

The Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes

NATO Enlargement on the Eve of the Second Round

[\[99\]](#)

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NATO enlargement is an issue of critical importance, not only for accession candidates, but also for virtually every Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council member. [\[100\]](#) Indeed, in the decade since the end of the Cold War, NATO has proven itself the sole organization capable of providing robust security in the Euro-Atlantic space. Thus, for states desirous of world order through cooperative security, enlarging the North Atlantic Alliance is the most promising prospect for enhancing regional security and projecting security outward into neighboring areas. It is the comprehension of this reality that renders integration into Euro-Atlantic structures a top foreign policy objective of Southeastern and Central European States.

Of course, security perspectives are always contextual. When assessing the post-Cold War landscape, certain features loom particularly large *vis à vis* NATO enlargement. Of special note, for instance, are the challenges of transition from command to market economies in the post-communist states. After all, the economic and social reforms involved, and the infrastructure investments necessary to seize opportunities to leverage globalization, are costly. But so too is the requisite modernization of post-communist militaries if they are to join the Alliance. Thus, aspirant states are often confronted with tough “guns versus butter” choices, a fact that will prove only more problematic in the foreseeable future. In terms of domestic policy choices, NATO expansion is hardly a cost-free and unconstrained imperative.

Similarly, international organizations and their members, in this case NATO, are confronted with hard choices. [\[101\]](#) What will NATO’s future role and missions be? Will aspirants become net consumers or producers of security? How is security to be defined in the Eurasian context? How is it to be measured—objectively or subjectively, tangibly or intangibly?

What conclusions will this lead to when performing cost-benefit calculations regarding eastward enlargement? To what extent should (and can) such organizations insist on internal reform so that aspirant states reach a reassuring level of stability, be it economic, political, or social, before permitting their integration into the key European and Euro-Atlantic structures?

In exploring these issues, we first describe the prevailing security environment, particularly the variables affecting stability beyond the borders of NATO. Having laid this groundwork, we then assess the costs and benefits of the enlargement process for candidate and member countries alike. It is essential to explore both perspectives, for the final decision on enlargement will not only have an important impact at the level of the Alliance as a whole, but it will also shape future cooperation between the aspirants themselves, as well as other Partner countries.^[102] In the end, we conclude that a holistic approach to regional security inexorably leads to acceptance of the proposition that NATO's contribution to cooperative security would be substantially enhanced by an Alliance decision to expand its membership at NATO's Prague Summit in 2002.^[103]

The Pre-Prague Security Environment

The end of the Cold War, and the related collapse of the communist system, caused many to opine that NATO's days were numbered.^[104] After all, the chief threat to Euro-Atlantic security, indeed the Alliance's *raison d'être*, the Soviet Union, had disintegrated almost overnight. However, after a decade of difficult economic and political transition in the former communist countries, NATO has not only adapted to the changed security context, it is playing a central role in helping them make the transition to democracy and build market economies. Having passed through such strategic phases as defense, deterrence, and *détente*, the Alliance has embraced a cooperative security strategy for the 21st century.

The year 1999 marked a crucial milestone in NATO post-Cold War history as three decisive events unfolded: the Kosovo conflict, enlargement, and the Washington Summit Initiatives.^[105]

Kosovo highlighted both weaknesses and strengths within the Alliance that, as the next round of enlargement approaches, are likely to prove definitive. While NATO

operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia uncovered faultlines between the United States and its European allies, they also clearly demonstrated that NATO could rely on Partner states, especially those that aspire to NATO membership.^[106] Furthermore, Operation Allied Force unquestionably illustrated the critical nature of strengthened cooperation between the current members of the Alliance and those non-members concerned with Balkan affairs who, as Partners, contributed directly and indirectly to the campaign. At the same time, it placed a rather uncomfortable spotlight on the linkage between Russian interests and NATO's new non-Article V missions, as well as on the limits of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) vision. Indeed, in response to the Kosovo campaign, Russia withdrew from active participation in the PfP, cancelled any activity related to its Individual Partnership Program,^[107] and froze communications with the Alliance; only recently has a thaw in relations occurred.^[108]

