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ANKASAM OUTLOOK



Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL
President of ANKASAM

New Kazakhstan: The Path to Renewal and Modernization

The President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who delivered his "Address to the Nation" speech on March 16, 2022, gave messages revealing the road map of New Kazakhstan. As a matter of fact, the Kazakh leader's speech titled "New Kazakhstan: A Path to Renewal and Modernization" also contains clues about the future of the country. It is now clearly stated that Kazakhstan has entered a period of renewal and modernization.

Stating that "Under the leadership of the First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, we have come a long way, we have made significant achievements, but we can lose everything if we do not maintain unity. The upheavals at the beginning of the year have clearly confirmed this." Kazakh leader said that New Kazakhstan did not reject the 30-year independence period but he also stated that he needed a strong nation-building and a sense of togetherness. In fact, Mr. Tokayev's speech makes it clear that Kazakhstan wants to reach a prosperous future based on the accumulation of the past.

In this context, the President of Kazakhstan, who started his speech by mentioning the most serious terrorist incidents that the country has faced since its independence, underlined the importance of the unity of the Kazakh people by saying, "Thanks to our unity, we have defended our state." The speech of the Kazakh leader, who gave information about the investigations into the events, contain three messages. These are "transparency", "justice" and "determination in the fight against terrorism". While Mr. Tokayev drew attention to the importance of the fight against terrorism and national unity, his words "I instructed the Prosecutor General's Office to determine the degree of their guilt and, if there were no aggravating circumstances, to mitigate the punishment of detainees. As a result, many citizens were released." showed that he attaches importance to fair administration. Mr. Tokayev shared all these with the Kazakh people within the framework of transparency.

Commenting on the reasons for the terrorist acts in this context, the President of Kazakhstan said, "In recent years, Kazakhstan has embarked on a path of radical modernisation and transformation. Far-reaching transformations have begun in various spheres. Some influential persons did not like this.", pointing out that the protests that started with peaceful spirit were turned into a destructive action.

According to the Kazakh leader, his main task is to implement the reforms demanded by the people. Mr. Tokayev, who has taken significant steps within the framework of the approach he

describes as "Listening State" since the day he became President, thinks that the reforms contribute to a consistent democratization process and ensure the stability and manageability of the state. In the face of the social changes taking place within the country and the increasing geopolitical tension, stable reforms are required for Kazakhstan to maintain its position.

Also, it is clear that Mr. Tokayev is an experienced politician who does not fall into the trap of populism and reads the issues with great common sense. That is, the President of Kazakhstan does not reform just for the sake of political populism, on the contrary, it opposes such an understanding and approach. It places the needs of the people and the state on the basis of the understanding of reform. This is an admirable approach.

Pointing out that the creation of a market system in which fair and open competition conditions are created is essential for the welfare of the people, Mr. Tokayev aims to strengthen the role of the Parliament in order to create a "Listening State". This adds a key formula of state-building: "A strong President – an influential Parliament – an accountable Government".

Reflecting the spirit of the aforementioned slogan, the Kazakh leader proposed 10 different initiatives, the direction of the reforms has revealed how the future of Kazakh politics will be shaped. These initiatives can be listed as follows:

On the powers of the President

Mr. Tokayev, showing great democratic maturity, by opening the Presidency's powers for discussion in order to make the country more democratic with the following statement:

"As I have already said, Kazakhstan has developed a super-presidential model of government. At the initial stage of the country's development, it was justified. But we are not standing still – society is changing, the country is changing. And our political system must constantly adapt to new realities. Today, literally everything is focused on the President, and this is fundamentally wrong. We need to gradually move away from this practice"

Moreover, Mr. Tokayev points out that the concentration of state powers in the hands of a single person strengthens the close circle of this person, especially his family, and that financial-oligarchic structures have emerged. This situation is the main reason for the inequality of income distribution in Kazakhstan. In this context, the President of Kazakhstan states that " Nepotism,

in whatever country, inevitably leads to negative personnel selection and becomes a fertile ground for corruption to flourish." and states that as the President, he will position himself as the guarantor of equal opportunities for all citizens.

Reformatting the representative branch of government

Stating that the President's powers should be reduced and the role of the Parliament should be increased, Mr. Tokayev expressed the importance he attaches to the realization of the national will by saying, " The country needs a strong representative government, in which responsible deputies with a mandate of people's confidence will play an active role in state-building." In addition, Tokayev states that he desires an order in which all ideas are represented by saying " The presidential quota in the Senate should be considered not as a means of control, but as a mechanism for taking into account the votes and opinions of social groups that are poorly represented in Parliament." In addition, in order not to abuse the said quota, the President of Kazakhstan proposes to reduce the number of deputies elected from the quota from 15 to 10. All these suggestions can be evaluated as a reflection of Mr. Tokayev's being a strong leader and his belief in his people.

Improvement of the electoral system

Stating that his country has adopted a proportional (party) election model and that this is even valid for local representative bodies, and criticizing this situation, Mr. Tokayev said, "The presidential quota in the Senate should be considered not as a means of control, but as a mechanism for taking into account the votes and opinions of social groups that are poorly represented in Parliament." and signals that the electoral system will be revised in line with an approach based on fairness in representation. According to Mr. Tokayev, a proportional-majoritarian model would better reflect the interests of voters at both the national and regional levels. Moreover, it is obvious that such a model will strengthen the ties between the deputies and the people and facilitate the resolution of the nation's problems.

Expanding opportunities for the development of the party system

According to the President of Kazakhstan, the road to strong democracy is through the need to ensure fair and free political competition. This will be the most important pillar of New Kazakhstan. For this, the Kazakh leader thinks that party formation processes should be facilitated and party membership procedures should be simplified. Because there is a need for

new parties that can urgently voice the problems of the Kazakh people. Moreover, this issue emerges as a requirement of the liberalization process in the country's politics.

Modernisation of the electoral process

Mr. Tokayev is aware that fair and transparent elections are essential for a strong democracy. In this context, it is in favor of facilitating the selection procedures. In addition, the Kazakh leader also cares about the legalization of the activities of his observers. In addition, the financial transparency of the actors running the election campaign is one of the essential parts of both democracy and independence of the country. In this context, it is possible to say that the election processes in Kazakhstan will also be modernized.

Strengthening human rights institutions

According to the President of Kazakhstan, the Constitution has supreme legal force and is the basis of the country's entire legal system. However, it is not uncommon that it is difficult to give an unambiguous answer as to whether certain legislative acts or decisions comply with its provisions. Moreover, the Constitutional Council is a body, which citizens are deprived of the opportunity to appeal directly to it for clarification.

In the context of the aforementioned problems, the President of Kazakhstan proposes the establishment of the Constitutional Court. The main priority of the Kazakh leader is the protection of the fundamental rights of the citizens. Because, according to Mr. Tokayev, protection of the fundamental rights of citizens requires continuous improvement. It should be emphasized that Kazakhstan has taken critical steps in the abolition of the death penalty and the fight against torture. Mr. Tokayev's aim is to make reforms that will ensure human rights in a way that will ensure the public's trust in the judiciary and therefore in the state. Undoubtedly, the steps taken in this direction will make the state-nation unity in Kazakhstan much stronger.

Strengthening the Competitiveness of the Media and the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

First of all, starting with the power of the media, it should be noted that it is of great importance for any progressive country to have competitive and free media in modern times. Being aware of this, Mr. Tokayev remarked that the state would enable a strong media formation and would attach importance to this issue. As a matter of fact, the speech of the President of Kazakhstan, "I am convinced that there can be no further democratic transformation without an independent and responsible

media.” reveals this sensitivity. However, Mr. Tokayev also draws attention to the fact that media organizations should not work with orders from outside and should not take actions that will increase social polarization. Therefore, the Kazakh leader wants a strong media that criticizes and thinks freely, but which has no other purpose than to defend the interests of his country. He also states that he will support free journalism for this purpose.

