

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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New Alignments Emerging Among Al-Qaeda's West African Affiliates

Jacob Zenn

In late 2021, al-Qaeda's Nigerian affiliate, Ansaru, pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which formalized the relationship between the groups that had existed since AQIM permitted Ansaru to break from Boko Haram in 2012 ([Twitter/@G88Daniele](https://twitter.com/G88Daniele), January 2). Ansaru's founders, who had trained with AQIM in the 2000s, explained to AQIM in a series of letters dated to 2011 that Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was excessively brutal toward civilians as well as prone to killing his sub-

commanders for frivolous reasons ([al-Andalus](#), January 17). Ansaru compared Shekau to the Algeria Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of the 1990s, from which AQIM's predecessor had broken away. This comparison incentivized AQIM to accept Ansaru's own break from Shekau, despite AQIM noting that in principle it preferred jihadist groups to stay united.

After being crushed by Shekau and forced into dormancy, Ansaru stumbled when it attempted to challenge Shekau's pledge to Islamic State (IS) in 2015, but since 2020 Ansaru has increasingly immersed itself in northwestern Nigeria while clashing with exploitative bandits ([Terrorism Monitor](#), July 28). At the same time, it has allied with other bandit groups willing to adhere to

Ansaru's doctrine. Namely, to spare Muslim civilians and focus on attacking Nigeria's government and Christians.

Ansaru's shift toward operations along Nigeria's border with Benin, where AQIM's Malia, as well as the Group for Supporters of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) is active, naturally raises the question of whether JNIM would acknowledge Ansaru's presence. On June 4, JNIM for the first time claimed an attack in Togo, which further indicates its expansion into Ansaru's operational territory in northwestern Nigerian and its borderlands (republicoftogo.com, June 4). Several weeks earlier, JNIM also attacked Benin, Togo's neighbor, which borders northwestern Nigeria (rfi.fr, April 27). Given JNIM's recent history of operating increasingly close to Nigeria, Ansaru's disloyalty to AQIM, and the AQIM relationship with JNIM as its "parent group," it is only a matter of time before JNIM and Ansaru recognize each other in their media, if not also coordinate operations.

Ansaru, meanwhile, has continued employing its longtime narratives, including in its latest June 12 video. In the clip, Ansaru distinguished itself once again from the late Shekau by affirming that Ansaru was not responsible for attacks that killed Muslim civilians in northwestern Nigeria (Telegram, June 12). Although the al-Qaeda-affiliated Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) announced that it will distribute Ansaru media, Ansaru nevertheless has a fairly inefficient media operation ([Twitter/@CalibreObscura](https://twitter.com/CalibreObscura), January 16). It rarely claims attacks, despite the fact that it often teams up with, or sometimes attacks, bandit groups that are active in northwestern Nigeria for high-profile raids. Until its media is further

professionalized, any formalized alliance with JNIM may be delayed.

At the same time, any alliance between Ansaru and JNIM would be more beneficial to the former than the latter. JNIM not only regularly operates in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria, but also littoral West African states like Togo and Benin. It has also abducted approximately 67 Malians who still remain in captivity and could become a valuable financing mechanism through ransom ([Twitter/Menastream](https://twitter.com/Menastream), April 27). Consistent with this, JNIM attacks on United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) forces and the French military withdrawal from Mali earlier this year will also continue to create a boon for JNIM expansion, which will only be amplified if they extend closer to Nigerian territory.

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Myanmar's Military Seeks Regional Support as Anti-Government Militant Tactics Mature

Jacob Zenn

In recent weeks, the militias opposing Myanmar's Tatmadaw have claimed increasing success in their attacks. On June 13 alone, for example, the opposition militias claimed they killed 90 soldiers in Kachin and Chin states and the Saigaing region (irrawaddy.com, June 13). While these numbers may be exaggerated, the types of attacks that the militias are carrying out exemplify their increasing sophistication, including sniping, roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and

mortar shells, and their increasingly close resemblance to well-established insurgent forces.

Attacks against the military government have also occurred in the country's heavily defended capital, Naypyidaw. The anti-government militants apparently detonated one explosive at a checkpoint and then a second after they saw security forces investigating the initial explosion. As further evidence of the pressure the militants are facing from the security forces was the fact that the claimant of the attacks refused to announce any group name to maintain operational deniability (myanmar-now.org, June 14).

