

Syria: threatening all-out war?

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Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are fleeing what is left of their homes in Syria. The offensive of the Syrian army and its Russian and Iranian allies was supposed to bring to an end another bloody chapter in the civil war, the recapture of Idlib. That would inevitably entail the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people and the destruction of all armed groups opposed to Assad's regime, whether they are jihadist, pro-Western or the last remnants of the democratic opposition.

No doubt the Syrian regime and its allies calculated that they could quickly complete this murderous enterprise. That there would be protest notes from the Western powers, the self-styled "international community", would have been included in those calculations.

Equally, no mobilisation by Turkey, which had already left important parts of northern Syria and especially Rojava to the tender mercy of Russia, was to be expected. But, as in Libya, the Putin-Erdogan alliance is proving to be fragile, indeed, it is practically at an end. Although both these robbers, both "victors", want their share of the cake, the Assad regime is particularly unwilling to make any concessions to Turkey.

Conversely, the war itself is now threatening to escalate from a proxy war to a direct hot war between the intervening powers. Even if neither of the parties positively wants this development, they are still playing with fire. While Russia orders more warships into the Mediterranean, Turkey calls on its NATO partners to back it with more than words.

The Trump administration sees a chance to restore its lost influence and promises support. NATO declares its solidarity with a member state, although it leaves open what practical form this will take. Despite all the concern about escalation, the confrontation could intensify massively in the next few days. In the most extreme scenario, the Syrian civil war could turn into a clash between Russia and NATO.

Turkey

According to Turkish news agencies, as many as 33 Turkish soldiers have been killed in Syrian air attacks on Idlib. The Kurdish news agency, Anf, puts the death toll at 113. However, video recordings circulating on the internet speak of several hundred "martyrs" and Turkish soldiers complain that they, "cannot get out of Idlib alive".

Twitter was closed down in Turkey on February 27 to prevent the spread of any further news about the war and the numbers of soldiers killed. But, in the border region with Syria, hospitals are overcrowded with corpses and the Ministry of Health is calling on the population to donate blood. This suggests that the number of victims is much higher than the 33.

Turkey is now openly waging war in Syria against the Assad regime and, in fact, against its ally, Russia. The fact that, since 27 February, Turkey is no longer preventing Syrian refugees from travelling to Europe means that they are once more using them as pawns in the game. In so doing, they want to put pressure

on the EU and force it to intervene on their side in the war for Idlib, or at least to provide support. This could also lead to a war between Turkey, the EU and Russia.

The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, is in regular telephone contact with the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg. As a result, NATO announced on February 28 that it will support Turkey militarily and strengthen its air defences. Already before and during the offensive in Idlib, parts of NATO sided with Turkey, which is fighting alongside jihadist groups like the Sultan Murad Division and Ahrar Al-Sharqiya.

The suffering of the 3 to 4 million civilians in Idlib, however, is hardly reported in Turkey. Several thousand people, some of whom were forced to resettle there by the Syrian regime, are still in Idlib, under Turkish/Jihadist and Syrian/Russian fire.

While Russia and Syria, Turkey and the USA are taking a stand and a further escalation threatens, the weakened EU is dragging its feet. It demands an end to the fighting and at the same time supports its NATO ally. However, it is at odds with Turkey over the question of the refugees, whom it does not want to help under any circumstances.

Opening the Turkish border does not mean that the people who are fleeing will get very far. Frontex has been further equipped in recent years, and more and more police and border guards are being ordered to the EU's external borders. If the rush becomes too great, it cannot be ruled out that the armed force of Frontex will shoot people at the borders. This threatens a humanitarian crisis for the people in Idlib and the millions of refugees from the civil war.

Currently, large groups of refugees are gathering in Edirne, a Turkish border town near Bulgaria and Greece, and in Izmir and other Aegean port cities in western Turkey. We need to open Europe's borders for all! Right now! We must fight to ensure that all those who want to enter Europe have safe escape routes by sea or land and can settle, work and build a livelihood in the countries of their choice.