The second event of consequence during 1999, one with enormous symbolic valence, was the realization of the initial wave of NATO enlargement pursuant to invitations issued at the Madrid Summit two years earlier. Admission of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary illustrated NATO's sincerity regarding the open door policy, and, in that sense, enlargement was a positive, stabilizing, and very welcome development for the region. It provided hope for those who also desire to join the Alliance and, therefore, an incentive to continue the necessary military, governmental, social, and economic reforms. Simply put, it underpinned processes that enhance domestic and regional stability over the long term. Moreover, admission into NATO produced significant intangible domestic benefits in the countries in question in the sense that it signified a "coming of age." Membership serves to separate new members from their past, thereby helping to cognitively orient the government, the military, and the citizenry toward their future. Yet, considered from the perspective of the military contributions that the three new members make to NATO's operational capabilities, the decision was far less constructive.^[109] Indeed, NATO has lately cited their failure to meet military commitments made before joining the Alliance, a failure none of them deny. Thus, whether round one enlargement is judged a success or failure depends on the measures of effectiveness applied.

The final critical event of 1999 was the issuance of the

Washington Initiatives during the NATO summit in the U.S. capital. Several of the initiatives, including the Enhanced and More Operational Partnership for Peace (EMOP)^[110] and Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI),^[111] were of consequence to aspirants. However, it was the creation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) that was of immediate and direct relevance to the nine countries hoping to join the Alliance. MAP is designed to assist aspirant countries in their accession preparations. It includes a number of key features: 1) annual reports by aspirants on their programs, including political, economic, defense, resource, security, and legal aspects; 2) feedback mechanisms on that progress, including an annual “19 + 1” meeting at the Council level;^[112] 3) coordination of defense assistance to the aspirants by NATO members, and; 4) a defense planning approach, including review of agreed-upon planning targets.^[113] The MAP, it is important to emphasize, is not a checklist; compliance will not guarantee an invitation to join. While MAP will obviously be a factor in any invitation to commence accession talks, ultimately the decision is a political one made on a case-by-case basis by member states.

Since that MAP was implemented after Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic had been invited to join, they did not have to meet the various MAP criteria.^[114] For those not fortunate enough to have been included in the first round of enlargement, MAP represents a double-edged sword. On the one hand, although compliance with MAP criteria does not guarantee future membership, a failure to fulfill them almost certainly would preclude an accession offer. Thus, MAP represents an additional set of criteria that aspirants have to meet, one which might be used by members opposed to enlargement (either generally or to a specific country) as justification for rejection. Because NATO determines these standards, a decision against enlargement would appear less political and more objective than in the absence of such criteria. On the other hand, MAP is positive in that it fosters necessary reform. Such reform is essential to the stability of both the countries involved and the region generally. Indeed, aside from their role in the accession process, MAP-based reforms are usually worthwhile in their own right.

The Romanian case illustrates this latter point. Romania is currently in the second MAP cycle. Preparation for NATO membership through achievement of MAP objectives has proved an effective instrument for accelerating the overall

process of reform and modernization in the country. This positive experience has led to a firm commitment by Romania to continue the reform of its armed forces pursuant to plans agreed to with the Alliance, and consultations with the Alliance regarding the implementation process have been broadened. Indeed, the government elected in November 2000 is further streamlining the process of preparation for NATO membership, a process that will serve as an agent of change in many fields. For instance, enhanced crisis management capabilities, reformed and more transparent human resource management systems, and greater preparedness for new combined missions with Alliance members and other Partners are among the priorities for the next period. [\[115\]](#) As should be clear, MAP not only improves a state's ability to meet admission "criteria," it, and most other preparations for NATO membership, is proving a beneficial process regardless of the enlargement issue.

