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Turkey heads to critical elections in shadow of NATO-Russia war

Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections on Sunday May 14 are of international significance and are being followed around the world. There are 64 million voters in Turkey and abroad.

The elections take place under the shadow of the US-led NATO powers' escalating war against Russia in Ukraine. A poll taken after the war began last year showed that 80 percent of the population in Turkey opposes the Ukraine war. However, the opposition to the war and the urgent social aspirations of working people find no political expression in these elections.

Despite their tactical differences, the two main contenders, the People's Alliance of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Nation Alliance of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), share this in common: loyalty to imperialism and hostility to the working class.

While Kılıçdaroğlu promises to better serve NATO, Erdoğan plans to continue maneuvering between the United States on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. This is a decisive factor in the preference for Kılıçdaroğlu in Washington and the European capitals, which are at war with Russia in Ukraine and preparing war against China.

Erdoğan's 20-year rule has been marked by massive political crimes, including support for imperialist wars and a draconian assault on democratic rights. His response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the economic crisis have discredited him. On February 6, earthquakes

struck Turkey and Syria, causing tens of thousands of preventable deaths and displacing millions of people, further deepening opposition to Erdoğan in the working class.

The Nation Alliance of Kılıçdaroğlu, backed by the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and pseudo-left parties as a “progressive” alternative to Erdoğan, is complicit with Erdoğan on all these crimes. It supported NATO expansion and wars, the deadly official response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enriched finance capital at the expense of the working class, and ignored scientists' warnings about earthquakes and unsafe housing.

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), rejects the claim that masses of workers and youth should choose between the two right-wing bourgeois alliances and their supporters. It stated:

Whatever their outcome, the elections will not solve any of the fundamental problems facing the working class. This is because none of these problems can be solved on a national basis, or without a frontal social assault on the wealth of finance capital.

Erdoğan, the leader of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has ruled Turkey since 2002, could lose the presidency in the first round, according to most polls. The latest poll on May 10-11 by ORC Research, which largely correctly predicted the outcome of the 2018 presidential election, shows Kılıçdaroğlu could win in the first round with 51.7 percent. Erdoğan, on the other hand, remains at 44.2 percent.

Kılıçdaroğlu's chances of winning the election in the first round rose after Muharrem İnce, the CHP's presidential candidate in 2018, withdrew from the race on Thursday, over allegations of a sex scandal which İnce denied and blamed Fethullah Gülen, an Islamist preacher and long-time CIA asset in the US. The Nation Alliance, the pseudo-left parties behind it and the pro-opposition media all demanded that İnce withdraw from the race.

Bekir Ağırdir, general manager of Konda Research, said that it expects most İnce voters to support Kılıçdaroğlu. “Among voters who said they would vote for Muharrem İnce, 7 out of 10 or even 8 out of 10 said they would support Mr. Kemal if the election went to the second round... Those who will go to the polls will probably vote for Mr. Kemal. Therefore, [İnce's withdrawal] is a development that increases the possibility of Mr. Kemal being elected in the first round.”

Kılıçdaroğlu reacted to İnce's withdrawal with an unprecedented barrage of accusations that Russian President Vladimir Putin had interfered in the elections. This underscores the central role played by NATO's war against Russia in the Turkish elections. Kılıçdaroğlu

tweeted, “Dear Russian Friends, you are behind the montages, conspiracies, Deep Fake content, tapes that were revealed in this country yesterday.”

Kılıçdaroğlu did not provide any evidence for this explosive accusation. The lack of any substantiation for his accusations is so obvious that it attracted questions even from the establishment media. “If we didn’t have it [concrete evidence], I wouldn’t have tweeted,” he told Reuters, before admitting that his campaign had not contacted the Russian embassy on the matter.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov categorically denied Kılıçdaroğlu’s allegations, saying: “We have repeatedly said and insisted that we do not interfere in the internal affairs and electoral processes of other countries. We officially declare: there can be no talk of any interference. If someone provided Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu with such information, they are liars.”

Peskov noted that allegations of “Russian interference” in the 2016 US elections turned out to be unfounded. Recalling the fiasco of the Democratic Party’s impeachment of then-President Donald Trump, Peskov said: “In the US, the entire government, the entire administration, for a long time claimed that Russia had interfered, then they spent tens of millions of dollars on the investigation and finally came to the conclusion that there was no interference.”

The Democrats’ unsubstantiated claim that Russian interference had caused their candidate, Hillary Clinton, to lose to Donald Trump, played a critical role in escalating the anti-Russian campaign amid the NATO-Russia proxy war in Syria and the civil war in Ukraine. Ultimately, the escalation of NATO’s arming of the Ukrainian regime after Joe Biden took office in January 2021 provoked Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Kılıçdaroğlu told Reuters: “We don’t want to break our friendly relations but we will not allow interference in our internal matters.” Reuters wrote that Kılıçdaroğlu plans to “push for another peace initiative between Russia and Ukraine, following a failed bid by Erdogan in 2022.”

Asked whether he would support NATO’s further eastward enlargement encircling Russia, Kılıçdaroğlu said, “Of course ... We will maintain our relations with NATO within the same framework as we had in the past.”

Kılıçdaroğlu wore a bulletproof vest at his rally in Samsun yesterday after his campaign circulated allegations that he could be assassinated by killers traveling through Georgia, a country located between Russia and Turkey.

CHP deputy Murat Balkan made further serious allegations about election day. He claimed the Interior Ministry sent a letter to provincial governors asking them to have Turkish Armed Forces personnel and armored vehicles ready on Sunday. The National Defense Ministry denied the allegation in a statement.

With the support of the HDP and the Turkish pseudo-left parties, Kılıçdaroğlu is preparing to take power and increase Ankara's participation in NATO's war with Russia. This policy, carried out behind the backs of the population, is deeply unpopular. It can proceed, however, because the entire capitalist establishment, including Erdoğan, supports the NATO war.

Yesterday, in response to Kılıçdaroğlu's accusations against Russia, Erdoğan attacked him, saying: "Biden handed down the verdict that Erdoğan must be defeated. It is in the archives. You are impotent, pathetic. When Biden said that, I did not say why he said it. When you attack Russia, I do not approve. Our relations with Russia are not less than with America. We trade more with Russia than with America. Mr. Kemal, you do not know how to administer the state, you do not understand."

Referring to the failed, NATO-backed coup attempt against him in July 2016, Erdoğan said in another statement: "No matter what attacks we face, we will not cast a shadow on the will of the nation and our democracy. If necessary, we will defend our independence and our future at the cost of our lives, as we did on the night of July 15 [in 2016]." He claimed that he would win the election and declare those who did not recognize his victory as "coup plotters."

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu also said yesterday that Washington was behind the allegations that forced İnce to withdraw, declaring: "America has been interfering in this election from the very beginning. Biden said that we weren't able to do this with a coup in 2016. This time we will do it with an election, not a coup."

Soylu's statements constitute an indictment of his own government. Despite the 2016 coup, the Erdoğan government remained loyal to NATO and joined in its escalation of the war in Ukraine. This laid the ground for Kılıçdaroğlu, assisted by the HDP and its pseudo-left allies, to mount his own provocations against Russia.

Whatever their outcome, the election will not resolve any of the questions facing the working class—above all, stopping NATO's war with Russia. Rather, it has shown the urgent necessity of establishing the political independence of the working class from all the pro-imperialist parties of the political establishment based on a program for a struggle of the international working class for socialism.

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