Objectives

The Turkish invasion of Syria was motivated, like the intervention of all other powers, by geostrategic objectives. Originally set on overthrowing Assad himself, Erdogan now wants to have as large a part as possible of the booty, i.e. to help shape the country's new order and profit from its reconstruction. He portrays the invasion of Turkish troops, the conquest of Afrin and other Kurdish cities, as an act of "defence" of his country, just as Russia, Iran and Syria glorify the brutal re-establishment of the Assad regime as a "fight against terrorism".

Nevertheless, the war could easily boomerang on Erdogan. Turkey is in a very bad economic situation and a war certainly will not contribute to a recovery. On the contrary, the working class is called up to the wars and has to die for the interests of a state that cannot even offer enough for many to survive. The minimum wage is barely enough to feed themselves and their families, the quality of life decreases with every dawning day, and now young wage earners are also called up to the army to die in a war that in no way serves their interests.

Just like the working classes in Russia or Iran, the Turkish working class should refuse any support to "its" government. Erdogan's war is not our war. At the same time, it does not help to rejoice over the death of Turkish soldiers, what is important is to force Erdogan and the regime to withdraw from Syria, not only from Idlib, but also from Rojava and all other areas of the civil war.

Withdrawal from Idlib alone, whether as a result of Syrian/Russian military strikes or through a broad

"ceasefire agreement", would ultimately mean that Turkey would continue to be the occupying power in northern Syria/Rojava. This would give it control over strategically important traffic junctions in the region, such as the M14 motorway linking Antakya with Mosul. The intention would be to gain a better foothold in the Arab world, maintain its occupation of the Kurdish areas and continue to build, arm and support jihadist formations.

No to war! Withdraw all imperialist troops and regional powers!

In Turkey, Russia and the NATO countries, we need a broad united front of the trade unions and parties of the working class. Only the working class, in international solidarity with the refugees, Kurds and the working class and democratic opposition in Syria can stop this war! Who could be drawn in if we strike? How could Turkey continue to wage war if the working class takes to the barricades and calls a general strike in solidarity with the four million civilians in Idlib and the three million Kurds in Northern Syria?

As the German workers song goes, "All the wheels must stand still, if the workers say they will" and, of course, this can also apply to the tracks of a tank!

We do not need any more imperialists and regional powers in the war in Syria, all fighting for their own profits and strategic interests. It was right that many Turkish and international leftists opposed Turkey's invasion of the Kurdish areas in Syria and showed solidarity with the Kurds, but solidarity cannot and must not remain lip service! A joint mobilisation must be organised and implemented in order to prevent the threat of the war spreading and to help the civilian population in Idlib.

The working class, the trade unions, have to recognise that Turkey's intervention in Syria does not serve to protect the population, but only its own power interests, the crushing of Syrian democracy, workers' rights and the prevention of Kurdish self-determination. Equally, a US or NATO intervention could lead to a military struggle for the redivision of the world between the great powers, and to an international conflagration.

The intervention of Russia and Iran is not an act of "anti-imperialism", but a naked and brutal pursuit of their own geo-strategic interests. Together with the Assad regime, they are keeping alive a murderous war machine responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions.

Whether the war in Syria escalates into an international confrontation or is "pacified" at the negotiating table, we must not place our hopes in the Assads and Erdogans, the Putins and Trumps, any more than the Merkels and Macrons. They are all part of the problem.

Only a joint, international, anti-war movement, based on the working class, can prevent the Syrian civil war from spreading further, even becoming a confrontation between NATO and Russia.

- Withdraw all imperialist troops and regional powers from Syria, especially Turkish, Russian and Iranian troops!
- No to any intervention and arms supplies to Erdogan or Assad!
- Withdraw all NATO troops from the region, close down the NATO bases in Turkey!
- Stop the EU-Turkey deal! Open the European borders to all refugees!
- Support for Rojava and for the working class, the democratic and socialist opposition in Syria!