

**23 – 05 – 2022**

**News:** Turkey on NATO expansion

- Recently, Turkey has been threatening to use its Veto Power in the matter of admitting Sweden and Finland (SweFin) to the military bloc NATO.
- The reason behind Turkey, threatening to use the power is that it cites that the Nordic countries harbour “terrorist groups” – a reference to Kurdish insurgents.
- For years since 1814, SweFin is yet to see a bloodshed war and their recent urge to join NATO is a statement that implies the equilibrium imbalance in Europe.

**Cause of the urge of SweFin to join NATO**

- Unlike Ukraine, both Sweden and Finland have no border conflict with Russia.
- But again, Ukraine didn't have any major conflict with Russia until the 2014 regime change in Kyiv.
- So the Russian attack on Ukraine seemed to have altered the security calculus of SweFin.
- They moved quickly to apply for NATO membership because they hoped the alliance would act as deterrence against potential future attacks. Sweden and Finland have already developed deep ties with the West.

- Both are **members of the European Union**. Their ties with NATO are the closest two nonmembers could get with the alliance. They **hold joint military drills with NATO, share intelligence and have supported NATO's military missions abroad**.
- They **did not formally seek membership until now because they did not want to upset the security status quo in Europe**.
- They also feared Russian retaliation. But that **status quo has been altered by the Russian invasion**.
- And the possibility of Russian military retaliation is very less now because Russian troops are fighting a seemingly prolonged war in Ukraine.

### **Turkey's Opposition and its implication**

- President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly said Turkey would oppose SweFin's NATO bid. Within NATO, **decisions are taken unanimously, which means every country in the 30member bloc holds a veto**.
- Turkey says Sweden and Finland have ties with "terrorist" groups — a reference to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the People's Protection Units (YPG).
- The **PKK, which seeks greater autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish minority, has waged an armed insurgency since the mid1980s**.

- YPG is the armed wing of Syrian Kurdistan which controls parts of the Kurdish region in Syria.
- Turkey faces serious allegations of human rights violations in the Kurdish region.
- In recent years, Mr. Erdogan's government has cracked down on Kurdish political groups and leaders, including the leftwing People's Democratic Party (HDP).
- Selahattin Demirtas, a charismatic Kurdish politician who was a former legislator and presidential election candidate, has been in prison since 2016. Turkey has justified its actions, claiming that the PKK, YPG and their associated political groups are "terrorists".
- Turkey says Sweden, and Finland to a certain extent, maintain close ties with Kurdish militias, particularly the YPG.
- It also alleges that the countries are hosting supporters of the Fethullah Gulen movement; a religious sect led by the U.S. based Gulen who is accused by Ankara of being the mastermind behind the failed 2016 coup against Mr. Erdogan.
- Turkish state TV reported last week that Sweden and Finland refused to extradite 33 people wanted by Ankara.

- Mr. Erdogan calls Sweden “a nesting ground for terrorist organisations” and has ruled out Turkey backing SweFin’s NATO entry in the future either.

## Future

- When Mr. Erdogan first expressed his opposition, many thought it would be a bargaining tactic.
- But the repeated comments from the Turkish leadership have raised alarm in NATO capitals.
- If Turkey walks the talk and blocks the SweFin bid, that would leave the Nordic countries in an awkward spot — they have already given up neutrality, but they won’t be getting NATO’s protection.
- Even if the application goes through, it would take time for these countries to be formally inducted into the alliance.
- In the case of NATO’s last expansion, when North Macedonia was admitted into the alliance in March 2020, the process took 20 months.
- In the case of Montenegro, which became a NATO member in June 2017, the process took 18 months.
- So the time taken for the process to be completed offers a window to Mr. Putin, whose response would depend on whether his troops could meet their military objectives in Ukraine and whether they could do it fast.

## Kurds Insurgent Groups

- At an estimated 25 million to 35 million populations, Kurds are the world's largest stateless ethnic group.
- The majority among the Kurdish people today is Sunni Muslim, but there are adherents of other faiths too, including Sufism and other mystical practices.
- They live in the highlands of southern and eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, the northeastern Syria, northwestern Iran, and parts of south Armenia, and are a minority in each of these countries. Small communities live in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and eastern Iran as well.
- Kurds have long had a reputation for being fearless fighters, and they have served as mercenaries in many armies over the centuries.
- The mediaeval warrior Saladin, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty that replaced the Fatimids in Egypt and ruled over large parts of the Middle East in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, was of Kurdish ethnicity.

### Demands of Kurds

- The Kurds have never achieved nation-state status, except in Iraq, where they have a regional government called Iraqi Kurdistan.
- Kurdistan is made up of five different regions: southeastern Turkey, northeastern Syria, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran and southwestern Armenia.

- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurds began working toward the creation of homeland known as Kurdistan.
- In 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres — one of a series of treaties that the Central Powers signed after their defeat in World War I — outlined the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and called for an autonomous Kurdistan.
- Three years later, after the end of the war, Western allies dropped demands for an independent Kurdish state and the Kurdish region was divided among several countries.

### Reasons behind Turkey persecuting Kurds

- Turkey has two main goals in northeast Syria: to drive the Kurdish YPG militia which it deems a security threat away from its border, and to create a space inside Syria where 2 million Syrian refugees currently hosted in Turkey can be settled.