The evolution of the European security environment since the watershed year of 1999 has rendered enlargement an increasingly vexed issue. Of particular note are U.S. and European defense policies—as well as their interrelatedness—and the unique place occupied by Russia in the European security scene. Recent events, such as those surrounding Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia, illustrate quite clearly that making decisions related to the role of the Alliance in Europe's security affairs will prove challenging at best. What is essential as the future unfolds is that security policies undertaken by Europe and the United States complement each other. Any diversion would undermine the consensus necessary for enlargement.

The Bush administration has embarked on a comprehensive strategic review of defense policy that focuses on appropriate roles, missions, approaches, and regions of concern. While it is not clear whether the United States will concentrate on Asia or Europe (the signals have been mixed), it is obvious that the U.S. will field information-age technologies to dominate high-intensity conflict. This "net centric warfare" envisions using cutting-edge command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) assets and precision weaponry to blind an enemy, render its operations transparent, and coordinate massive precision strikes against key targets. Conflict at the lower end of the spectrum, particularly peace operations, is under similar scrutiny. For instance, while the United States still participates in Balkans peacekeeping, the pressure to withdraw, or at least scale down U.S. contributions, is mounting. [\[116\]](#)

Meanwhile, the European security landscape is likewise uncertain. That said, one certainty is that the Europeans will be unable to match U.S. technological capabilities for the foreseeable future. To some extent, this will imply a division of labor between U.S. forces and those of its NATO allies. In the near term, however, the test of Europe's security and defense policy has become the European Union's pledge to develop the capability to deploy 60,000 rapid reaction troops to a distant crisis within 60 days and sustain them for a year. With Europe's declining defense budgets, meeting this goal by the target date of 2003 will present a significant challenge. A new rapid reaction force would give Europe the ability to conduct "Petersberg tasks"—humanitarian assistance, peace operations and crisis management—either as part of a NATO [\[117\]](#) force or autonomously. In the latter case, the Americans should be pleased, for the European contribution would relieve them of their portion of any such operation. However, the risk is that an inordinate European focus on peace operations may undermine an ability to engage in future high-intensity warfare, thereby increasing the U.S. share of responsibility for such missions. A division of labor would be divisive for the Alliance, in that the U.S. and its European partners would be driven by differing incentives and risks when engaging in consensus decision-making. [\[118\]](#) To avoid this situation, the United States must maintain its commitment to NATO's Balkans operations and the Europeans must approve defense budgets consistent with their increased responsibility for managing crises on their own continent.

All of this must be viewed through the lens of the trans-Atlantic partnership. Clearly, Europe does not want to sever its relationship with the United States, nor does the United States wish to abandon its role as a "European power." Nevertheless, the EU's vigor in implementing the European defense project since the Helsinki European Council suggests to some that Europe wishes to have the military capacity to distance itself from U.S. defense policy. [\[119\]](#) At the same time, U.S. desires to build a missile defense system have raised the ire of Europeans, but the Americans, despite recent attempts to reassure their allies, show little sign of desisting. The interesting question is whether the dominant tendency is for the United States to react to European approaches, or vice-versa, or perhaps whether the transatlantic trend towards operating independently is synergistic.

Further complicating the security equation is Russia. Russia

has now been invited by the EU to conduct talks on the European defense force, the most recent consultations occurring during the May 2001 EU-Russia summit in Moscow. Indeed, Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union and the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, has expressed the EU's interest in enhancing a "strategic partnership" with Russia.^[120] The European goal is self-evident—the more robust Euro-Russian ties are, the more stable Russia and the post-Communist space will be.

Russia's motives are more obscure. Even as President Putin declares old quarrels with the United States over, Russia is clearly attempting to fill voids left by the U.S.^[121] Such moves are likely to generate attempts to limit Russian influence on such issues as NATO expansion or missile defense systems, paradoxically as the U.S. considers downsizing its involvement in European events, for example by withdrawing some troops from the Balkans. So the dynamic is a fascinating, albeit unclear, one. Does Russia really want cooperation with the United States, or does it remain trapped in a zero-sum mindset reminiscent of the Cold War? How does Russia view European-Russian contacts, valuable in themselves or primarily as a counterweight to the United States? Does Russia actually seek cooperation with Europe on an equitable basis, or is it just looking for an ally in order to pull itself out of its isolation following its fall from superpower status? The answers to questions like these clearly bear on how Russia will perceive enlargement. So too will Russia's perception of the trans-Atlantic relationship, for the direction of that relationship weighs on Russia's view of NATO.