Counter-insurgency struggles at home, however, have not translated into Myanmar's isolation in East Asia. For example, China has announced that it plans to "deepen exchanges" with Myanmar and that it will expand the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) there, otherwise known as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). Although the Chinese government has expressed the desire for reconciliation between the Tatmadaw and the militants, it is continuing to transfer weapons to the Tatmadaw. In general, the Chinese are becoming increasingly frustrated by militant attacks that have disrupted their economic and infrastructure projects in Myanmar (irrawaddy.com, June 8).

Further, Myanmar has reached out to Thailand to ask for help in cracking down on anti-junta militants operating near the Thai border with Myanmar. This is being done in the name of countering "cross-border crime," but also combating drug trafficking and other forms of smuggling (irrawaddy.com, June 13). The Thai government, for its part, is struggling with

drug trafficking along its borders and needs the support of both Myanmar and Laos for efforts there, especially as the three countries' "Golden Triangle" region sees a reported "drug surge" (rfa.org, June 8).

The United States, meanwhile, is becoming increasingly hostile against the Tatmadaw, encouraging the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) and other countries around the world to recognize the exiled National Unity Government (NUG) (straits.com, June 7). Although the United States has not formally recognized the NUG, it considers the NUG the rightful government in Myanmar because of its status as the legitimately elected government of Myanmar. The growing ties between the United States and Thailand, as evidenced by growing high-level defense meetings between the nations' top officials, could ultimately result in pulling Thailand away from the Myanmar junta and leaving China more isolated in its support for the Tatmadaw (bangkokpost.com, May 31). If this occurs, the Tatmadaw could face regional diplomatic setbacks at the same time as militant attacks continue to escalate and grow more effective and sophisticated.

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Islamic State Khorasan Propaganda Targets New Audience with Release of Pashto Magazine Khurasan Ghag

Iftikhar Firdous and Riccardo Valle

On May 11, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) channels on Telegram

shared a new magazine produced by the group's media wing, al-Azaim Foundation. In Pashto, the title of the magazine is "Khurasan Ghag", which is the same title as the English magazine "Voice of Khurasan", a magazine that has regularly been published by the al-Azaim Foundation since late January ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 6). While the two magazines share the same name, albeit one in Pashto and the other in English, the contents are considerably different.

The Pashto version addresses a local and regional audience rather than attempting to build international appeal for ISKP like the English "Voice of Khurasan". Thus, it delves into different details with several articles. The most important difference between the publications is that the English version has broader reach and mainly represents ISKP propaganda for an international audience, while the Pashto version offers new, original content. In addition, it is the first ISKP magazine to be produced in a local language, similar to Islamic State in Pakistan Province (ISPP)'s "Yalghar", whose first issue was published in Urdu in June 2021. ([Terrorism Monitor](#), June 6, 2021).

On June 1, the second issue of Khurasan Ghag was also released. It was even more well-articulated than the first issue on May 11. This attests to the prominence of the magazine and the commitment to its development to become among the most relevant magazines of all IS provinces in South Asia.

Looking at Khurasan Ghag's First Issue

The first issue of Khurasan Ghag was 43-pages long with articles ranging from religious to political topics. Different from Voice of Khurasan and Yalghar, which present stand-alone articles, Khurasan Ghag is divided into five sections: religious, political, literary, historical, and news of claimed attacks. The religious section featured four articles in total, three of which concern Islamic interpretation and

faith while the last one was a vitriolic attack against "polytheists." This specifically referred to Shias and Taliban, who ISKP officials argue are working together ([Twitter.com/RTA_Pashto](#), April 23). The article ended by calling for more attacks against Shias in Khorasan (South/Central Asia).

The political section features only one article, which is mainly dedicated to the great conspiracy theory of the regional alliance against ISKP. While this is an attempt to consolidate rhetoric on the topic for ISKP, the article adds an important point to this narrative by specifically mentioning Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the regional alliance. Referring to the recent ISKP-claimed rocket attacks, which hit an Uzbek military base in Termez, Uzbekistan, and a Tajik military base bordering the Afghan district of Khwaja Ghar, Takhar, the author promised more attacks against these countries as well as China. According to the article, the oppression of Uighur Muslims will be avenged by ISKP, including against the Taliban, which ISKP decided has become part of Uighurs' repression ([Eurasianet](#), April 25; [Twitter.com/ValleRiccardo](#), May 7). The author also highlights ISKP's capability to strike all across Afghanistan and Pakistan, and hints that the group is interested in bringing sectarian warfare to Iran.