On the other hand, Mr. Tokayev also states that strong societies and strong democracies need strong civil societies. In this context, the following words of the Kazakh leader reveal how high his awareness of democracy is:

“We need wider and deeper involvement of NGOs and activists in the preparation and implementation of reforms. To achieve this, it is first and foremost necessary to ensure open discussions of all national projects and strategic documents.”

As expressed in the Kazakh proverb, “A fur coat sewn together won't be short”. In this sense, it is possible to say that Mr. Tokayev's approach to democracy is actually the revival of the democratic tradition of the “Great Steppe”. In this context, the President of Kazakhstan proposed the establishment of the National Kurultai (Congress) instead of the National Council of Public Trust.

Improvement of the administrative-territorial structure of the country.

At the point of democratization steps to be taken in Kazakhstan, it can be said that reforms will be made to improve the administrative and regional structure. Being aware of this need, the Kazakh leader has been saying the policy he wants to implement on various platforms since his National Address in 2019 with the slogan “strong regions – strong country”. It is also possible to see Mr. Tokayev's ideas for improving the administrative and regional structure of the country in his article titled “Independence Above All”.

In this context, Tokayev expresses the steps taken in this direction in the past and his suggestions for the new process with the following words:

“Earlier, Shymkent was given the status of a city of national significance, and the South Kazakhstan region was renamed Turkistan, with the city of Turkistan as its administrative centre. These were the right decisions, supported by the people. ... First

and foremost, I propose to form the Abai region with the city of Semey as its centre. I know the people of the region have been raising this issue for a long time. There are a lot of unsolved problems there now, for example, outdated infrastructure. The condition of Semey, once the centre of the Alash movement, is not good either. We must restore historical justice and revive this sacred land which gave our nation many great sons of our people. The Ulytau region must be formed on the territory of the former Zhezkazgan region. The city of Zhezkazgan will once again become the regional centre. The creation of a separate region has not only economic, but also spiritual and cultural significance. The Ulytau region, which is located at the heart of Kazakhstan's great spaces, holds a special place in our history. ... Located in the heart of Saryarka, Ulytau has enormous tourism potential. Its production and logistics capabilities need to be fully realised. Essentially, we are opening the way for the development of the Ulytau region. There are also many questions regarding the Almaty agglomeration. Residents of the region mainly live in the suburbs of Almaty. At the same time, it is not easy to solve problems of Uzynagash or Talgar, for example, from Taldykorgan. In addition, people have to travel long distances to get to the centre of the region. Given these and other circumstances, I propose to divide this region into Zhetysu and Almaty regions. The centre of the Almaty region will be Kapshagai, and the centre of the Zhetysu region will be Taldykorgan. I believe that these steps will give a strong impetus to the development of the region... For instance, Kapshagai town is closely connected with Dinmukhamed Kunayev, an outstanding personality in the history of our people. And if the public proposes naming the town after him, I will support such a position. I am saying all this on the basis of suggestions and opinions of citizens. If local residents support these initiatives, they should already be put into place in the near future.”

As can be understood from the statements above, Mr. Tokayev seems to have a great command of the problems of all provinces of Kazakhstan and the opportunities in these cities. He cares about both the socio-economic development of the regions and the revitalization of the historical identity. This is the signal of significant reforms in the area in question.

Decentralisation of local self-government

Emphasizing that the center will strengthen the regions, Mr. Tokayev gives the message that we will continue to transfer real powers from the centre to the regions by saying, “It should be understood that a strong system of local self-government is



the foundation for the direct participation of citizens in improving the quality of life in their home locality.” Because, according to the President of Kazakhstan, the steps to be taken in this direction are the key to the development of the regions. As a matter of fact, the President of Kazakhstan stated that he instructed this issue to be taken into account while developing the “Local Self-Government Law”. In this context, it can be foreseen that the economic financing system of the regions will be radically revised.

On priority anti-crisis measures

Mr. Tokayev stated that Kazakhstan is facing some financial and economic difficulties in connection with the sharp worsening of the geopolitical situation, but also expressed that there is nothing to panic about. Because Kazakhstan has the necessary means to overcome even large-scale crises. However, some steps must be taken.

In this context, the Kazakh leader emphasized the importance of the fiscal policies to be implemented by saying “First of all, it is necessary to ensure the stability of the national currency. This is a key factor in our economic security.” In this context, Kazakh leader also mentioned the situation of banks and underlined the importance of food safety.

Conclusion

The foundation of the new Kazakhstan is based on the harmony of political and economic reforms. This harmony will enable the country to progress and the Kazakh people to have a more prosperous future. As can be understood from Mr. Tokayev's “Address to the Nation” speech, reforms that will change the political system and administrative-territorial structure of the country will be made in Kazakhstan. These reforms will enable the country to take a serious leap towards democratization. Therefore, Mr. Tokayev, who is aware of the internal and external difficulties, takes important steps in line with his belief that the Kazakh people, a nation with a high patriotic spirit, will achieve their goals. These reforms will be implemented in a way that is far from populism, taking into account the needs of the Kazakh people. The most substantial stage of this process will be the strengthening of democracy in Kazakhstan. In this sense, Mr. Tokayev's thinking of reducing his own authority appears as a concrete indicator of his democratic maturity and patriotism.



ANKASAM ANALYSIS

Can Finland Become a Member of NATO?

The Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014 and Ukraine in 2022 has led to serious disquiet in the Baltic region. Without a doubt, Sweden, and Finland, which are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have worried due to the military operations of Russia. The increase in military activities in the Baltic Sea also creates a fragile situation for Finland's security.

With the effect of recent developments, Finland is calculating the advantageous and disadvantageous return of NATO membership and currently waiting for the "right time" to apply for accession. However, this right time can take months or even years in the short term. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO membership has added to the agenda in both Finnish poli-



Doç. Dr. Evren KÜÇÜK

tics and the public. In the wake of this, the President and Prime Minister of Finland have almost declared that it is not easy to become a member of NATO by their statements.

Western defence alliance has gained more importance as the European Union (EU) has proven to be a 'paper tiger' in the military field. The majority of Finnish people have been against membership up to the present, but Russia's occupation of Crimea and then Ukraine has engendered a significant increase in the proportion of people who confirm NATO membership in public opinion. Recent opinion polls also indicate that support for NATO membership has exceeded 50% for the first time.

Russian moves have extra-ordinarily caused the concern of Sweden and Finland which are not part of NATO. This brings the necessity of major fund allocation of the defence industry, and corporate jointly with NATO. To give an instance, Sweden has signed a defence pact with NATO's founding members Norway and Denmark, and these countries examined their defence expenditures.

Finland which shares a long border with Russia has achieved the preservation of its neutrality and its "distant" policies during the Cold War for the sake of its independence. Together with recent developments, the reorientation of Finland's policy is seen. If Russia enhances its provocations, it has been openly declared that Finland and Sweden, which have adopted the tradition of neutrality, may have to hide behind NATO.

In fact, an outcome of the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939-1940 may also be seen in the Ukrainian War. Finland had failed to win the Winter War, after months of fierce resistance, it had managed to sign a peace treaty in March 1940 that ended the occupation and saved Finland's defence and independence. Despite some compromises, Finland was able to maintain its independence. Ukraine's "Finnishization" (or Finlandization) seems to be among the options with a "Pyrrus Victory" (with the approval of the USA and EU) to be gained by Russia.

