

Significance of Finland joining NATO

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Context - Earlier reluctant, Finland is now hurtling to join NATO making a monumental shift for a nation with a long history of wartime neutrality and staying out of military alliances.

What is NATO?

- NATO is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April 4, 1949.
- It sought to create a counterweight to Soviet armies stationed in Central and Eastern Europe after World War II.
- Its original members were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- NATO has spread a web of partners, namely Egypt, Israel, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Finland.

Reasons behind Establishment

- After World War II in 1945, Western Europe was economically exhausted and militarily weak, and newly powerful communist parties had arisen in France and Italy.
- By contrast, the Soviet Union had emerged from the war with its armies dominating all the states of central and Eastern Europe.
- By 1948 communists under Moscow's sponsorship had consolidated their control of the

governments of those countries and suppressed all non-communist political activity.

- What became known as the Iron Curtain, a term popularized by Winston Churchill, had descended over central and Eastern Europe.

Principles of NATO

- NATO ensures that the security of its European member countries is inseparably linked to that of its North American member countries.
- It commits the Allies to democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes.
- It also provides a unique forum for dialogue and cooperation across the Atlantic.

About Article 5

- Article 5 was a key part of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, or Washington Treaty, and was meant to offer a collective defence against a potential invasion of Western Europe.
- It states: (NATO members) will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.
- However, since then, it has only been invoked once, soon after the 9/11 attack in the United States.

Why does Finland wish to join NATO?

- Finland, so far, has **stayed away from joining such alliances** as it always wanted to maintain cordial relations with its neighbor Russia.
- For a long time, the idea of not joining NATO or getting too close to the West was a matter of survival for the Finns.
- However, the change in perception and overwhelming support to join NATO came about following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- NATO membership would strengthen the country's security and defence system. For Finns, events in Ukraine bring a haunting sense of familiarity.
- The Soviets had invaded Finland in late 1939 and despite the Finnish army putting up fierce resistance for more than three months, they ended up losing 10 percent of their territory.
- The country adopted to stay non-aligned during the cold war years. However, insecurities started growing since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 as Finland brought back conscription and military spending went up.

Advantages of NATO Membership

- NATO has shown eagerness about Finland and Sweden's memberships. Usually, becoming an official NATO member can take up to a year as it requires the approval of all existing member states.

- Finland's geographical location plays in its favor as once it becomes a member, the length of borders Russia shares with NATO would double.
- This would also strengthen the alliance's position in the Baltic Sea.

The Russian Reaction

- Russia's foreign ministry has said that they will be forced to take military steps if the membership materializes.
- Russia has warned that this may prompt Moscow to deploy nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania.