

Turkey threatens veto as Finland, Sweden to join NATO against Russia

Bar?? Demir
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Amid the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has indicated his concerns and opposition to moves by Finland and Sweden to join NATO. For a new country to join NATO, all 30 member states must be unanimous in supporting it.

On Friday, Erdoğan said: “We are following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don’t hold positive views.” Referring to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the Turkish state bans as terrorist, he added, “the Scandinavian countries, unfortunately, are almost like guesthouses for terrorist organizations. PKK, DHKP-C are nested in the Netherlands and Sweden. I go further; they also take part in the parliaments there.”

Erdoğan also referred to rising tensions in the Aegean and Mediterranean with French-backed Greece: “The [Turkish] governments before us made a mistake regarding over Greece’s [return] to NATO. You know the attitude that Greece has taken towards Turkey by backing NATO, so we do not want to commit a second mistake in this regard.” He was referring to the Turkish military junta’s approval of Greece’s return to the alliance’s military wing after the NATO-backed coup in 1980 in Turkey.

Erdoğan maintained this stance yesterday. Regarding today’s visit of the Finnish and Swedish delegations to Turkey, he said: “They will come to Turkey on Monday. Will they come to persuade us?” He continued, “First of all, we would not say ‘yes’ to those who imposed sanctions on Turkey to join NATO, a security organization, during this process.”

US officials have indicated they are confident that Erdoğan will ultimately capitulate to pressure from the NATO imperialist powers to admit Sweden and Finland into NATO.

“If that’s what they [Finland and Sweden] choose to do, I’m very confident that we will reach consensus on that,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters after a NATO foreign ministers meeting in Berlin on Sunday. He said, “I don’t want to characterise the specific conversation that we had either with the [Turkish] foreign minister or within the NATO sessions themselves, but I can say this much: I heard almost across the board, very strong support (for Sweden, Finland) joining the alliance.”

The Finnish and Swedish governments refer to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to justify joining NATO and abandoning their long-standing policies of official neutrality. This provocative move, essentially planned in Washington, Berlin and London, forms part of decades of NATO expansion, which provoked Russia into its reactionary invasion of Ukraine. The entire Scandinavian region is to be transformed into a potential war zone in a conflict with Russia.

All these attempts raise the danger of the Ukraine war escalating into a direct military conflict between Russia and NATO and a nuclear world war. However, the reaction of Erdoğan, who is the head of a country that has NATO’s second largest army and has been supporting the NATO expansion against Russia for decades, has nothing to do with principled opposition to NATO or war.

Ankara supports NATO’s Ukraine policy, including the far-right coup NATO organized in Kiev in 2014, and supplies critical Bayraktar TB2 armed drones to the Ukrainian army.

However, Ankara does not participate in the economic embargoes and sanctions against Russia. Moreover, it criticizes the policies of NATO powers, especially the US and Britain, to continue or even expand the war in order to weaken Russia.

There is mounting concern in Turkish ruling circles at the scope of NATO's war on Russia. NATO officials have made clear they intend to forcibly break up Russia—notably seizing Crimea, which Russia counts as its sovereign territory—and topple President Vladimir Putin. The Turkish ruling elite is no doubt deeply concerned at the prospect of NATO-Russian war and of a bloody disintegration of Russia, just north of Turkey.

Last month, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned: “Until the NATO meeting, we thought the war would not last long. However, after the NATO meeting, an opinion emerged. There are countries that want this war to continue. Their aim is to push Russia back.”

Turkey has broad military-economic ties with Russia. It purchased S-400 air defense systems from Russia despite US objections, and obtains nearly one-third of its natural gas directly from Russia via pipelines. Russia is currently still building the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in Mersin. Turkey also imports most of its wheat from Russia. Moreover, Russian tourists are critical for Turkey's hospitality industry to provide much-needed foreign exchange reserves.

While fearing the war's consequences for Turkey, the Turkish bourgeoisie also sees US moves to escalate the war drive as an opportunity to advance its regional interests and bargain with the major imperialist powers. “We did not close the door for Sweden and Finland to join NATO,” Erdoğan's spokesperson İbrahim Kalın commented, revealing Ankara's pragmatist bargaining approach.

However, a Turkish veto of Sweden and Finland joining NATO would pose a serious challenge to the US-led imperialist war drive against Russia, and could place Erdoğan once again in the gun sights of Washington and Berlin. The two leading NATO powers backed a failed 2016 coup attempt, plotted by officers who tried to assassinate Erdoğan during the coup.

Ankara wants its NATO allies to stop supporting the Kurdish nationalist People's Defense Units (YPG) in Syria. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said, “The reason for Turkey's stance is quite clear. NATO is not a union, not an organisation. NATO is an alliance. What does this require? It is not just a matter of security; it requires shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity. Especially when there is a threat to security in any area.

Unfortunately, the countries we mentioned openly support PKK-YPG terrorist organizations.”

Turkey is in conflict with the US on this issue. While Washington supports the YPG as a proxy force in its ongoing occupation in northern Syria against President Bashar Assad's government, Turkey sees the YPG as a terrorist organization and part of the PKK. The Turkish ruling class considers it of strategic importance to prevent the emergence of any Kurdish state led by the YPG on its borders. For this, Ankara has repeatedly invaded Syria since 2016, occupying parts of the country.

However, NATO's ongoing regime-change war in Syria which began in 2011 threatens increasingly to bring Turkey into conflict with Iran, another country targeted by Washington. Turkey recently held talks with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the main powers in Washington's anti-Iran axis, while Syrian President Assad held talks with the UAE and Iran.

Unconfirmed reports claim that Russia has begun to reduce its presence in Syria due to the Ukraine war, and Iranian-backed forces have settled in these regions. This indicates a growing risk of direct confrontation between Iran-backed militias, which Israel regularly targets in Syria, and Turkish armed forces in the country.

Amid all these events, there is an upsurge of the international class struggle amid a surge in food prices, which have risen with the Ukraine war and NATO sanctions against Russia.

Mass protests erupted in Iran last week after the government announced an end to subsidies on basic foodstuffs. In Turkey, where high costs of living have become unbearable for millions of workers' families, 2022 started with a wildcat strikes wave. This emerging class struggle points to the only social force that can put an end to the danger of world war: the international working class, fighting based on an internationalist and socialist program.



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