Sweden and Finland have several options for NATO membership:

The first is that both countries Sweden and Finland are members of NATO. But a possible attack by Russia seriously worries Finland. Russia has a border of 1340 kilometers with Finland, and at the same time, 1.6% of the population of Finland is Russian.

Moreover, Finland's energy dependence on Russia requires a rake through of relations.

The second and stronger option is for Sweden and Finland to obtain Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status with the United States of America (USA). Countries with this status benefit in the fields of defence, trade, and security cooperation. NATO had previously granted this status to 17 countries.

As a third option, Sweden and Finland can be envisaged to maintain the current situation in order not to attract the reaction of Russia. Although this option seems unlikely at present, it will remain an important option in a historical context.

The fourth and weakest option is, for Sweden or Finland to join NATO separately. The sanctions of both the USA and the EU against Russia force both countries to participate in these sanctions. Sweden and Finland are pursuing a joint decision by acting jointly due to avoid losing their privileged partnership with NATO.

What Will Russia's Response?

Although Russia's aggressive attitude has brought Sweden and Finland closer to NATO, Russia has made it clear that it will not leave a possible membership unanswered. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mariya Zakharova, after the US State Department's statement that "the doors are open to Sweden and Finland if they want to join NATO," said: "The participation of Finland and Sweden in NATO, which is primarily a military bloc, will require a serious response from our country. It will lead to political-military consequences". Shortly after the announcement, Russian warplanes also violated Swedish airspace.

Russia had previously announced at the highest level that it would not easily accept the possible membership of both countries in NATO. Russian President Vladimir Putin, during his visit to Finland in July 2016, "How would you welcome Finland if it becomes a member of NATO?" "What do you think we will do? We withdrew our soldiers from the 1500 km border. Do we hold them back?" had given the answer. Moreover, he also expressed their satisfaction with Finland's neutrality. However, in the face of Russia's moves toward Ukraine after Crimea, Finland changed its policy and began to focus more on NATO membership.

Russia's invasion of Crimea and Ukraine pushes Finland and Sweden to further deepen their relations with NATO. This situation makes the membership or partnership status even more controversial. Finland and Sweden want to grab a place from the table in order to not be on the menu due to the fear of the



Russians, but they are currently trying to calculate the price. "Finland paid a great price by not fulfilling Stalin's wishes in the Second World War, but will it now be a member of NATO despite Putin? Are they ready to pay the price if they become a member?" questions will continue to remain enigmatic.

On the other side, Putin's vague, incomprehensible, and unpredictable policies keep Sweden and Finland on a knife-edge. This will ensure that NATO membership remains on the agenda. Russian occupation of Crimea and Ukraine; forces these two non-NATO Nordic countries to act together and jointly. Joining or not joining NATO together or individually by both states will have different results. In fact, NATO wants to make both states members at the same time. Because the strategic location of Sweden and Finland gains great importance to further support and surround the defence of the Baltic states.

In other respects, Russia tries to prevent Finland and/or Sweden from joining the Alliance through intimidation rather than giving assurances. Finland uses and will continue to use the possibility of applying for NATO membership as a threat in response to the insecure environment created by its neighbor, whose behavior cannot be foreseen. In doing so, Washington will try to strike a balance between Stockholm, Brussels, and Moscow. Given the historical process, Finland will maintain its policy of remaining militarily neutral but will deepen its relations with NATO and maintain the policy of keeping the option to apply for membership open.



China's Arctic Strategy

The world has witnessed geopolitical developments more than ever since the period when human beings tried to dominate geography by using science and technology. The Anthropocene Age is regarded as a period when nations expanded their interaction with geography and gained the ability to utilize geopolitics as a strategy. The dominance of science and technology on geography has created an accelerating effect on the loss of importance of existing geopolitical orders and the emergence of new geopolitical orders in different regions. Today, one of the regions that can shift the center of gravity of the Current order established by the global system and attract the attention of many countries is the Arctic Region.

As a result of the global warming in the world, glaciers are melting rapidly and a change is taking place that can trigger climate change. This situation causes the melting of the glaciers in the Arctic Region, which is located in the north of the world, and a change in its geography. The region, which was formerly known for climate, biology, and anthropological research, is presently considered for new transportation routes, hydrocarbon resources, and economic activities. The region's growing geopolitical significance attracts actors of global system. China,



Mustafa Cem KOYUNCU
ANKASAM
Asia-Pacific
Research Assistant

for instance, is one of the countries that responded quickly to adjust to the region's changing geopolitics.

China's interest in the Arctic began through scientific research. Beijing, which made a diplomatic move by signing the Svalbard Treaty in 1925, has been conducting expeditions in the North Pole with the Xue Long Icebreaker since the 1990s.[1] China, whose wish to become an observer country was accepted at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting organized by the "Arctic Council" formed by the countries in the Arctic region in 2013,[2] increased its engagement in the region and sought new cooperation opportunities.

The "White Paper," which China released as an official document in 2018, was the most critical step in bringing China's interest in the Arctic Region from a scientific and diplomatic level to an economic and geopolitical level. The document, which defines China as a "Near Arctic State", refers to the Arctic shipping routes in the region as the "Polar Silk Road" and defines these routes as the third main transportation corridor for the Belt-Road Project initiated by China in 2013. The significance of the emerging transit routes in the Arctic was highlighted in the text with the following words:[3]

"The Arctic shipping routes comprise the Northeast Passage, Northwest Passage, and the Central Passage. As a result of global warming, the Arctic shipping routes are likely to become important transport routes for international trade. China respects the legislative, enforcement and adjudicatory powers of the Arctic States in the waters subject to their jurisdiction. China maintains that the management of the Arctic shipping routes should be conducted in accordance with treaties including the UNCLOS and general international law and that the freedom of navigation enjoyed by all countries in accordance with the law and their rights to use the Arctic shipping routes should be ensured. China maintains that disputes over the Arctic shipping routes should be properly settled in accordance with international law."

In Beijing's last five-year development plan, which outlines China's economic priorities, the Arctic was highlighted as a key area for collaboration. China's growth of scientific research, collaboration, and economic activity in the area was underlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan, which will cover the years 2021-2025. [4]

There are two key reasons for China's growing interest in the

region in recent years and its frequent mention of it in official publications. These are energy and trade security. China became the world's largest exporting country as a result of economic and cultural reforms that began in the 1980s. The Chinese economy has been growing steadily for years, thanks to its success in opening trade routes and ensuring the energy flow that its industries need. In reality, China's leaders have formed their foreign policy initiatives around these two aspects. For this reason, the Arctic considered significant in terms of both energy and transit, has entered China's radar.

Considering the Arctic Ocean's rich underground resources and strategic importance, which covers around 6% of the Earth's surface, the region has a major influence on global geopolitics that is inversely proportionate to its size. The region holds an estimated 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves, 13% of global conventional oil reserves, and one trillion dollars' worth of rare earth minerals.[5] This wealth is seen as essential to China's energy security strategy. As a matter of fact, China makes substantial energy investments together with Russia, which has an area of approximately 5 million km² in the Arctic Region and 24,140 km of the total 37,653 km of the Arctic coast.