Seven articles of different kinds are featured in the literary section. One key article is dedicated to the ISKP militant, Haji Saib Abu Anwar. He was an elderly veteran originally from Usman Khel, Logar province, who was also featured in a 2018 IS central video. ([Jihadology](#), August 11, 2018)

Looking at Khurasan Ghag's Second Issue

The second issue of Khurasan Ghag was 81 pages, nearly twice as long as the first issue. The structure was nevertheless the same, although it contained more detailed articles, with a focus on ISKP militants and

their biographies. The political section was once again entirely dedicated to anti-Taliban propaganda, specifically to the Taliban's softening attitude toward Shias in Afghanistan. The magazine, for example, quoted Taliban Foreign Minister Maulvi Amir Khan Mottaqi during his meeting with the chairman of the council of Shiite Ulama and other influential figures ([Kabul Times](#), May 9). In addition, the magazine featured a lengthy article on the Taliban's relations with the United Nations and the latter's efforts advocate for the international recognition of the Taliban government in exchange for its rejection of Sharia.

The other sections featured an interview with an ISKP militant from Kunar, the story of a group of ISKP militants who fought in Spin Ghar, Nangarhar, and the short biography of an ISKP commander whose group was tasked with field operations and ammunition management. The interview on the ISKP militant from Kunar provided details on the group and the background of the author, who personally knew one of the three suicide bombers who carried out the 2016 attack on the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad. ([Dawn](#), January 14, 2016). The author narrated the suffering of ISKP families in Nangarhar's eastern districts of Achin, Nazyan, and Haska Meyna, as he took part in battle and was among those responsible for executing the Shinwari elders in October 2015 ([The Express Tribune](#), October 19, 2015).

Also in the article, the author recalled the story of a group of militants called the Umar Karwan group in the mountains. They were led by Umar Karwan (Abdul Khaliq), who operated in Haska Meyna and Ishhar Shahi. Before joining ISKP, Umar Karwan was wanted by the Taliban because the former opposed local elections while the latter allowed them. He, therefore, set up his own checkpoints to challenge the local Taliban government, gangs, and warlords and became famous for executing a warlord in the middle of the village's bazaar. When Islamic State (IS) declared its Caliphate, Umar Karwan joined ISKP and started to fight the U.S and the

Taliban. As a result, ISKP emir Hafiz Saeed gifted him his own gun and Umar Karwan hosted former TTP spokesman and ISKP co-founder Sheikh Maqbool and prominent ISKP commanders from Orakzai, Jihadyar and Gul Zaman, in Mamond. Umar Karwan, however, eventually was betrayed by his best friend and succumbed to injuries from a drone strike.

Conclusion

Khurasan Ghag magazine is the latest development in ISKP propaganda, and is now a key media product for IS in South Asia. Together with Voice of Khurasan in English, it testifies to the group's capability to adapt its narratives for both international and local/regional audiences. It is also a more elaborate version of its English counterpart of the same name, and pays close attention to detailing the current situation between Afghanistan and its neighbours, even exceeding the quality of the second issue of Yalghar, which covered many political and social aspects but was limited to Pakistan. ([Militant Wire](#), December 7, 2021). The efforts employed by ISKP to maintain a high propaganda output – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – attests to the importance the group assigns to its media warfare strategy, which complements its operations.

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Islamic State's Threat to Foreign Commercial Activity in Afghanistan

Lucas Webber

Since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August 2021, it has made the transition from a guerrilla force to a governing body, while being faced with an array of severe economic challenges that threaten to undermine its rule ([TOLOnews](#), May 4). In attempt to ameliorate these problems and stimulate the economy, the Taliban is aggressively lobbying for foreign investment ([Khaama Press](#), January 19). The Taliban, meanwhile, is the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP)'s primary foe, and thus ISKP seeks to disrupt and derail anything that would strengthen the Taliban's position ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 6). By issuing threats, attacking infrastructure, and striking neighboring countries, ISKP seeks to create a chill effect for already-hesitant foreign states and companies considering investment in Afghanistan. If successful, ISKP could then undermine the Taliban's hold on power in the country.

