

Answer to Question

Sweden and Finland Joining of NATO

(Translated)

Question:

Finland and Sweden submitted an official request to join NATO on 18/5/2022, at the Alliance headquarters in Brussels, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but this announcement was soon followed by a Turkish objection, because of the two countries' stance on Turkey's fight against Kurdish armed groups, led by the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which is active in Turkey and the region. It is known that all thirty members must agree as a prerequisite for membership, including Turkey, for the two countries to join the Alliance. What is behind all this and what are its motives?

Answer:

To get a clear answer, we review the following matters:

First: with Finland joining NATO, which was the first to take the decision, before Sweden's decision to take the step too, the length of Russia's common border with the member states of the Alliance, which is currently seen as a "hostile alliance", will double to 2,600 km. Note that the border with Finland is 1,300 km. In comparison, the length of Russia's disputed border with Ukraine, that its possible joining of NATO was one of the most prominent headlines of the current war, is no more than 400 km. And if Sweden later joined, even though it does not have a direct border with Russia, it would be easier for NATO to conduct broader and more dangerous activities in the Baltic Sea.

In this case, all countries with access to the Baltic Sea, with the exception of Russia, will become members of the Alliance, which means the weakening of Russia's strategic presence in this basin in exchange for its transformation almost into a lake controlled by the Western Alliance. Sweden's joining the NATO means the transfer of the territory of the Swedish island of Gotland to the control of the Alliance. Hence, it will be more difficult for Russia to actively operate in this region, conduct exercises and maneuvers, or even enhance the capabilities of a permanent presence in the region. Here, it cannot be ignored that Sweden, for example, possesses five ultra-modern submarines that will constitute a qualitative addition to the fleets of Poland and Germany, and increase the blockade of any military movements of Russia in the region.

Second: From a military point of view, the membership of Finland and Sweden of the Alliance presents the Kremlin with very complex and difficult choices, and this is not limited to the military and strategic dimension of the most dangerous development of its kind since the Cold War, but moreover, on the political level, the Kremlin fought the war in Ukraine under a basic slogan; to remove the danger of NATO's expansion to the east, and not to enable the Alliance to consolidate its influence in Ukraine close to the Russian borders, so how about after Finland and Sweden join the alliance now? This would be one of the most dangerous political repercussions of this war, because the Alliance would be practically only 200 kilometers from the city limits of Saint Petersburg. This constitutes a severe political blow to President Vladimir Putin's ambitions, and raises internal questions about

the feasibility of waging war on Ukraine in the first place, without calculating dangerous repercussions of this kind!

Third: The membership of Finland and Sweden to NATO will have repercussions on the Western confrontation with China. It is expected that the task of deterring Chinese influence in the alliance's strategy will be confirmed for the first time in its history during the Alliance summit in Madrid at the end of this month in June 2022, and NATO does not hide its ambitions to expand the Alliance's scope outside the Western world. It sent invitations to attend this event to the foreign affairs ministers of Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand... From this angle, Finland and Sweden's official request to join NATO constitutes a political victory for President Joe Biden, a failure for President Putin, and a danger to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Fourth: NATO was established shortly after the end of World War II; it is an Alliance of 30 countries. Turkey is the second military power in it after the United States. When a new country applies for membership, it requires the unanimous approval of the members of the Alliance to invite it to join. This is the reason for the importance of Turkey's reservation on the membership of the two European countries... Turkey has officially supported the expansion of the alliance since its joining of the bloc 70 years ago. Now, Erdogan opposes Sweden and Finland joining NATO for four reasons:

1- Erdogan's bid to stay in power amid the economic downturn. Turkey's inflation rate has soared to triple digits as the lira has fallen, plunging an already reeling economy into a deeper crisis. This poses problems for the president ahead of the 2023 elections, which makes Erdogan's position weaker than any time since he came to power nearly 20 years ago. His popularity in recent opinion polls is declining, and therefore he put pressure on the alliance to show opposition to the membership of Finland and Sweden, hoping to achieve economic and military aid from the countries of the alliance to improve his popular position before the elections.

2- Erdogan hopes to use the issue of Sweden and Finland's NATO membership as an opportunity to achieve his long-held goal of creating a buffer zone free of Kurdish fighters along Turkey's border with Syria. By expanding the liberated areas, Turkey can resettle Syrian refugees, who, according to the opposition, constitute a problem in Turkey. The plans for the military operation also reflect his belief that the West will not oppose such operations when it needs Ankara's support for the two European countries' efforts to join the alliance. Erdogan's announcement is also aimed at bolstering support from nationalists as he prepares for tough elections next year. Cross-border military operations have boosted his approval ratings in the past. His move comes at a time when opinion polls show waning support for Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), amid simmering economic problems.

3- Erdogan's desire to meet the American president. Last April, Erdogan complained to reporters that he and Biden do not have the kind of relationship that linked him to former presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama. [Erdogan said: "Of course, there are some meetings from time to time, but they should have been more advanced." He added: "I hope we can achieve this in the next process" (24/05/2022 <https://arabic.cnn.com>)], meaning that this is not a matter related to Sweden and Finland, but rather an appropriate moment from which Erdogan hopes to speed up his meeting with Biden, who kept the Turkish leader at a distance from him.

4- To stop Western support for the Kurds, and hand over by the West of members belonging to Hizmet (Service Movement), Erdogan is still pursuing those belonging to the Hizmet. [The Turkish newspaper *Zaman* reported that the authorities issued arrest warrants against 40 people, including dismissed employees and military personnel, on charges of “belonging to Hizmet,” affiliated to the preacher Fethullah Gulen. The newspaper pointed out that a security campaign was launched in several cities, centered in Istanbul and Ankara, to arrest the wanted persons. (Zaman, 1/6/2022)]. As for Western support for the Kurds, despite the European Union's designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization, many European countries have provided armaments support to the People's Protection Units, the military arm of the Democratic Union Party, which Ankara considers the Syrian extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and therefore Turkey met it with a strong rejection. Ankara also objects to some European countries hosting representative offices of Kurdish organizations, receiving their members, and allowing them to organize political events on their lands. The majority of European countries did not respond to Ankara's requests to extradite them. Erdogan invoked this issue when talking about his country's objection to Finland and Sweden joining NATO, trying to exploit it to influence the removal or reduction of Western support for the Kurds, as well as the extradition of those belonging to the Hizmet movement.

Fifth: Intensive talks are taking place between Turkey on the one hand, and Sweden, Finland, the United States and members of NATO on the other. In an effort to meet some of Ankara's demands, in exchange for its approval of Stockholm and Helsinki joining the alliance. [“On 18/5/2022, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin held telephone conversations with senior officials in Germany, Sweden, Finland, Britain and the United States, on the issue of Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO.” (<https://futureuae.com> 27/05/2022)]. [On the same day, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and his American counterpart, Anthony Blinken, held the first meeting of the Turkish-American Strategy Mechanism in New York, where they discussed the issue of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. (<https://mubasher.aljazeera.net/> 18/05/2022)].

Sixth: Accordingly, it is expected that Turkey will reach a settlement with the European powers and the United States on the issue of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. It is unlikely, due to the current facts, that Ankara will persist in its objection and its blocking of the two countries from joining the Alliance completely. Rather, it is expected that it will agree in the end, after obtaining some consolation in the four points of clause IV above, even if this takes time, something similar has happened previously. In 2009, Turkey protested the appointment of former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO chief, but after negotiations for some time, Turkey agreed to appoint Rasmussen in exchange for obtaining positions (as consolation) within the political and military structure of the Alliance.

2 Dhul Qi'dah 1443 AH

1/6/2022 CE