Due to the deterioration of European-Russian relations following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Moscow and Beijing deepened their Arctic collaboration, making China a prominent player in Russia's Arctic initiatives. The most important project of this partnership, the Yamal LNG Project, has been China's first overseas megaproject since the announcement of the Belt-Road Project. China National Petroleum Corporation has a 20% stake and the Silk Road Fund has a 9.9% stake in the Yamal Project, which covers oil and gas exploration and development, natural gas processing, liquefaction, marketing and transportation. The ship, which departed from Russia's Yamal facility in 2020 using the Northern Sea Route, reached China. With the energy coming from the region, Beijing has crossed a notable milestone in its goal of diversifying its energy supply.[6]

Another essential component of China's Arctic policy is route security, which is one of the most critical considerations for exports. In this regard, the shortest possible navigation time plays a vital role. The traditional route of a cargo ship moving from China to Europe is from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean, from there to the Suez Canal, then to the Mediterranean and from there to the port where it will arrive. Considering

Rotterdam as the last stop of the line in question, the voyage time takes approximately 45 days. However, a cargo ship traveling to Rotterdam through the Arctic Ocean may arrive in 32 days, cutting the journey duration by 13 days. Furthermore, factors such as the US-controlled Strait of Malacca on the Pacific and Indian Oceans, as well as some pirate activity in the Indian Ocean, reduce this route's efficiency in China's eyes. The Arctic Route, on the other hand, increases Beijing's commitment to this region due to its road safety and lower distance advantage. In addition, today, where communication and information technologies are increasingly considered an element of geopolitics, the short distance and safe route offered by the Arctic Region has attracted and will attract China to the region in terms of submarine cables.

In the global order that tries to move from a unipolar world to a multipolar world, the Arctic Region will come to the fore with its many factors. In particular, the spread of tensions between China and the USA to many parts of the world indicates that the North Pole will also warm up in the future. The only force likely to hinder the importance of the new geopolitics emerging as a result of new icebreaker ship technology and the gradual melting of glaciers will be climate and nature.

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Elif TEKTAŞ
ANKASAM
Research Assistant

The Key to the Baltics: Suwalki Corridor

Suwalki Corridor, which is situated between Russia's exclave, Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus, is located between Poland and Lithuania, members of the Organization for North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) and consists of 100 kilometres of rugged and mountainous terrain. The corridor that is also known as the "Suwalki Gap" is crucial for the security of the Baltics as it draws a line between Russia-ally Belarus and Kaliningrad. This corridor, which is the sole remedy to reach the Baltic countries from Poland and Central Europe by road and rail, is connecting Europe and the Baltic States, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia with this feature. In the event of an attack, the corridor is leaving the Baltic Region vulnerable through preventing the three countries from accessing NATO's main areas.[1]

In 2014, after Russia's annexation of Crimea by violating international law, has raised the issue of defenseless the corridor by the countries in the region because of this gap which would insulate Kaliningrad and his ally Belarus could become key to the invasion of the Baltic countries.[2]

While Russia's possible move to seize control of the corridor seems unlikely, given that it would mean an attack on NATO territory and the military response of the United States (USA), Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine is demonstrating that this possibility should not be ignored. Because, although Moscow has repeatedly stated that Ukraine will not be invaded by Russia, it has breached the world's faith in his word due to the operations that started on February 24, 2022. Thus, it is imperative to focus on the military assets Putin has amassed around Belarus.

Further, the United States and its allies headed towards the Baltic Sea and the eastern flank of NATO following the Ukrainian occupation. The Kremlin might perceive the situation as a threat to Kaliningrad and take possession of the Suwalki Corridor to build a land bridge in its exclave. In addition, the heavy sanctions imposed on Russia due to the invasion of Ukraine may cause Putin to make moves to open a new "front" on the regional borders of the NATO alliance, where the power of the West is considerably weak.

Prior to the start of the campaign against Ukraine, Russia, like all major military forces, has frequently moved its capabilities around its own borders and deployed troops to the allied states for the exercises. In this context, the Belarus and Russian armies held the "Zapad" military exercise in September 2021 involving 12,000 soldiers and 950 vehicles[3] During the exercise,

it was observed that Russian and Belarusian troops conducted attacks on Belarus in the direction of Kaliningrad in order to practice the closing of the Suwalki Corridor.[4] The idea of Putin's offensive in Ukraine in an attempt to regain the former Soviet region could lead to increased pressure on the Baltic states is assertable.

The increased tension between Russia and the West already reinforces Moscow's claims in Ukraine; The U.S. and its allies are likely to focus on the Corridor which is considered to be NATO's "Achilles' Heel"[5] Because if the New Cold War has deepened, the Suwalki Gap could become the place where the NATO-Russia conflict breaks out. In this case, the fate of the Baltic states will depend on the situation of the Suwalki Corridor, where many weaknesses in NATO's strategy and in powerlessness on the scope of military capability merge.

With 29 member states, including the United States, NATO has much more military power than Russia. But many of NATO's troop and tank reserves, as far as US forces are concerned, are thousands of miles away from the Suwalki Corridor.

Russia, on the other side, has increased its permanently deployed buildups, including advanced warplanes and nuclear weapons, around the Suwalki corridor, namely in Belarus and Kaliningrad after the mentioned exercises.

Due to this reason, Western powers may reciprocate Russia's military presence along the Polish-Lithuanian border. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO established small-scale, multinational combat units in Poland and three Baltic nations to pursue a deterration policy on Moscow.

But they do not have sufficient preventative leverage for the Russian contingent, as it was designed not to violate the terms of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which have signed in 1997 that hindered NATO's ability to permanently contribute troops to the Baltics and Poland.[6]

The Founding Act, which was designed 25 years ago, was executed after the parties agreed that the agreement was based on "the current and predictable security environment" binding Russia to "impose similar restrictions on conventional force deployments to Europe." Now, about 120,000 Russian soldiers, a range of armoured vehicles, rockets, artillery and more are breaking into Ukraine from the northeast, east and south of Ukraine. Compendiously, these capabilities require the termi-

nation of the said Act due to the change in the security environment in today's conditions, where conventional combat power in Eastern Europe has reached its maximum level since the end of the Cold War.[7]

All these developments bring us that NATO should strengthen its presence and military bases in the Suwalki region. Within this framework, it can be expected that, as a result of Russia's unilateral termination, NATO will no longer be subject to Founding Act. In this regard, NATO's rapid improvement of the military infrastructure in the Suwalki region and significantly and permanently support the standing of allied forces in Northeast Europe seems likely. But a further strengthening of NATO presence in the region could create a "security dilemma" due to maximum security for the Suwalki Corridor means a security threat to Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast. Russia's growing threat perception may mean an enhanced strengthening of its forces in external regions. As a result, increasing the military presence of parties at the point of regional security may carry the arms race between NATO and Russia to the Baltic Region.

Another possibility for the securitization of the Corridor is that the West is focusing on a regime change in Belarus. A "Maidan Uprising" in Belarus could lead to the breaking of the alliance on the Moscow-Minsk line and the establishment of a "democratic" pro-Western government in Minsk which will be accepted as a safe zone in one part of the Corridor. However, it remains unclear when such a situation will occur and how Russia will respond.

As a last resort, the acceptance of the atmosphere of insecurity created by the corridor can be considered. Because, although Suwalki poses intimidation to the Baltic countries, it actually contains a threat to Russia's exclave Kaliningrad. Thus, the vulnerability of the Baltic states is balanced by the vulnerability of the Oblast.

This is what has been called a "mutual security gap" in international policy, which is familiar to Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This scenario is more acceptable to NATO since a significant increase in NATO's conventional attack capabilities could stimulate a Russian response and thus had led to the creation of insecurity in the whole of Europe.

After all, there are several options for dealing with the vulnerability of the Suwalki Corridor, which is considered to be the most fragile point of the Western powers. Besides, the consequences

for Europe of the current presence of Russian forces in Ukraine must also be taken into consideration.

Responses and sanctions against Kremlin by European powers are pursued to Russia's isolation from the international community. In response to this, there is no warranty about Russia will not take another step by aiming at the Baltics region. Moreover, the measures that NATO will take while eliminating the insecurity regarding the Baltic, even if Russia does not have such an aim, may still create an atmosphere of conflict due to the threat it poses to Kaliningrad.

