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War in Ukraine

# Turkish diplomacy, Nato and the left

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**With the organization of talks between the warring parties in Istanbul, President Erdogan has finally succeeded in setting himself up as a mediator in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.**

First with the Antalya Diplomatic Forum of 10 March, in which the foreign ministers of the two countries participated, and then, last week, by welcoming the Russian and Ukrainian delegations to Istanbul, the Turkish president was able to take advantage of the "opportunity" offered by this war to restore his image at the international level.

## A sinuous foreign policy

Indeed, Ankara, a member of NATO since 1952 and with the second largest army in its midst, has followed an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy in recent years, which wanted to be "independent" in its international relations, especially vis-à-vis the Western imperialist powers. The main breaking point was the military rapprochement with Russia through Ankara's acquisition of the Russian S400 air defence system in 2017-2018 (incompatible with Nato systems). This foreign policy shift had been initiated after the 2016 coup attempt - deemed to be supported by the US - and Washington's alliance with Kurdish forces in northern Syria in the fight against the Islamic State.

After several years of multilateral tensions - with almost all his neighbours and the major Western powers - and military interventions outside his borders (in Syria and Libya), Erdogan, facing a deep economic crisis and popular discontent (65 wildcat strikes in the first two months of 2022), has been trying for several months to reposition himself internationally. Without breaking with Moscow (on which it is dependent for energy), Ankara is trying to get closer to the Western bloc and, at the same time, to reconcile with the Arab Emirates and Israel in order to get out of its isolation and recover its economy.

In this context, Russia's invasion of Ukraine offers Erdogan the opportunity to show his balancing act and make his diplomatic turn. The fact that Ankara has economic and military relations with both countries is to its advantage and it has everything to gain if the war does not take a "global" turn with the involvement of Nato, which would force it to clarify its positions and act with the latter.

## Rejection of the "imperialist war"

However, while the Russian invasion is certainly not accepted and is not perceived as legitimate in society, there has been no massive demonstration of solidarity with the Ukrainian people or even more vaguely an anti-war mobilization that would gather several thousand people. However, much smaller demonstrations have been organized by the radical left in several cities. The Russian invasion being of course denounced, it is the rejection of an "imperialist war" between Russia and Nato, to the detriment of the peoples - and in particular the Ukrainian people - that stands out in these statements, one of whose main demands is the withdrawal of Turkey from Nato.

Let's remember that NATO was at the origin in Turkey of the formation of a "special operations" department within the state from the 1950s onwards, in connection with the far-right militias, active in the repression of the left and the workers' movement for several decades. So Nato is not only a question of international imperialist alignment for the

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left in Turkey, but is above all about the memory of many local massacres and murders. The question of whether or not to support arms deliveries by Nato states to Ukraine is thus completely absent from the strategic debate, while for example a halt to the sale of Bayraktar TB2 drones - apparently effective in combat - to the Ukrainian state could be demanded even if this demand was not generally accepted.

While the bulk of the radical left cannot be called "Putinist", it is clear that not being on the same side as Western imperialism and its military arm remains an imperative in its positions.

*7 April 2022*

*Istanbul*

*PS:*

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