ISKP's Threats and Criticism of Foreign Economic Interests in Afghanistan

In the wake of ISKP's April 18 Katyusha rocket attack targeting the Uzbekistani city of Termez, Tawhid News released a 24-minute-long Uzbek-language audio statement under the banner of ISKP's official propaganda organ, al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production, in which the speaker celebrated the operation and declared it the beginning of the "great jihad to Central Asia." [1] However, this "great jihad" would also include attacks on Uzbek interests in Afghanistan because ISKP proclaimed that "the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway is the road by which the apostates plan to bring their democracy to Khorasan" and that "the Caliphate's mujahideen will never, under any circumstances, allow the enemies of

Islam to realize this insidious plan." In a subsequent statement, Tawhid News added that Tashkent's provision of humanitarian aid was likewise part of Uzbekistan's strategy to spread democracy in Afghanistan and it alleged Tashkent was supporting and protecting the Taliban to use it as a proxy against ISKP. [2] Given these hostile statements of intent and the recent attack aimed at Uzbekistan, the railway project could be targeted in the future.

Similarly, pro-Islamic State (IS) propaganda outlet Anfaal Media published a document criticizing the Taliban for "protecting the interests of the enemies of Allah in Afghanistan". [3] It identified the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline and China's control over the copper mine at Mes Aynak as nefarious.

ISKP's Focus on China

As the politico-economic behemoth in the region, China has been a major focus of Taliban diplomatic efforts. It seeks to bolster relations with Beijing as a trade partner and source of foreign investment. Just days after taking power, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated that "China will be our main partner and represents a great opportunity for us because it is ready to invest in our country and support reconstruction efforts ([The Express Tribune](#), September 2, 2021)." Keeping its own position vague, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin described how the "Afghan Taliban believes that China's [Belt and Road Initiative] is good for development and prosperity in Afghanistan and the broader region" ([Times of India](#), September 3, 2021).

China's talk about investing in Afghanistan has not been matched by action, however, as Beijing is very wary of militant threats and operational risks in the country based on IS and ISKP's open hostility towards China. In an al-Naba newsletter editorial, IS, for example, accused China of using "the method of investment" to "strengthen

its ties with tyrannical governments” and urged Muslims “to wage war against the idolators of China everywhere” by killing and abducting Chinese nationals and workers as well as attacking Beijing’s economic interests and investments ([Jihadology](#), February 28, 2019). Likewise, the pro-IS al-Battar Media asked “can China complete the silk road project which because of it they killed Muslims?” [4] The statement added that IS “declared war on China in direct backing and support for Uighur Muslims,” and specified that the “war includes all the interests of the Communist state.”

The Islamic State’s “Economic Warfare” and the ISKP Campaign in Afghanistan

There are transnational infrastructure projects in the works or under consideration that involve Afghanistan and would be at risk of attack by ISKP. In issue 294 of al-Naba, IS published a full-page article promoting an “economic war” campaign to target infrastructure, oil and gas assets, crops, and commercial assets around the world ([Jihadology](#), July 8, 2021). In Afghanistan, since at least 2017, ISKP has followed through by hitting targets, such as electricity towers and fuel tankers ([The Hindu](#), October 23, 2021 ; [Militant Wire](#), December 8, 2021). The group has also used threats for political leverage, and, in May 2021, ISKP propagandist Sultan Aziz Azzam warned in a statement that infrastructure would be destroyed if the Afghan government extradited ISKP prisoners to Pakistan ([Twitter/@JournalistAnees](#), May 4, 2021). Likewise, in a book published by ISKP, Azzam called for attacks on workers involved with the construction and maintenance of Afghanistan’s energy infrastructure ([Twitter/@Valle_Riccardo](#), July 28, 2021). Between May 24 and 25, pro-ISKP group al-Mursalat also posted four graphics bragging about attacks on Afghanistan’s power grid. [5]

Conclusion

ISKP’s threats and attacks are undermining the Taliban’s pursuit of foreign investment to strengthen Afghanistan’s economy ([The Print](#), April 5). Most nations mulling investment or directly involved with ongoing projects in the country are explicitly declared foes of IS. Attacks on foreign business interests on Afghan soil will serve multiple strategic aims for IS in striking the citizens of an enemy nation, undermining confidence in the Taliban’s ability to provide security conducive for foreign investment, and stoking tensions between the Taliban and the foreign countries that see their nationals and interests targeted.