In this regard, the West is expected to take Suwalki Corridor under preservation without any movement to provoke Russia. Thus, it would be fair to say that the Suwalki Corridor is a deadlock point because it contains both a dilemma and a paradox.

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Tunxi Summit: What Do Afghanistan's Neighbors Want from the Taliban?

Although the neighboring states of Afghanistan, especially China and Russia, have improved their relations with the Taliban Government, they have not yet recognized this government. It is seen that the states of the region act collectively on the Taliban issue. In this context, Afghanistan's neighbors came together at the level of Foreign Ministers, first hosted by Pakistan and then by Iran. The third of these meetings was held in Tonji, hosted by China.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Foreign Ministers Meeting hosted by Pakistan as a special guest and gave a speech about China's relationship with the Islamic World at the meeting. Afterwards, Wang visited Kabul and met with Taliban officials. During the meeting, Wang invited the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Taliban, Emirhan Muttaki, to the meeting to be hosted by China. In addition to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Iran and China, the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Qatar and Indonesia also attended the meeting. In addition to these, the Extended Troika Meeting consisting of China, Russia, the United States of America (USA) and Pakistan's Special Representatives for Afghanistan was held, hosted by China.



**Ahmad Khan
DAWLATYAR**
ANKASAM AF-PAK
Expert

Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a letter to the meeting and conveyed the messages about Beijing's Afghanistan policy to the parties. In the letter, he stated that for a bright future in Afghanistan, the country's neighbors should try to support the Afghan people and that a peaceful, stable and developing Afghanistan would be in the interests of the region and the world. Along with this, Xi stated that Afghanistan is moving towards a stable order and Beijing will respect Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and will support the stability and development of the country in question.[1]

The most striking issues at the meeting were the statements of the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Iran. In his speech, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that his country gave accreditation to a diplomat appointed by the Taliban Government and said that he was concerned that other terrorist organizations, especially the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), would first pass to Central Asian states and then to Russia. However, he stated that the strong trade and economic relationship between the Taliban and the regional states would pave the way for recognition, and said that the neighboring states of Afghanistan should not give military bases to the USA and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[2]

Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdullahiyani expressed his concerns about ISIS's activities in Afghanistan and stated that the regional states should act jointly against terrorism and that a special unit should be established in this regard.[3]

A joint statement was also published after the meeting. In the declaration, it was emphasized that the way to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan is through political dialogue, inclusive government, moderate domestic and foreign policy, and friendly relations with all states, especially neighboring states.

In addition, it was pointed out in the declaration that the talks with the Taliban should be increased and the states responsible for the developments in Afghanistan should play a role in solving the problem. In the declaration, the Taliban was not mentioned, and the protection of the rights of the Afghan people was mentioned. The attendees of the meeting stated that they are against the politicization of humanitarian aid and that Afghanistan should be given a central role in the distribution of aid. Finally, the parties stated that they would support the economic development of this country and mentioned the need for Afghanistan to focus on the fight against terrorism.[4]

Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Russia and China, stated that the rapid withdrawal of the USA from Afghanistan led to further destabilization of the country. Accordingly, the West has failed in Afghanistan and has deepened the problem far from solving it. Although the states participating in the meeting have different interests in Afghanistan, it can be argued that they have similar concerns about the instability of the country. In this context, it can be said that China has political and economic goals in Afghanistan.

Iran, Russia and China are the states that are happiest with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Therefore, they welcomed the Taliban and continued their relations with the Taliban by not closing their embassies in Kabul. However, the international community does not recognize the Taliban Government, although it sends humanitarian aid materials and money to Afghanistan, and this situation exposes the Afghan people to hunger and humanitarian crisis.

Russia and China, as significant rivals of the West, are trying to fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan by reconciling with the Taliban without waiting for the West, with the logic of "May the snake which doesn't bite me live for a thousand years!". In other words, these two states are trying to show their power to the world by making the Taliban accept certain demands of the international community. China and Russia, like Western states, do not see human rights, democracy and nation-building issues as a tool of foreign policy and do not place much emphasis on these issues in the context of Afghanistan. Indeed, by visiting Kabul, the Chinese Foreign Minister made it clear that China would not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs and would respect its sovereignty.

Russia, on the other hand, believes that it has avenged the Soviet Union by failing the United States through the Taliban. Moreover, while Russia was fighting the West on the Ukrainian front; He wants to prevent the opening of the terrorist front in Afghanistan. Therefore, despite the objections of the international community, Moscow establishes relations with the Taliban in a way that means "De Facto Recognition" and accepts the diplomat appointed by the Taliban and encourages other states to establish diplomatic relations with the Taliban. According to Russia, there is no force in Afghanistan to balance the Taliban. Therefore, the Moscow administration, which gives certain privileges to the Taliban, tries to maximize its interests in this way.

One of Beijing's requests from the Taliban is to distance itself and fight against organizations that will pose a threat to China's national security and territorial integrity, especially ISIS. Because while the activities of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan pose a direct threat to China; On the other hand, it harms China's economic interests. This makes it difficult to identify the Taliban. Instead of deploying troops to Afghanistan, the Beijing administration learned lessons from the experiences of the Soviet Union and the United States; it focused on securing its interests through the Taliban. For this reason, the President of China, expressing that the chaos in Afghanistan is evolving towards a stable order, defines the presence of the USA in Afghanistan as a period of chaos and describes the Taliban as an actor that maintains order.

Another target of China is the mines of Afghanistan. Because Beijing government needs raw materials to sustain its growing economy. In this context, China is trying to achieve maximum economic gain by including Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The dominance of the Taliban, which has close relations with Pakistan, in Afghanistan is an opportunity for China to achieve its economic goals. In this context, it is known that Chinese companies held talks with the Taliban about operating the Afghanistan mines and started to import copper in accordance with the agreement made during the deposed regime. In addition, China is planning to solve the problems that prevent the implementation of the said project through the Taliban by including the Taliban in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Chinese President's statement that "a stable and developing Afghanistan will be in the interests of the region and the world" should also be read from this framework.

In addition to not recognizing the Taliban, the USA blocked Afghanistan's national reserves and imposed sanctions on some Taliban leaders. Moreover, the Washington administration suspended talks with the Taliban. Therefore, the Taliban give up hope from the West and turn its direction to the regional states, especially China and Russia. For this reason, the Taliban think that can get closer with Russia and China. The Taliban should be recognized by the regional states, especially China and Russia, to receive assistance from these states to overcome the humanitarian crisis, to eliminate the sanctions demanded by the West in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) through Russia and China, and to invest in their national reserves through these countries. It aims to create an international public opinion at the point of removing the American blockade against it. For these purposes, the Taliban promises that they will not allow the territory of Afghanistan to be used against any state in order to gain the support of neighboring states.

As a result, Afghanistan's neighbors, especially China and Russia, do not officially recognize the Taliban and develop de facto cooperation. However, the withdrawal of the USA from Afghanistan offered some opportunities to regional actors. China and Russia are also trying to seize these opportunities. However, the current situation also brings with it various threats. China and Russia consider terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, immigration and economic and humanitarian problems in Afghanistan and seek ways to prevent the destabilization of the country. It is understood that the mentioned states prefer to draw Afghanistan to the ground of cooperation instead of isolating Afghanistan from the world.

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**Mustafa Cem
KOYUNCU**
ANKASAM
Asia-Pacific
Research Assistant

Philippines: The Country Stucking Between the US and China

As international relations evolve from the dominant position of the United States of America (USA) to a multipolar structure, the significance of the countries in the geography that provides the gateway between regions has been gradually increasing. These countries demand more rights by using power gaps in international relations or the interests of great powers on them, and they change their traditional foreign policies by creating their own agendas. The increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific region, which is one of these geographies, has brought Southeast Asia and the countries in the region to the fore.

