

TURKIYE'S CONFLICT: POST-SWEDEN HOSTS KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY MILITANTS

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Abstract This study aims to explain the impact of the ongoing conflict between Turkiye and Sweden after the country hosted militant members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is considered a terrorist group by Turkiye, the European Union (EU), and even the United States (US). This qualitative descriptive research method uses the theory of interdependence that emerged from a liberalist perspective. This research gets information from various sources, such as journal articles, official reports from websites, and online media. The study's results show that Sweden's willingness to accept militant members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party has cost the country Turkiye's vote to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The recent burning of the al-Quran in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm has also made things worse between the two countries. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated in his speech that Sweden should seek support from the Kurdistan Workers' Party militant group to keep their country safe rather than Turkish backing.

Keywords: Conflict, Turkiye, Sweden, NATO.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1940s it was important for Turkiye to make a security policy related to the whole world, hence Turkiye's desire to join NATO, while Turkiye's efforts to join NATO were to shape its security policy towards the western type. which became the Modernization and Westernization

movement. In 1950 during the Soviet Union war in which Turkiye also asked for help and support from the west to fight the Soviet Union, because Turkiye had entered the western security system. So, with that Turkiye's entry into NATO became one of the most important members because of its success in the defense of the Soviet Union (Baharçecek, 2010).

By 1952 Turkiye had become one of the most important members of NATO since joining the Alliance. Turkiye's huge contribution and role in the battle to prevent UN troops from being destroyed during the Korean War (1950-1953). This Turkiye gained the trust of NATO in the containment of the Soviets. In addition Turkiye is also the defender of the south-eastern wing of the Alliance, in which Turkiye bears considerable responsibility for the security architecture of NATO and Turkiye has also become one of the alliance's largest contributing partners in NATO making it an integral part of the command structure with the largest number of troops (Oguzlu, 2015).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an organization to build a security community, which was formed during the Cold War Era, which included an alliance of 30 countries from North America and Europe (Yakti, 2016). NATO's role is to maintain the freedom and security of its member countries. And NATO also plays an important role by increasing crisis management and improving peace (European Parliamentary Reaserch Service, 2016).

In 2020 Sweden is looking to join NATO, where Sweden was a neutral country for years. Given that Sweden has historical claims to regional leadership Sweden has been fending off Moscow for centuries. From the late 15th to early 19th centuries, Sweden fought several wars against Russia. Although Sweden has been militarily impartial since then, it remains Russia's rival (Deni, 2022a). As currently Russia and NATO relations are in conflict and trending downwards, so that Sweden's potential in the Alliance is likely to acquire new importance. Seeing Sweden share core political values in NATO after 70 years of NATO's founding, they have a lot to offer as a strategic partner and military ally (Chivvis, 2017). In the event that Sweden wants to join NATO, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will veto Sweden's offer of NATO membership. According

to the view from Turkiye that Sweden supports the PKK and FETO. PKK as a terror organization to curb PKK activities in the country and resolve pending extradition and deportation cases, and lift the arms embargo. In 2022, Sweden signed a trilateral memorandum, according to which Sweden was not to provide support to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and its military wing, the People's Défense Units (YPG), or the Fetullah Gulen Terrorist Network (FETO). And Sweden also stopped recruiting, financing, and PKK activities. However, in the conflict in Syria, Turkiye claims that Sweden has supported the PYD/YPG in Syria both militarily and financially, and in a controversial case. And the Swedish Foreign Ministry categorically rejects these accusations and states that they have provided humanitarian assistance to the Syrian crisis in general and support the fight against ISIS not supporting any political or military group inside Syria directly. However, there is a document written by the Social Democratic Party of Sweden in 2021 as part of an agreement with the independent ethnic Kurdish MP10 Amineh Kakabaveh, in the document which contains an agreement to intensify the support of the Social Democratic Party to the YPG/PYD/YPJ against ISIS. This also characterizes that Sweden is involved in this matter (Neset, 2023).

This research explains why Sweden depends on Turkiye to enter the NATO alliance. If we look at history, Sweden has been a partner of NATO since 1994. Sweden has also joined NATO's Joint Military Exercises and also works together in maintaining peace. As well as sharing core political values in NATO after the founding of NATO for 70 years, they have a lot to offer as strategic partners and military allies (Chivvis, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In examining Sweden's dependence on Turkiye for entry into the NATO alliance. This study will use several previous studies as a literature review. This literature review is used to support the arguments built in this research. As well as looking for gaps that have not been discussed in previous research.