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Notes:

[1] Tawhid News/Al-Azaim Foundation for Media Production, April 20, 2022.

[2] Tawhid News, April 30, 2022.

[3] The Anfaal Media, accessed on November 7, 2021.

[4] Al-Battar Media Foundation.

[5] Al-Mursalat, May 24 and 25.

Terrorism Accusations from Türkiye Stymie Swedish and Finnish NATO Membership

Jorma Arvidson

As a reaction to Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, Finland and Sweden abandoned their long tradition of military non-alignment to seek security through membership in NATO. Both countries

submitted their membership applications to NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on May 18, 2022. While the overwhelming majority of NATO member states applauded the prospect of enlargement with the two Nordic states, one expressed reservations—Türkiye ("Turkey" has formally changed its name to "Türkiye").

In the days leading up to May 18, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan scolded Sweden and Finland for being "like a guesthouse to terrorist organizations" and lacking a "clear stance on terrorist groups," which is why he was resisting both Nordic States from joining NATO ([voanews.com](https://www.voanews.com), May 13). The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu reiterated the criticism by demanding both countries stop their "support to terrorists in their countries" ([Takvim](https://www.takvim.com.tr), May 18).

Türkiye's high-level diplomatic criticism raised consternation in the Nordic countries, which had hoped for quick acceptance into the alliance in anticipation of retaliatory action by Russia. At the center of Türkiye's grievances stands the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is a designated terrorist group by the European Union, Türkiye, and other states that desire to join NATO. So, what lies behind Türkiye's heightened criticism towards the two Nordic neighbors?

Türkiye's Accusations of Sweden's Support for Terrorism

According to Hakki Emre Yunt, the Turkish ambassador in Stockholm, Sweden is the primary focus of Türkiye's displeasure. The country is home to a sizeable Kurdish community of 85,000-100,000 people and, according to the Turkish ambassador, Sweden has been cooperating with the Syrian Democratic Union Party (Partiya

Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD) and its armed wing, People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG). From Türkiye's perspective, both organizations are PKK "fronts" in its struggle in Syria. Secondly, Sweden is accused by Türkiye of not extraditing individuals Türkiye suspects are members of terrorist groups ([Dagens Nyheter](https://www.dagensnyheter.se), May 18).

Although Sweden was among the first European states to brand the PKK as a terrorist organization in 1984, the PYD remains openly active in the country, with an office in Stockholm since 2016. Türkiye voiced its "uneasiness" about this, despite Sweden assuring Türkiye that the office was never granted diplomatic status ([Hürriyet Daily News](https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com), April 28, 2016).

In the framework of the global counter-Islamic State (IS) coalition, the Syrian Kurds were seen in many Western capitals as allies and were granted military support from several states. At the same time, the PYD also lobbied for political backing, including amongst Swedish politicians. Indeed, several high-level Swedish politicians, including Foreign Minister Ann Linde and Defence minister Peter Hultqvist, met PYD representatives. Other politicians voiced moral support to Kurds and their various organizations ([Dagens Nyheter](https://www.dagensnyheter.se), May 19).

Although the accusations that the Swedish state would actively support Kurdish "terrorist attacks" in Türkiye are far-fetched, from the Turkish perspective, some support for attacks could still become a possibility in the future. For example, the Swedish Kurdish community has gained some political influence through several parliamentarians of Kurdish origin. One of them, Amineh Kakabaveh, is a representative of the Swedish Socialist

party and played a decisive role in bringing the current Social democratic Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson to power. As a condition for Kakabaveh's support, the Social Democrats had to promise to seek possibilities to deepen cooperation with PYD, YPG and YPJ, the latter being the "Women's Protection Units" (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin) ([Dagens industri](#), May 18).