In recent years, Southeast Asia has become more critical in terms of regional and global competition between the United States (US) and China. Beijing's enhanced naval power in the South China Sea and its policies in the context of the "Nine-Dash-Line Strategy" mean a further challenge to the US's Indo-Pacific strategy.

In this context, the diplomats of the two countries attend in the summits organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and visit the regional capitals in order to achieve their own interests. In this sense, the Philippines has become one of the priorities of both countries. The fact that the Philippines, which is situated in a strategic location in Southeast Asia, attempted to pursue its own foreign policy agenda was considered as a significant development in the region, and it was seen as the hotspot of rivalry.

The Philippines consists of more than 7,000 islands located in the center of the South China and Philippine Sea, linked between Indonesia, Japan, and China. While its vicinity to the aforementioned nations gives Philippines a geographical advantage on trade routes, its location in the South China Sea has made it a key player in the Beijing-Washington competition.

From a broader perspective, the Philippines is also seen as a strategic destination on maritime transport lines between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Considering its geopolitical lynchpin, it can be said that the Philippines has the capacity to change the balance of power in the region in favor of the great power with whom it is allied.

After the Second World War, the Philippines, which the USA saw as a substantial country in its Pacific policies, signed important agreements with the USA, particularly in the field of security. The signing of the "Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT)" between the Unit-

ed States and the Philippines on August 30, 1951, was a major turning point in the two nations' regional security. The "Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)" signed by the parties in 1999 and the "Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)" signed in 2014 paved the way for US troops to access military bases in the Philippines.[1]

In addition to military agreements, the "Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA)" was also signed in 1989. According to the data of the US Department of State in 2019, the bilateral trade volume between the two countries has exceeded 27 billion dollars and the USA has become the third largest trading partner of the Philippines.[2]

The Philippines, on the other hand, is a security rather than an economic partner for the United States. Decision-makers in Philippines have also shown a willingness to be protected by the US security umbrella. However, the two countries, which have been in alliance for many years, came to a crossroads in 2016 when Rodrigo Duterte became President of the Philippines.

Since he took office, Duterte turned Manila's US-oriented foreign policy into a China-centered one. One of the most important indicators of this is ignoring the decision of the International Arbitration Tribunal in favor of the Philippines regarding the disputed reefs between the Philippines and China. He said "In the play of politics, now, I will set aside the arbitral ruling. I will not impose anything on China." [3] Ignoring this decision of the International Arbitration Tribunal against China's claims in the South China Sea has encouraged Beijing in terms of expansionist policies in the region. In addition, Duterte has made various calls to take advantage of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The signing of an investment agreement worth \$24 billion during the visit of Duterte and his delegation to China in 2016 [4] and the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the Philippines in 2018 became a turning point in terms of bilateral relations. During this visit, it was decided to raise the relations to the level of comprehensive strategic cooperation and 29 cooperation agreements were signed. [5] According to China's data for 2020, the trade volume between the parties reached 61.1 billion dollars. This figure reveals that Beijing has become the Philippines' largest trading partner. [6]

Duterte has been a controversial figure in both international and domestic politics since taking office. He has faced many

criticisms, particularly for his speeches encroaching on diplomatic language. For instance, Duterte's swearing at Former US President Barack Obama has been debated for a long time.[7] Similarly, following the US criticism of the Philippines for human rights abuses in the anti-drug campaign, the Filipino president has threatened to expel US Special Forces stationed in the Philippines, end all joint military exercises, and, if necessary, abrogate existing bilateral security agreements.[8]

Undoubtedly, in Duterte's eyes, being an open US ally against China's growing power is a situation that puts Manila in danger. For this reason, it turns to Beijing to break the influence of its traditional ally, Washington. Although this foreign policy shift appears to be a logical step, China's frequent violations of Philippine territorial seas as part of the "Nine-Dash-Line Strategy" led to a negative attitude toward Duterte in the Security and Foreign Ministry bureaucracy. As a matter of fact, on March 7, 2021, Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin's swearing at China on social media for the anchoring of 220 Chinese boats around a disputed reef in the South China Sea,[9] releasing a joint statement by retired soldiers and policemen against Beijing's violations in South China Sea[10] and despite Duterte's statement that saw the AUKUS Agreement as a threat, the support given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the AUKUS have been the most significant developments showing the division in question.

Over time, the Philippines' security bureaucracy, which worries about relations with Washington, was able to shatter the government's publicly hostile posture toward the US. Particularly under the Donald Trump administration, the two leaders' mutually positive statements, as well as Duterte's re-opening of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which he unilaterally terminated, confirm this softening. There is no doubt that one of the reasons for this softening is the upcoming elections on May 9th.

The Philippines, which will have elections, will cross a crucial period. Manila, which has long been dominated by harsh political rhetoric against foreign states and domestic political events, has recently grown more vulnerable to foreign support/intervention as Sino-US competition has increased. Although it has been announced that Duterte will not be a candidate for the presidency, his popular leadership will provide substantial support to the person he will refer. At this point, Marcos Jr, the son of Ferdinand Marcos, the former dictator of the Philippines comes into prominence as a favorite candidate.

In the polls, Marcos is the favorite candidate to become the 17th President of the Philippines. The statement by the President's daughter, Sara Duterte, that she will be active in Marcos Jr's election campaign, in particular, is a move that may influence the outcome of the election in favor of Marcos.[11]

Furthermore, it has been reported that Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo's recent "Pink Wave" campaign has surprisingly increased her votes. As a matter of fact, it should be carefully noted that the governors of Davao North and Davao South – Edwin Jubahib and Douglas Cagas IV, located on Mindanao Island, which has approximately 25% of the Filipino voters, both signalled their backing for Robredo.[12] Although the polls show a significant gap between Marcos and Leni, it is expected that the gap will gradually close and that a stormy campaign would continue until the election.

The increasing anti-Chinese movements in recent years and the possibility of bureaucracy to support a pro-US candidate indicate that the Philippines will enter into a very hot election race. On the one hand, China's economic influence and the rising nationalist rhetoric against Beijing originating from the South China Sea, on the other hand, the influence of the USA, which is strong in the security and foreign affairs bureaucracy, will constitute the key dynamics of the Philippines' future route.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Is Finland's NATO Membership Possible?

Russia's attack on Ukraine forced many world countries to reconsider their security policies. That is why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has become the focal point of the debate, has become the main topic on the agenda of non-member states. In the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, many countries declared their intention to join NATO. However, one of the most noteworthy developments was the statements regarding NATO membership for Sweden and Finland, which have a permanent neutrality status. Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said they are negotiating to deepen relations with NATO, but said they are not considering NATO membership for the time being. Finland, which is a member of the European Union (EU), continues to discuss joining NATO. Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said they do not prefer that a rapid accession

process be in place for his country's entry into the alliance, which will be decided in the spring.

NATO has given the go-ahead for the membership explanations of Finland and Sweden. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that if the two countries wish to join the alliance, they could speed up the integration process. Russia has warned the two countries that achieving NATO membership would have political and military consequences. Particularly the debate over Finland's accession was covered extensively by the Russian media.

Experts assess Finland's progress towards NATO membership with the Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Research (ANKASAM). The process is not easy, they say.



Sibel MAZREK
ANKASAM Media
Coordinator



Dr. Emre OZAN
ANKASAM
Advisor

“Finland strengthens its defense against the Russian threat, but NATO membership is not an easy decision.”

Dr. Emre Ozan, adviser to ANKASAM, pointed out that Finland’s NATO accession process should be considered in the context of the war in Ukraine, and added that the Helsinki government’s request to join the alliance was related to the security threat it receives from Russia. “This membership, even if it happens one day, will not be a very fast accession process. In Finland, there is no broad consensus on this issue.

