

Turkey retracts veto on Sweden, Finland joining NATO amid war summit in Madrid

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On the eve of the NATO summit focusing on war against Russia in Ukraine as well as confronting China, top officials from Turkey, Sweden and Finland agreed on Tuesday in Madrid to a trilateral memorandum of understanding allowing Stockholm's and Helsinki's entry into the military alliance.

After a meeting attended by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Finland's President Sauli Niinistö and Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, a memorandum was signed by the foreign ministers of these countries.

Stoltenberg declared: "The door is open—the joining of Finland and Sweden into NATO will take place." Seeking to present this decades-long imperialist alliance of war and destruction—from the Balkans to the Middle East and Central Asia—as a so-called tool for security, he claimed that "Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO is good for Finland and Sweden, it is good for NATO, and it is good for European security."

In his doorstep remarks yesterday at the ongoing Madrid summit he announced that the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO would be "unprecedentedly quick, within few weeks."

In exchange for the Swedish and Finnish commitments over Ankara's demands, the Turkish government withdrew its veto on their NATO membership. Turkey was demanding that Sweden and Finland stop supporting the Kurdish nationalist People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the Turkish government bans as terrorist groups.

The Turkish ruling class considers it of strategic importance to prevent the emergence of any Kurdish state led by the YPG on its borders, and has been preparing a new military operation against Kurdish militias since late May.

The US-backed agreement sharply exposes the hypocrisy of the imperialist powers on justifying the war offensive against Russia in the name of defending "human rights" and Ukraine's right of national self-determination. Coming at a time of escalating state repression against Kurdish media

and politicians in Turkey, this agreement gives the green light to a new offensive against the YPG in Syria, which, as before, will lead to hundreds of thousands of displaced people and thousands of deaths.

According to the memorandum, "Finland and Sweden will not provide support to YPG/PYD [Democratic Union Party in Syria], and the organization described as FETO [Fethullahist Terrorist Organization] in Turkey". Fethullah Gülen is the US-based preacher whom Ankara blames for the NATO-backed 2016 coup attempt against the Erdoğan government.

The memorandum also states that "Finland and Sweden commit to prevent activities of the PKK and all other terrorist organizations and their extensions, as well as activities by individuals in affiliated and inspired groups or networks linked to these terrorist organizations."

Sweden has committed to end its arms embargo to Turkey, which it launched against Ankara's military invasion in Syria targeting the YPG militias in 2019. Both countries also promised to "address Turkey's pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects expeditiously." Yesterday, Ankara announced that it would seek to extradite 33 alleged members of the PKK or FETO from Finland and Sweden.

In exchange to these commitments, Turkey "confirmed its long-standing support for NATO's Open Door policy, and agrees to support at the 2022 Madrid Summit the invitation of Finland and Sweden to become members of NATO," effectively removing the only obstacle to the opening of a northern front against Russia. Any new membership of the alliance needs confirmation by all members.

With this provocative move, essentially planned in Washington, Berlin and London, the entire Scandinavian region is to be transformed into a potential war zone in a conflict with Russia. In May, the Finnish and Swedish governments seized on Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine to justify their application to join NATO, abandoning their long-standing policies of official neutrality.

Finland shares a 1,300 km border with Russia, while

Sweden has a significant position in the Baltic Sea, and both countries have been increasingly rearmed by NATO powers against Russia in the last period.

“One of the most important messages from [Russian] President Putin... was that he was against any further NATO enlargement. He wanted less NATO. Now, President Putin is getting more NATO on his borders,” Stoltenberg said on Tuesday evening. With this statement, the NATO chief more or less admitted that NATO’s decades-long eastward expansion targeting Russia consciously sought to provoke the Kremlin to invade Ukraine so the US-led alliance could further escalate its confrontation with Russia.

The agreement on NATO enlargement comes just days after it was acknowledged that NATO forces, including those from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France and Lithuania, are directly involved in the war against Russia in Ukraine. As the NATO powers continue to massively arm Ukraine, Stoltenberg said the military alliance would increase its “high readiness forces” sevenfold, from 40,000 to 300,000, deploying tens of thousands of additional troops as well as countless tanks and aircraft directly to Russia’s border.

Moreover, in line with Washington’s “great power conflict” national strategy, NATO is adopting a new strategy, taking concrete steps towards targeting not only Russia, but also China—both vast nuclear-armed countries with massive resources of raw materials critical to the imperialist re-division of the world.

With the leaders of four Asia-Pacific countries—Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea—attending the NATO summit, Stoltenberg declared that the summit would directly address China for the first time, citing “the challenges that Beijing poses to our security, interests, and values.”

As Erdoğan’s office declared on Tuesday that “Turkey has made significant gains in the fight against terrorist organisations,” and “Turkey got what it wanted,” Swedish Prime Minister Andersson said it was a “very good agreement.” She added that “We will continue our fight against terrorism and as NATO members also do so with closer cooperation with Turkey.”

In a statement, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö said, “Our joint memorandum underscores the commitment of Finland, Sweden and Turkey to extend their full support against threats to each other’s security.”

Leaders of the major imperialist powers expressed their satisfaction with the deal. “Congratulations to Finland, Sweden, and Turkey on signing a trilateral memorandum—a crucial step towards a NATO invite to Finland and Sweden, which will strengthen our Alliance and bolster our collective security—and a great way to begin the Summit,” US President Joe Biden wrote on Twitter.

Although there was no public US involvement in negotiations between Turkey, Sweden and Finland, “The final push to resolve the dispute started early Tuesday morning, when President Biden called Mr. Erdogan to urge him to ‘seize the moment’ on the eve of the summit,” according to the *New York Times*.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed the deal on Twitter, writing: “Fantastic news as we kick off the NATO Summit. Sweden and Finland’s membership will make our brilliant alliance stronger and safer.” German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock expressed her government’s “relief” that Turkey had ended its opposition to Sweden and Finland joining NATO.

The main Turkish bourgeois opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) also welcomed the agreement. Yurter Özcan, the CHP representative to the US, tweeted, “The AKP government took the right decision by abandoning its token veto.” Earlier, CHP spokesperson Faik Öztrak said, “As CHP, we would of course be pleased to see NATO strengthened, but Turkey’s interests come first.”

While this agreement confirms the Turkish bourgeoisie’s deep-rooted commitment to imperialism and the NATO alliance, it also underlines the bankruptcy of Kurdish nationalism’s orientation towards the United States and the European powers.

In late May, Meral Dan?? Be?ta?, a leading deputy of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), declared, “The Kurdish issue can be solved inside Turkey. You cannot solve this issue by blackmailing NATO and vetoing Sweden and Finland. Of course, we do not think that these countries will enter into narrow negotiations. Because both Sweden and Finland have a democratic system, a fair judicial system, and freedom of thought and expression.”

The conflict between the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie, both pro-NATO and pro-imperialist, is purely tactical. Both are hostile to the democratic aspirations of the Kurdish people. Amid the growing danger of a third world war, only the revolutionary unification of the working class across the Middle East and internationally can fight against war and defend democratic rights on the basis of a socialist program.



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