In a journal written by Klaus Wittmann entitled *NATO and Security in the Baltic Sea* (Wittmann, 2022). In the journal describing the Cold War. The Baltic Sea was declared a “sea of peace” by the Soviet Union for the purposes of limiting use and access. And there are imperialist plans, Putin’s revisionists go far beyond Ukraine, the Baltic countries are especially exposed by geographical location. Because in essence Putin wants to protect the Russian people wherever they are.

In a journal entitled *NATO’s obsession with Finland and Sweden can shape future Russian threats* by Nicholas Lokker, Jim Townsend, Heli Hautala, and Andrea Kendall (Lokker et al., 2023). The research revealed if Ireland and Sweden join NATO Russia will feel increasingly threatened. Because it will expand NATO’s territory. And also create a new dynamic in European security that will reshape Russia’s threat perception. However, the threat to NATO’s development has resulted in a paradoxical situation in Europe, especially along its north-eastern edge. It is becoming more insecure despite NATO’s expanded role in the region.

In addition to some of the above literature, this study also uses other references related to Sweden’s dependence on Turkiye so that it can enter the NATO alliance. From the literature above, we can see that the theme is “Sweden’s dependence on Turkiye in order to enter the NATO alliance”. Therefore, this research is considered important because of the update in this research.

Interdependence Theory

As a very common phenomenon in international relations, a country certainly interacts with other countries both in terms of cooperation, conflict, or in other matters. Interactions between these countries can vary according to their respective needs. Among the many interactions there are countries that are interdependent with other countries in terms of economic, political, social and so on, which is known as interdependence. In the theory of interdependence, a country cannot fully meet its own needs, and requires the role of other parties as supporters or providers of the country’s needs.

If countries increase their interdependence with one another, the potential for these countries to engage in armed conflict will decrease (Jackson & Serensen, 2014).

Being asymmetrically less dependent than one's partner is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for exercising influence in a bilateral relationship. In a relationship between two countries that are mutually dependent, a country that tends to be weaker takes advantage of the relationship of dependence on a stronger country to achieve its goals. This asymmetrical interdependence is still a source of strength in bilateral relations. Strong (less dependent) actors also take advantage of relationships with dependent actors because less dependent actors can bargain at lower costs than more dependent actors. Relations between strong and weak actors are often determined by the rules in multilateral agreements, in the absence of bilateral negotiations. Under such conditions, a powerful State may break rules or change conventions and may have invincible bargaining power (Keohane & Nye, 2017).

The relevance of the argument is due to the fact that international relations are now becoming more aggressive and authoritarian, due to the increased autonomy sought by states (especially in the competitive pursuit of energy resources). Therefore, the need to rekindle the spirit of cooperation that the world witnessed after the end of the Cold War (which in particular gave rise to the Partnership for Peace) is urgent. Interdependence is a complex system of relationships that can be observed in everyday international life. The apparent complexity of this system stems in part from a lack of understanding of causality and consequences. The inability to test and predict a theory means that the theory is bad. Yet we cannot dispute the *prima facie* evidence of modern international relations; interdependence, such as cooperation, is a fact, even though these principles have been under attack since 11 September 2001 (Labarre, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive method. Descriptive research is research that aims to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what than how or why something happens (Nassaji, 2015). In this study, the authors analyse Sweden's dependence on Turkiye to enter into the NATO alliance. This research will also examine the reasons for Sweden's dependence on Turkiye to join NATO. And the results of this study obtained data from the web, official online, and library studies from official government agencies. This study also uses previous literature and journals, so the results of this study explain the reasons for Turkiye's dependence on joining NATO.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Turkiye's Role in North Atlantic Treaty Organization Membership

In 1934, Turkiye, led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, tried to get back the land that Britain, France, Italy, and Greece, among other Western countries, had taken from 1919 to 1923. At that time, Western countries were used as an example of progress, and the constitutional systems and results of those systems were one of the examples imitated by Turkiye. During World War II, Turkiye became a country that carried out an "*active neutralization*" policy and did not go to war with the great powers. However, after World War II, the Soviet Union quickly expanded its territory to exert influence at the expense of Central and Eastern European countries. Unfortunately, this plan was not successful and instead caused Turkiye to change its foreign policy direction and join the Western. The chaotic global situation after World War II has made Turkiye firmly clarify its country's geopolitical priorities by participating in NATO.