Recent discussions have also shown this. There was a debate in parliament on the matter. So, a public consensus has not been reached yet, but support for NATO membership has increased following the war in Ukraine. Currently, we cannot say for certain whether membership will be available. However, with the increased threat that Finland receives from Russia, the Helsinki administration will increasingly look to arms.” statements.

Stressing that if Finland joins NATO, there will be consequences, Ozan said, “Finland is an objective state. commit to becoming no member of any military alliance after the Second World War. But she did not do it by her own choice. This decision was taken after the agreement with the Soviet Union. Because of a necessity, such neutrality was introduced; yet Finland, not militarily, is part of the Western alliance, politically and economically. Membership in NATO, therefore, would represent significant political or even military consequences for Finland. That decision is therefore not an easy one.” he clarified. He added that the Russo-Ukrainian War had largely changed the order established in the world, and that Europe was seeking a new order in its security.



Doç. Dr. Evren KÜÇÜK
Kastamonu
University Faculty
Member

“Finland is unlikely to join NATO.”

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Evren Küçük said that Helsinki had calculated the advantages and disadvantages of NATO membership and that they were waiting for the right time to apply stating that Russia’s military operations created serious unrest in Finland.

“Finland, which has a long border with Russia, managed to maintain its neutrality policy by acting distanced from the Soviet Union to preserve its independence during the Cold War. The latest developments have changed Finland’s attitude. If Russia increases its provocations, Finland and Sweden, whose neutrality is a tradition, will have to take refuge in NATO,” he said.

Kucuk said that there was a 1,340-km border between Russia and Finland with the Russians accounting for 1.6% of the country’s population. He added that Finland’s energy dependence on Russia would necessitate a substantial review of bilateral relations.

Kucuk emphasized that Finland’s membership in NATO is a low possibility. “As a country which is reluctant to lose its privileged partnership with NATO, Finland is after a joint resolution by working with Sweden,” he said.

Kucuk also said that Russia would keep its possible membership in the alliance unanswered and would try to block it.



Doç. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ
Cappadocia
University Faculty
Member

“Finland’s NATO membership is not an easy process.”

Assoc. Prof. Şafak Oğuz pointed out that Finland had acted jointly with Sweden to meet the Russian threat and softened its stance on NATO membership. Oğuz said ratifying membership would not be an easy process and NATO allies would be more cautious.

Oğuz reacted against Russia’s possible membership and said, “Considering the lines extending to Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States and Finland, it is evident that Russia aspires to create a buffer zone between NATO and thus it does not wish to be a border neighbor to NATO. Indeed, Russian authorities clearly express this. Russia, which has put out the aspirations of these two states to join NATO with its moves towards Ukraine and Georgia, is trying in a sense to block the accession process of Finland and to have a short border with NATO just over Norway and Estonia/Lithuania.” comment.

Eventually, Finland’s NATO membership would open the doors to a different era, Oğuz said, arguing that accession would pave the way for a dangerous arms race.



Uluç ÖZÜLKER
Retired
Ambassador

“Russia cannot say that “this is my red line” for Finland’s NATO membership.”

Commenting on the process from a historical perspective, Retired Ambassador Uluç Özülker emphasized Finland’s status of impartiality during the Soviet Union era. “When Finland applies to join NATO, Russia will say, ‘This is a red line for me.’ And you just don’t come out.” he said.

“Finland is not a very big country, but a country of lakes. It is a very profitable and forested country. Fighting under these climatic conditions is no easy task.” He said that what the Soviet Union wanted from Finland was the same as what Russia wanted from Ukraine.

Focusing on the permanent neutrality status of Switzerland, Sweden and Austria alongside Finland in Europe, Özülker said, “When the United Nations (UN) was established, Switzerland did not enter the EU. Again, he chose not to join the EU. However, Switzerland positions itself where it can say, “I’m neutral in my policy, but I can collaborate with the West.” Austria and Finland, on the other hand, have slightly different status. They are countries that have gained sovereignty by escaping from the yoke. So there is an important difference.” thoroughly.

Özülker stated that Russia does not want the Eastern European countries to be part of the military alliance, adding, “There is no room for Russia to be persistent in preventing Finland’s membership in NATO.”



Atila ALTUNTAŞ
Journalist

“Russia cannot afford to wage war against Finland after Ukraine.”

“The process of NATO membership is still under discussion in Finland,” journalist Atila Altuntas said, noting that 53 per cent of Finnish citizens, along with politicians, welcome the accession. “Finland’s membership in NATO may create a transformation. NATO brain death was said to have occurred. To overcome this rhetoric, NATO has long sought to convince Sweden and Finland of membership. Politicians in Sweden and Finland were also dismissive of their countries’ NATO accession because for a long time the people regarded NATO as an “occupying, imperialist, expansionist union”. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine sparked deep fear among the public in Finland and Sweden, and the desire to join NATO rose above 50% in both countries.” he said.

Altuntas asserted that Russia would take a hard line if Finland becomes a NATO member. “Russia has said that Finland and Sweden’s application to join NATO would have military and political consequences. However, the prolonged war in Ukraine and the unexpected reaction by Russia from the West make things difficult. After Ukraine, Russia can’t afford to start a war in Finland; however, it can also impose an economic embargo by giving up gas and oil.” assessments.



Referendum Preparation in South Ossetia

South Ossetia, which declared its independence from Georgia unilaterally in 2008, announced that a referendum would be held soon to join Russia. The President of the so-called Republic of South Ossetia, Anatoliy Bibilov, declared that unification with Russia is one of its strategic goals and that steps towards this will be taken as soon as possible.

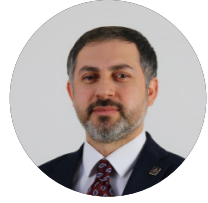
The first reaction against South Ossetia, whose independence is not recognized by any state other than Russia, came from Georgia. Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani emphasized that the region was occupied by Russia

and said that the referendum statement was unacceptable. There was a signal of support for the referendum from Russia. Andrey Klimov, Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Russian Federation Council, stated that there is no legal obstacle to holding the referendum, and that the referendum can be held within 4-5 weeks.

Analyzing the preparations for the referendum in South Ossetia to Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies (ANKASAM), experts said that Russia supports the referendum in South Ossetia.



Sibel MAZREK
ANKASAM Media
Coordinator



“South Ossetia’s desire to join Russia stems from its security concerns.”

Stating that South Ossetia is concerned about security, ANKASAM Eurasia Expert Dr. Sabir Askeroğlu said that the purpose of the referendum was that the people of the region thought that they would feel more secure if they joined Russia.

Askeroğlu reminded that, the referendums were held in the region before, and said that Moscow’s recognition of this referendum, which aims joining Russia, will be reacted harshly by the world.

Referring to the statements coming from Russia regarding the preparations for the referendum, Askeroğlu said, “Klimov stated that the laws allow states to join Russia, and that the people of South Ossetia must declare their will for this. He claimed that there was no obstacle for Russia, they expected when this process would take place, and that Russia resolved the legal issues 20 years ago.”

**Dr. Sabir
ASKEROĞLU**
ANKASAM Eurasia
Expert



“The referendum was brought to the agenda at the request of Russia.”

Ankara University Faculty Member Prof. Dr. Toğrul İsmayıl expressed that, that kind of explanations by South Ossetia is not new, and referendum issue will be bring on the table by the demand of Russia. İsmayıl has said that “Russia tries to strengthen herself due to the war in Ukraine with the new attack. However, Moscow is having a wrong policy. Georgia did not join the sanctions against Russia, yet after that decision has joined the sanctions and closed her air space.”

