

# Turkey Takes the Spotlight: Key Takeaways from the 33rd NATO Summit

written by Ezba Walayat | July 18, 2023



## Introduction

The 33rd NATO summit took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on July 11-12, 2023. The summit was hosted by Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda. The main topics of discussion were the ongoing war in Ukraine, NATO's deterrence and defense posture, and the alliance's cooperation with partners. The summit resulted in a number of decisions, including the adoption of a new Strategic Concept, which outlines NATO's goals and objectives for the next decade. It was decided to establish a new NATO-Ukraine Council, which will provide a forum for more regular dialogue between NATO and Ukraine. Also, the decision was also made to invite Sweden and Finland to join NATO.

## Turkey's Role at NATO Summit

At the NATO summit, Turkey played a significant role and remained a prominent player because of the following reasons.

## Sweden's NATO Membership

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had first refused Sweden's membership requests to join NATO. Following two rounds of trilateral talks with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Erdoğan declared that he will submit the Swedish application for ratification to the Turkish parliament. Nevertheless, Erdoğan ultimately consented to remove his veto after the two nations made a number of concessions, including the removal of defense arms embargoes and the

extradition of PKK suspects. The decision by Turkey to remove its veto was viewed as a significant win for NATO since it paves the way for Sweden to join the organization. The position of NATO in Northern Europe would be greatly strengthened by the Sweden's acceptance, which is a major issue in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Erdogan discussed a number of Turkish concerns during a press conference held in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, after the summit. These included Turkey's ratification of Sweden's NATO application, its agreement with the United States for F-16 jets, and the continuing balancing act it maintains between Russia and Ukraine.



### **Greece-Turkey Ties**

During the NATO leaders' summit, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey met Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the prime minister of Greece. The two neighbors have been at odds for many years over a variety of problems, including energy resources, over-flights above the Aegean Sea, and the ethnically divided island of Cyprus. Last year, in a dispute over airspace violations, Erdogan halted bilateral negotiations and blamed Greece with exerting pressure on the United States to prevent the delivery of F-16 fighter fighters to Ankara. But now, the leaders of two countries have decided to resume negotiations, confidence measures, and welcomed a new positive climate in their tense relations. In a statement, the two leaders said, "It is to the benefit of both countries that the positive climate formed in bilateral relations over recent months has continuity and consistency." Also, it was stated, the two countries decided that in the coming time, they would build on their current progress, open up a variety of channels of communication, and express their willingness for more regular communication at all levels. This is a really positive development for regional stability considering the tight relations between the two countries.

### **Turkey-U.S. Fighter Jets Deal**

The Turkish President met U.S. President Joe Biden for the first time since taking office. The ties between the two countries were not so good prior to their meeting. It is expected that the recent meeting will result in better bilateral ties between both countries. The both leaders spoke favorably about the future of ties between the U.S. and Turkey. Erdogan even called the American counterpart my dear friend while addressing the media. Another significant turning point in their relationship came when, following months of debate, it was decided that the U.S. would supply Turkey F-16 fighter jets. Erdogan stated that he was hopeful than ever that the jets will be purchased, while U.S. President Joe Biden also expressed confidence that the deal will move forward. In addition, Erdogan also said at the summit that Turkey could serve as a mediator between Moscow and Kyiv to put an end to the war in Ukraine. Thus, the summit was a clear demonstration of Turkish diplomacy's triumph at the international level.