and stand for the defeat of “their” state. Naturally, the involvement of imperialist powers on each side (not excluded given the close relationships both countries have with Great Powers) could alter the character of the war. As a general principle we state that the RCIT opposes both US, EU as well as Russian imperialism.

** We call for anti-war mobilizations in Greece and Turkey, for the end of the current hostilities*

** We call for an end to imperialist interventions in the region*

References:

[1] <https://tinyurl.com/y8y6vmeh>

[2] <https://tinyurl.com/ycjn9njq>

[3] <https://tinyurl.com/y7h7t4ap>

Map:



For furthermore information on Greece: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/greece-semi-colony/>

On Marxism and War:

<http://the-isleague.com/marxism-and-war/>

<https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/chapter-ii/>

On Turkey:

<http://the-isleague.com/turkey-6-2013/>

<https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/chapter-v/>

<https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/program-turkey/>