Besides the political inroads by PYD, since 2016 Türkiye has followed with concern the modernization of the PKK weapons arsenal, including weapons produced by some NATO members ([Al-Monitor](#), January 27, 2017). These weapons are believed to have been delivered to Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, including the YPG, for use against IS. Among the weapons seized from the PKK have been AT-4 anti-tank weapons made by the US and Sweden ([Daily Sabah](#), June 1, 2016). It is unclear by whom and to whom specifically these weapons were delivered, but at least some were used not only against Turkish security forces in Syria but also inside Türkiye itself. This explains Ankara's discontent with this situation.

Weapons were, therefore, mentioned in Türkiye's demands to Sweden, which were published on May 23 on the official Twitter account of Türkiye's Foreign Ministry ([Twitter/@MFATurkiye](#), May 24). The demands included Sweden's:

1. Termination of political support for terrorism, including an end to denying Turkish requests for extraditing PKK/PYD persons and also "FETO [Gülenist] terrorists";
2. Eliminating terrorism financing, including \$376 million in support Sweden announced for the PKK/PYD.
3. Cessation of Sweden's weapons support for the PKK/PYD.

4. Lifting embargoes and sanctions against Türkiye.
5. Global cooperation against terrorism, with Sweden taking "principled steps and providing concrete assurances" regarding Türkiye's security concerns.

Sweden's foreign ministry, however, quickly rejected Türkiye's accusations that Sweden ever armed or financed PKK, PYD or YPG/YPJ ([Aftonbladet](#), May 24).

Finland: The Side Show

Thus far, Türkiye has not publicly presented a similar list of demands to Finland. In comparison to its larger Nordic neighbour, Finland has a much smaller Kurdish community of around 16.000 members. In terms of PKK terrorism, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO) named PKK as a terrorist group in its 1994 Yearbook after a Finnish tourist was wounded in a PKK bombing in Antalya in 1993 and two Finnish tourists were kidnapped by the organization the following year.

Despite Finland's recognition of the PKK as a terrorist group, Türkiye's displeasure toward Helsinki stems, as in the case of Sweden, from a conflicting understanding of the PYD. In 2018, the Czech Republic, based on a Turkish extradition request, detained Salim Muslim, the leader of PYD, but later released him. During the court hearing, it became known that Muslim had a residency permit in Finland ([YLE](#), February 27, 2018).

More recently, in the Finnish government's quest to repatriate Finnish IS women and children held in YPG-run camps in northeastern Syria, the Finnish authorities sought the assistance of the PYD ([YLE](#), July 4, 2019; [Helsingin Sanomat](#), December 10,

2019). From Ankara's perspective, this could be interpreted as Finland's giving tacit support to PYD. In light of Finland's traditional foreign policy on such matters, it is highly doubtful that Finland would have chosen to side with the PYD against Türkiye. Finland, for example, has traditionally had good bilateral relations with Türkiye, and in the early 2000s Finland even lobbied for Türkiye to be accepted into the European Union.

Conclusion

Türkiye's demands to Sweden and Finland circulate back to the conflicting interpretation of the nature of PYD/YPG and their overlap with, or distinctiveness from, the PKK. Despite Türkiye's opposition, several NATO member states, including the U.S, have seen in the Syrian Kurds an ally against IS. While Türkiye has some grounds for pressing Sweden and Finland to do more to thwart PKK-related terrorism, with countering terrorism financing as a potential area for closer cooperation, it is highly likely that Türkiye's intended audience includes other key NATO actors, especially the U.S. Sweden and Finland have both stated their willingness to discuss counter-terrorism issues with Türkiye, and the first high-level discussions between Swedish, Finnish and Turkish diplomats were held in Ankara on May 25. However, these talks did not lead to a breakthrough ([Helsingin Sanomat](#), May 25). After the negotiations, President Erdoğan repeated Türkiye's reasons for blocking the Nordic countries NATO membership in a guest article published in the Economist ([The Economist](#), May 30). Türkiye has been uncompromising in its demands, with foreign minister Çavuşoğlu even demanding Sweden and Finland change their laws in order for them to come to terms with Turkish demands ([Arab](#)

[News](#), May 31). A quick coming to terms on this issue with Sweden and Finland is nevertheless in Türkiye's interest because unrealistic demands or perceived unwarranted delays in their membership may harm Türkiye's own standing in NATO.

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