

Mass protest against threatened Turkey-Syria war

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Tens of thousands of anti-war protesters gathered in Istanbul, Thursday evening, opposing military action against Syria. Marchers streamed through the capital's commercial district, opposing Turkey's alliance with the United States and pledging support for the Syrian people.

The demonstration took place after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government used its majority in parliament to grant Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan powers to send soldiers into "foreign countries".

The clear intent is to wage a cross-border offensive to depose the regime of Bashir al-Assad without consulting the national assembly. The motion submitted allows the government to determine "the scope, extent and time" of any possible intervention.

The motion was passed after a stray shell from Syria killed five people in the Turkish border town of Akçakale Wednesday. Two days of mortar fire followed; Turkish fighter jets also carried out strikes on targets including a Syrian military camp, killing an unspecified number of soldiers.

The measure, denounced as a "war bill", was opposed by the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). AKP spokesmen denied that war was being considered, but Erdogan called the mortar shells that hit Akçakale "at the threshold of armed attacks" and pledged "to act in a timely and quick manner against additional risks and threats facing our country."

The parliamentary session was held in closed session, under AKP instructions. Demonstrators outside parliament in Ankara were attacked by police with teargas.

Internationally, Turkey engaged in a flurry of diplomatic activity to secure support for its stand. It called repeatedly for the support of its NATO military allies against an external threat, citing Article 4 of the NATO treaty.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu personally called United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The response was bellicose.

A NATO statement declared, "The Syrian regime's recent aggressive acts at Nato's south-eastern border ... are a flagrant breach of international law and a clear and present danger to security." It demanded the immediate end of "aggressive acts against an ally".

Pentagon Press Secretary George Little denounced what he called "depraved behavior" by

Syria and called for the removal of the government.

Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague joined Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in expressing outrage.

Russia blocked the more inflammatory positions demanded by the US and its allies at the UN. A first draft of a resolution condemned the shelling of Akçakale and the deaths of five civilians as "violations of international law" and as constituting "a serious threat to international peace and security," calling on "the Syria government to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours."

Russia opposed the reference to violations of international law and a serious threat to international peace and security, urging an appeal to both parties for "restraint" and to "avoid military clashes".

Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov made clear to Interfax news agency that Russia was seeking to block "pretexts for carrying out a military scenario or to introduce initiatives such as humanitarian corridors or buffer zones."

Most media sources accepted the AKP's denials that it is contemplating war, but war is clearly what it wants.

The resolution moved in parliament was in fact dated September 20, showing that the AKP cynically used Akçakale as a pretext to promote pre-existing plans to obtain authorization for an invasion of Syria.

In addition, on Friday, the Turkish General Staff declared 15 mountainous areas, predominantly in the East and Southeast of Turkey "temporary security zones." Public entry into the areas will be forbidden between October 7 and January 7 due to "extensive military operations" being carried out against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Turkey has already said it will not respect Syria's border in pursuing its military campaign against Kurdish separatists it has accused Assad of encouraging and sheltering.

Turkey has repeatedly urged the establishment of military corridors and no-fly zones in Syria. It also hosts the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Congress. It provides bases for various opposition groups to enter Syria and conduct military attacks, including covert forces from the CIA and Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar and numerous Al Qaeda-type outfits.

The AKP is intent on advancing itself as the head of an alliance of Sunni powers on which the imperialist powers can rely to police essential oil and gas extraction and to suppress social and political opposition in the working class through repression and whipping up ethno-sectarian tensions.

But the AKP wants military action to proceed under a NATO umbrella and with active US participation. For both the AKP and the Obama administration, this is fraught with difficulties. Both would face major domestic opposition to the launch of another war in the Middle East. Both will face opposition, possibly including a military response, from Russia and China to an attempt to exclude them from the strategically-vital region.

The Turkish media reflected these concerns, with Ismail Kucukkaya, writing in centre-right

Aksam urging, "Let us scream from the very beginning: No war!" Warning of "incalculable dangers", he asked, "Are we right to make a war and do we have enough legitimate reasons? Does the nation want that? Will our economy bear this?"

Melih Asik in *Milliyet* warned: "We've reached a critical point. We're not only up against Syria, but also Iran, Iraq, Russia and China which support Damascus. Behind us, there is nothing but the provocative attitudes and empty promises of the United States." Referring to the AKP's recent conviction of Turkish generals on charges of plotting a coup, he added: "What we have is an army whose generals are arrested... and a terror problem we are struggling to deal with."

Such comments indicate the sense of impending disaster that is developing in sections of the Turkish ruling class. Nonetheless, the AKP and its NATO allies are continuing to pour fuel on the flames.

Warning Syria that testing Turkey's preparedness for war would be a "fatal mistake," Erdogan said yesterday: "We are not interested in war, but we're not far from it either. This nation has come to where it is today having gone through intercontinental wars."

The logic of the AKP's participation in the US drive for regime change in Syria and to destroy Iran's nuclear program leads to war with both those countries and ultimately with Russia and China—that is, towards war throughout the Middle East and the world. The parliament vote authorizing military action brings Turkey and the world one step closer to such a catastrophe.

Deutsche Welle wrote: "Ankara is preparing for conflict and at the same time stating it does not intend to declare war. The West has responded slowly to play down the clash's importance... Turkey is not limiting its response to howitzer fire. The air force and navy were put on alert, according to press reports."

"Few doubts remain about Turkey's resolve to consider a full military reaction against Syria," it concluded.

At the same time, Simon Tisdall busily lobbied for military intervention in the *Guardian*. Asking "How long can the world's great powers sit on their hands?" he condemned "do-nothing hand-wringing." He solidarised himself with the "pressure for more direct, multilateral intervention, most probably via NATO," coming from the Arab states and US Republicans.

The head of the Israeli military intelligence, Maj Gen Aviv Kochavi, used the occasion to threaten action to protect the Golan Heights. "The erosion of the Syrian regime's control and the growing penetration of global jihadist forces present a new threat, for which Military Intelligence and the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] are preparing," he said.

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