The civil war between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea on the Korean Peninsula has caused the United Nations (UN) to ask its member countries to help form peacekeeping forces in conflict areas. Turkiye answered the UN's call by sending 4,500 military troops to the Korean Peninsula to help South Korea defend itself against

North Korea's attacks. This was done through Foreign Minister, Mehmet Fuat Koprulu. According to Adnan Menderes, the leader of the Democratic Party at the time, Turkiye 's participation in forming a peacekeeping force in Korea could provide a great opportunity for Turkiye to quickly decide regarding the country's desire to join NATO, where this would later enable the achievement of its main foreign policy goals and strengthen the country's national security. This event then became a moment to restore relations between Turkiye and the West, where the US decided to re-evaluate Turkiye's entry into NATO, and Turkiye assumed that if there was aggression against their country, they would ask for UN assistance with the same level of assistance they provided to South Korea.

Since 1949, the number of NATO members, which was originally only 12 countries, has increased to 30 countries. NATO's open attitude has been shown for any European countries that wish to join its membership by holding commitments, carrying out obligations, and contributing to security in the Euro-Atlantic region (Tuncer, 2022). Ankara submitted its country as a member of NATO on May 11, 1950. However, Turkiye's entry into NATO membership had to wait several years before officially joining on February 15, 1952, as a reaction to Turkiye's disillusionment with the post-World War II Soviet Union's policies, which threatened its sovereignty and national integrity. Turkiye is a country that has the largest and strongest armed forces after the US. During the era of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union had a strong interest in controlling the Bosphorus and Dardanelles as passageways for ships from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. This is the reason why Turkiye's geographical location is considered unique because it is at the crossroads between east and west, north, and south. Turkiye's geopolitical position also provides benefits for the alliance and Western countries because it is directly adjacent to the Soviet Union (Çakir & Chasnouski, 2020).

During the Cold War, Turkiye was seen as a barrier against the expansion of the Soviet Union and a part of security in the European region. But for the US, Turkiye was an important partner because it was close to the Soviet Union and helped with operations in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, which were outside the region. For the

strategists at the Pentagon, Turkiye has a base in the Persian Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean, not in Europe anymore. When the US found out that these two areas produced oil, it gave Turkiye a lot of military help and tried to build a lot of bombing bases, airfields, and military facilities. It also tried to build communication systems and update, equip, and train Turkish troops. People often think that the strong US support for Turkiye is a response to the fact that Turkiye has promised to always follow every US policy. On the other hand, as the first foreign country to receive US military assistance on a large scale to build its defense capabilities, the US is preparing Turkiye to face a bigger role in stopping the expansion of the Soviet Union into European territory (Bölme, 2022). Under the aid program and the construction of military infrastructure, which cost a lot of money at the time, the US has succeeded in turning Turkiye into a solid logistics base and a key member of the NATO alliance.

As a member of NATO, Ankara will put the national and geopolitical interests of Turkiye first. But Turkiye doesn't forget to support the alliance's strategy and operations and help put the basic principles of security into practice in the Euro-Atlantic region. This is shown by the fact that Ankara does not want to get involved in regional conflicts that could hurt its relationships with other countries. During the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars, Ankara let Washington use their communication stations, but they wouldn't let US troops use the military facilities that had been set up for them. Strictly speaking, the Turkish government stated that "US facilities in Turkiye are for the security and defense of NATO territory, including the protection of Turkiye, but will not be used in connection with conflicts in the Middle East". In the Cypriot conflict that occurred in 1974 and the Lebanon crisis that occurred in 1983, at that time, Ankara again did not allow the US to use the Incirlik Air Base as a means of transportation or storage of non-military supplies (Bölme, 2022). Even when the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Turkiye did not participate in the invasion and did not allow its territory to be used during the war. This proves that Ankara carries out an independent and principled foreign policy.

