

Turkey Approves Sweden's NATO Bid

Why In News

- **Sweden's attempt to join NATO** cleared a major hurdle after **Turkey's parliament supported its membership**. For a new country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), all the existing members have to approve it. **Turkey and Hungary had been opposing** Sweden's entry for almost the past two years.



NATO

- **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation** was formed in 1949 with the aim of providing **collective security** against the Soviet Union.
- The **founding members** were the United States, Canada and several Western European nations. The main and military headquarters of NATO are located in **Brussels, Belgium**.
- Since its establishment, NATO has welcomed new members nine times.
- Most recently, **Finland joined the alliance on April 4, 2023**, exactly 74 years after its formation.
- **Sweden will be the 32nd member**, following the acceptance of its application for membership.
- Hungary is currently in the process of ratifying its Accession Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty.



Why Does Sweden Want To Join

- Sweden has not fought a war in two centuries, staying neutral through the two World Wars and the Cold War. In recent years, while it **joined the European Union** and collaborated with NATO, it showed no intention of actually joining the military alliance its powerful neighbour, Russia, is hostile to.



- However, this **neutrality had to be abandoned after Russia invaded Ukraine**. With public opinion increasingly in favour of joining NATO, both Sweden and Finland applied for membership in 2022.
- While **Finland's bid was cleared**, Sweden ran into stiff opposition from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban.
- **Once a country is a NATO member**, an attack on its territory is considered an attack on the US-led alliance, and all 31 members are obliged to defend each other.

Why Turkey Was Opposing

- Turkey had accused Sweden of going **soft on groups** it sees as terrorists, such as the **Kurdish militant outfit the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)**.
- **Quran-burning protests held in Sweden**, which its government says are protected under freedom of speech laws, further soured its relationship with Turkey.



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- When Turkish legislators cleared Sweden's bid recently, **Fuat Oktay, a senior member of Erdogan's party**, told parliament that Sweden had tightened its anti-terrorism laws, cracked down on the PKK's activities, and lifted restrictions on arms sales to Turkey, AP reported. Sweden has also said it will support Turkey's EU membership bid.
- Erdogan had also linked Turkey's support to Sweden with the **US agreeing to sell 40 F-16 fighter jets to Ankara**.
- While the US had not said the deal would depend on Turkey's Sweden actions, the sale is expected to go through now.

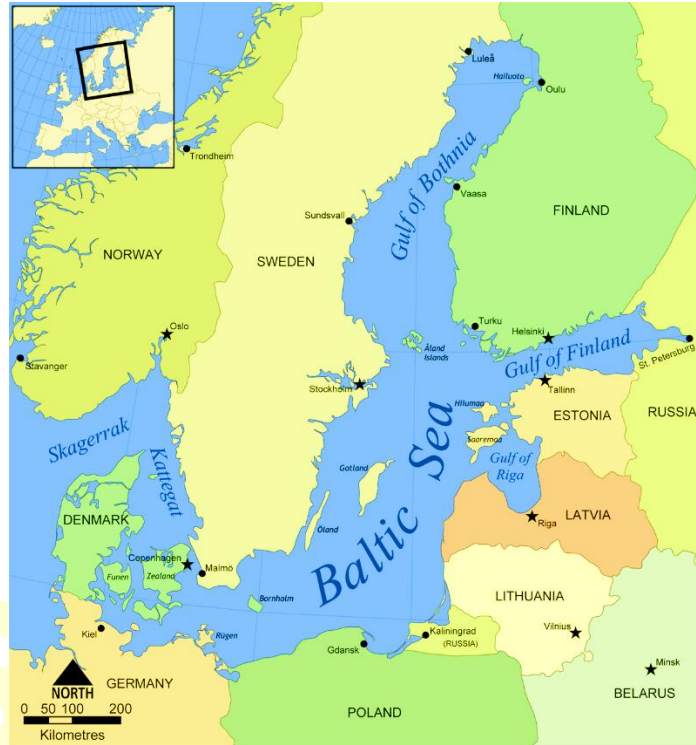


- **Hungary had been seen as following Turkey's lead in blocking Sweden.**
- Its grievances with the country include **Stockholm's negative remarks about the rule of law and state of democracy under Orban.**
- Orban is also more friendly with Russia than other NATO nations. After Turkey's move, Orban said that he had invited Swedish **Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson** to Budapest to discuss "future cooperation in the field of security and defence as allies and partners,".



What Will Sweden Bring To NATO

- Once Sweden becomes a member, almost **all of the Baltic Sea coastline**, except that in Russia's control, will become NATO territory.



- This will provide the **alliance strategic bases** close to Russia, make supply lines more streamlined, and make it easier to defend assets in the sea.
- **Sweden's military, though numerically small**, is modern and experienced in past NATO missions. Importantly, it has advanced aircraft and submarine capabilities.