

Leverage

Politicians like to be wanted. It gives them leverage, as Joe Manchin has illustrated over the last few years. During this time, Senate Democrats often needed Manchin's vote to pass legislation. He took advantage of this situation by originally signaling that he was against certain bills but was willing to negotiate. And negotiate he did, often winning concessions that benefited his constituents in West Virginia.

While Manchin was successfully gaining leverage in the United States, Turkey's leader, President Erdogan, was successfully gaining leverage on the international stage. Erdogan's opportunity to gain leverage began when Russia invaded Ukraine. The invasion caused Finland and Sweden to abandon their practice of staying neutral in the Cold War between Russia and NATO. In fact, because Finland and Sweden feared that Russia would attack them, they became desperate to join NATO and gain the security offered by the military alliance.

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These two countries applied for NATO membership and Finland was admitted. Sweden, on the other hand, was not. Sweden ran into trouble because every NATO country has to approve letting a new country into the alliance. All but two NATO countries agreed to let Sweden in, and one of those two countries (Hungary) appears to be on the verge of doing so. That leaves Turkey as the last holdout. Erdogan refused to let Sweden enter the alliance because Sweden provided sanctuary to people that Turkey considered to be terrorists. Turkey also objected because of the anti-Muslim demonstrations that have recently occurred in Sweden. That was the official story anyway.

The official story gave cover for Erdogan to appear to be against Sweden's membership into NATO. Then, like Manchin, Erdogan signaled that he was willing to negotiate. He has asked the U.S. to sell Turkey F-16 fighter planes, which the U.S. had been reluctant to do. He also insisted that Turkey be admitted into the European Union. Being in the union would help Turkey's economy by making it easier for Turkey to trade with the European countries in the union. Since many countries are in both the European Union and NATO, Erdogan can effectively trade his vote to admit Sweden into NATO for other countries' votes to let Turkey into the European Union.

This week, Erdogan has announced that Turkey will vote to admit Sweden into NATO. To me, this signals a deal has been reached. But the deal will probably never be made public. The Biden administration does not want to appear to be trading F-16s for a vote on NATO membership. EU countries would probably also like to keep any arrangements that they have made secret. We can, however, observe if Turkey gets what it requested. It has already gotten some of it. Just hours after Turkey agreed to let Sweden in NATO, the Biden administration approved sending F-16 jets to Turkey – although the administration claims there was no connection between the two events. So Turkey is getting the planes it wanted. It will be interesting to see if Erdogan used his leverage to get EU membership as well.

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