At the end of the Cold War period, many observers questioned the continuity of NATO, and Turkiye's role was often questioned by other

NATO member countries because there were no more threats from the Soviet Union. But Turkiye's location is still thought to be important, especially since the Persian Gulf War broke out in 1990 and lasted until 1991. In this case, Turkiye stayed true to its role as a part of Gulf security and as a link between Europe and the Middle East. Turkiye is the only Muslim country in NATO, and this case showed that it still plays that role. The occurrence of the Gulf War became a new security problem after the end of the Cold War, where there was competition for access to energy resources. In this condition, Turkiye then realized that its country was close to a conflict area because it was at the crossroads of an important energy corridor that had vital value in protecting the Persian Gulf oil fields.

As a country that already has good relations with NATO, Sweden has submitted a proposal to join NATO. However, this was rejected by Turkiye for several reasons which caused tension between Sweden and Turkiye. This tension was exacerbated by the burning of the Koran by Swedish right-wing politician Rasmus Paludan in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm which was authorized by the Swedish government. Previously, the Swedish people also held a protest action by making Recep Tayip Erdogan dolls and hanging them in several places. This action was a form of protest from Sweden to Turkiye due to Turkiye's rejection of the proposal for NATO membership for Sweden and Finland which had been submitted since 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2023). However, if we look deeper, the Swedish protest action above is a form of Sweden's dependence on Turkiye to join the NATO alliance.

From the Interdependence Theory explained in the previous section, we see that there is an asymmetric power imbalance in Sweden and Turkiye. To get NATO membership status, Sweden has fulfilled the necessary conditions. In fact, Sweden's joining can provide benefits to NATO as a line of defense for NATO in northern Europe (Deni, 2022b). However, due to Turkiye's strong membership status in NATO, Turkiye's refusal to join Sweden could result in Sweden not being accepted into NATO membership. Here Sweden is a strong country in terms of military, but Turkiye's current position in NATO makes it a bigger force than Sweden. This great power then made Sweden very dependent on Turkiye to accept it as a member of NATO.

One of the principles in the Interdependence Theory put forward by Nye and Keohane is that the dependence of one country on another can be a mutually beneficial relationship for both countries. In this case, the reason Turkiye rejected Sweden's membership proposal was that Sweden did not comply with Turkiye's request to hand over a group that Turkiye considered to be terrorists from Sweden and assumed that Sweden was protecting the terrorist group. There is a possibility of bargaining between Sweden and Turkiye that supports the fulfillment of the interests of the two countries. As a stronger country, Turkiye tends to spend less effort in the bargaining process with Sweden which causes Turkiye to benefit more in this interdependence relationship. Sweden also benefited from the bargaining process that was carried out even though Sweden spent more effort due to the power imbalance between the two countries.

CONCLUSION

To join NATO, Sweden needs approval from Turkiye, one of NATO's longest-serving members. Turkiye's influence in NATO turns out to be so important that Turkiye has a voice that is heard in the alliance. Turkiye is a member of NATO which joined after the formation of the alliance, namely at the beginning of the Cold War. Turkiye is also a country with a very large military power and plays an active role in carrying out missions assigned by NATO. Turkiye's rejection of Swedish membership caused tensions between the two countries that threatened their good relations. This was exacerbated by Sweden's protest action which was carried out to criticize Turkiye by burning the Koran at the Turkish embassy in Stockholm or other things that exacerbated relations between the two.

In Interdependence theory, the two related countries tend to depend on each other to create peace and achieve their respective national interests. The interdependence relationship between Turkiye and Sweden is described as a dependency relationship with asymmetrical power in which one country is stronger than the other. In order to achieve Sweden's national interests, it is necessary to make Turkiye change its mind and agree with Sweden's interests in joining NATO. There is bargaining by the two countries to

produce a mutually beneficial dependency relationship, but the stronger country here (Turkiye) tends to spend less energy than the country that is more dependent on this relationship, namely Sweden. One of the conditions for the bargaining that Sweden has to do is surrender the rebel groups which Turkiye labels as terrorists, therefore Turkiye will open the way for negotiations with Sweden to join NATO membership.

This study has limitations on data samples, methods and cases observed. The author does not compare data from obtained sources with several other sources that process data on the same field. Limitations on the method also still exist in this paper where the author cannot use primary data by conducting research directly to the field where the case being studied occurs. For some of the reasons above, it is important for researchers to accommodate larger samples, conduct research with more accurate methods and analyze this case from other theories that can create even better results.

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