İsmayıl, has claimed that a referendum in the South Ossetia would cause a new war, and expressed that “By supporting the referendum here, Russia is opening a new front. Therefore, this would be a casus belli for Georgia, yet since Georgia is not enough for Russia, this war would be a war towards the West. Tbilisi Administration would seek support from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States of America (the US).”

İsmail said, “You see Russia, it continues to continue its move in Ukraine against all reactions. Moscow’s support for the referendum in South Ossetia can be interpreted as an intimidation. Other neighboring states will start to feel uncomfortable with this attitude of Russia. A referendum would be a violation of international law and would violate the territorial integrity of neighboring states.” made its assessment.

**Prof. Dr. Toğrul
İSMAYIL**
Ankara University
Faculty Member



“Russia is taking back its old rights. It completes this in a legal way by holding a referendum.”

Referring to the autonomous structures in the region, Retired Ambassador Halil Akinci has said, “After the establishment of the Soviet Union, autonomous regions were created in most of the republics. The peoples of these autonomous regions were also closer to Moscow than the people who gave the republic its name. For example, South Ossetia and Abkhazia within Georgia. These are not in the Tbilisi Government; it was close to Moscow. This is the result of the policy of nationalities. The creation of these autonomous regions means that Moscow can use the peoples of these regions against the people who named the republic when necessary. If the Georgians do not follow Moscow’s orders, then a demonstration will immediately begin in South Ossetia. When Georgia gained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these two regions emerged by saying that ‘we have the right to be independent like other peoples.’ Karabakh made the same claim. Moscow was also satisfied with this work. Because it was possible to maintain its influence in these regions.” he explained.

Akinci has reminded that, between 1992-1993 he was the head of Committee of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “In that period we tried to find a middle way, provide the ceasefire, yet we could not end up with a permanent solution. South Ossetia, always positioned towards Moscow. In 2008, South Ossetia also became independent when Georgia was exposed to Russian intervention as it approached the West. Now they want to join Russia. This situation is similar to the developments in Donbass. However, this issue goes back much further, to the years 1991-1992.” he said.

Emphasizing that a referendum to be held in South Ossetia would be just a formality and would provide a legal basis for the process, Akinci said, “After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia behaved like a medium-sized state until Vladimir Putin came to power. However, Russia’s concern is to obtain the status of a great state. Now it sort of takes back its former peoples and thus wants to attain the status of a great state. It completes this in a legal way by holding referendums.” made his comment.

“South Ossetia wants to secure its future by joining Russia.”

Pointing to the possibility of South Ossetia’s union with North Ossetia, Retired Staff Colonel Ünal Atabay suggested that the region wanted to join Russia in order to guarantee itself, and then he would raise the issue of unification with North Ossetia. Atabay said, “The membership of Georgia to the European Union (EU) and NATO is being discussed. The question that happened to Ukraine, “Can Georgia also happen?” is asked. I think South Ossetia is making a calculation for the future to save its own situation. There is the idea that ‘if we join Russia when the environment is suitable, we will secure our future’. So instead of staying independent; They see joining Russia as more secure for their future and security.” used the phrases.

Claiming that holding a referendum in South Ossetia would not cause any tension in the region, Atabay said, “There does not seem to be a chance for the peoples of the region to live together in the future. As this is the case, maybe Georgia can reflect this to its internal public opinion, but on the one hand, a part of the problem can be seen as solved. Because Russia has no power to object to its stance. It is obvious what the West has become after supporting Ukraine. The Tbilisi administration sees this too. There is no reason to trust the West right now. Because the West is busy with Ukraine. Therefore, this process will pass silently.” said. Atabay also added that the Moscow administration would look forward to the joining of South Ossetia to Russia.

Halil AKINCI
Retired
Ambassador



Ünal ATABAY
Retired Staff
Colonel



Elnur ENVEROĞLU
Journalist

“Ukraine, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are victims of the same policy.”

Journalist Elnur Enveroğlu stated that Russia is trying to regain control of the surrounding regions and said, “The separatist leader, General Anatoly Babilov, is a figure both financed by Russia and brought to power. It is not unusual for him to make such a statement.”

Emphasizing that the reaction of the Georgian Government should be considered, Enveroğlu underlined Russia’s multi-faceted expansionist policy. Enveroğlu said, “Even though Russia seems neutral, it continues to implement its expansionist policy. In Ukraine, there is a similar situation in the Russian-dominated Donbas.” made a statement. Finally, Enveroğlu pointed out that Russia has a 100-year-old political ambition and claimed that Ukraine, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia are victims of the same policy.



ANKASAM IN PRESS

12 April 2022

ANKASAM Eurasia Expert Dr. Sabir Askeroğlu’s analysis titled “Putin’s Plan B in the Ukraine War” was published by Time Türk.

13 April 2022

ANKASAM Eurasia Expert Dr. Sabir Askeroğlu spoke about the Russia-Ukraine War to Haber Global.

13 April 2022

ANKASAM International Relations Specialist Dr. Doğancahan Başaran evaluated the Russia-Ukraine War to Haber Global.

14 April 2022

ANKASAM President Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin Erol participated in the Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Congress.

14 April 2022

ANKASAM Asia-Pacific Research Assistant Mustafa Cem Koyuncu’s analysis titled “New Address of the Crisis in the Global Power Struggle: Pacific Islands and Chinese Strategy” was published by M5 Defense Strategy.

14 April 2022

ANKASAM International Relations Consultant Dr. Kadir Ertaç Çelik evaluated the Russia-Ukraine War to the “Thought Map” program of Bengütürk TV.

14 April 2022

ANKASAM Eurasia Expert Dr. Sabir Askeroğlu evaluated the possible referendum in South Ossetia to Haber Global.

15 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by ANKASAM and DSC was broadcast on TRT Uzbek.

15 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by ANKASAM and DSC was shared by the Russian news portal News.mail.ru.

ANKASAM IN PRESS

15 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by ANKASAM and DSC was broadcast on O'zbekiston 24.

15 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by ANKASAM and DSC was broadcast on the Uzbekistan National News Agency.

16 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by ANKASAM and DSC was published by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

16 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference, organized by the Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Research (ANKASAM) and the Development Strategy Center (DSC), one of the leading think tanks in Uzbekistan, was shared by the Kazakh news portal Infozakon.

16 April 2022

The Turkish-Uzbek Civil Thought Conference organized by the Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Research (ANKASAM) and the Development Strategy Center (DSC), one of the leading think tanks in Uzbekistan, was shared by Uzbekistan's news portals Yuz.uz, Uz Daily, Nuz.uz and Vzglyad.uz.



The latest issue of the International Journal of Crisis and Politics Studies, an international peer-reviewed journal operating within the Ankara Center for Crisis and Politics Studies (ANKASAM), has been published. Academic Keys, ASOS Index, CEEOL, Cite Factor, DRJI, Index Copernicus, Ideal Online, Research Bible, Sindex and TUBITAK DERGIPARK databases are scanned by our journal can be accessed via the link below.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CRISIS AND POLITICAL STUDIES VOLUME VI, ISSUE I

JOURNAL OF REGIONAL STUDIES

The latest issue of the Journal of Regional Studies, an international peer-reviewed journal operating within the Ankara Crisis and Political Research Center (ANKASAM), has been published. Our journal is scanned by Academic Keys, ASOS Index, CEEOL, Cite Factor, DRJI, Index Copernicus, Ideal Online, Research Bible, Index and TUBITAK DERGIPARK databases. You can reach our journal via the link below.

ANKASAM JOURNAL OF REGIONAL STUDIES VOLUME VI, ISSUE I.