Whatever the face of a new European-Atlantic partnership, and whether or not Russia will eventually begin thinking in terms of cooperative security, EU and NATO enlargement should continue eastward in order to consolidate stability and democracy among the states of the region. However, we must be realistic. The triangular U.S.-Europe-Russia dynamic, in its present form, is not necessarily a positive one for NATO aspirants, all of whom have always been, and will always be, affected by relations among the big powers; hence the unpredictability of when and how NATO will enlarge.

Consider the missile defense issue as one example. Russia has offered a counterproposal to U.S. missile defense plans, specifically the building of a European missile defense system

in lieu of an American one. Obviously, the seriousness of the offer is questionable. ^[122] Furthermore, the United States has already spoken in terms of extending coverage of the system to its allies. Nevertheless, when the Russian Foreign Minister described the threat against which such a system would be deployed as “hypothetical,” that characterization resonated in a number of European capitals. ^[123] Some even see the project as destabilizing, rather than merely unnecessary. ^[124] Despite this, U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told fellow NATO Defense Ministers at a meeting in June that the United States intends to press ahead with the system. This followed on the heels of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s failure to convince his NATO counterparts of the need for such a missile defense system during a meeting with them a week earlier. Clearly, the Europeans and Americans remain divided on the matter, and, equally clearly, it is a division that is being exploited by the Russians.

For the aspirants, this is a delicate situation with respect to enlargement because they may feel pressure to express their positions in support of one or the other view. Thus, aside from the merits of the system (or lack thereof), aspirants will need to calculate which countries have assumed what position on the issue and how the aspirant’s support or opposition (or abstention) would affect an enlargement vote by each of the ^[125] nineteen member states. Moreover, as the matter evolves, the U.S. and European, and perhaps even Russian, stances may shift. Taking a position too early could, therefore, be precipitous.

But it would be unproductive for candidate countries to consider themselves merely victims of the tension between the United States, Russia, a European power, or Europe generally. On the contrary, they will have to articulate valid arguments that their presence in NATO, given current events taking place in the international arena, will enhance security and stability. In a cooperative security regime, particularly one not characterized by a high likelihood of conventional conflict between major powers, small states can offer unique and important security benefits, either actively, by providing forces to Alliance operations, or passively, by not serving as a source of instability themselves.

Finally, and of particular concern, Southeastern Europe remains a volatile region in desperate need of stabilizing influences. Thus far, the international community has only

succeeded in halting the Balkan conflict(s) for short periods. Kosovo followed Bosnia, then a second Kosovo occurred, and now serious unrest has reared its head in Macedonia. Possible future scenarios are numerous, as are the tasks NATO might be expected to assume: peace-keeping operations (including “out-of-area” tasks); heavy NATO peace enforcement; security-enhancing activities; and coping with an Article V threat against one or more members, or perhaps a Partnership for Peace participant. No organization or country is likely to be able to restore stability in the long term unless the countries of the region are committed to it and cooperate in its maintenance, hence the NATO need for strong regional ties. Those regional states that have already proven their reliability in supporting the Alliance during the conflicts in the Balkans are the ones that are perhaps most likely to contribute in this fashion in the future.

NATO Enlargement at Prague

As the process of NATO enlargement has unfolded, the contribution of NATO and its affiliated organizations to European security and stability has been demonstrated time and again. Perhaps most importantly, since the end of the Cold War NATO has been able to embrace a wider view of security—the new “Strategic Concept”—that includes building trust and cooperation with non-member countries via such mechanisms as the EAPC, PfP, and the special relationships with Russia, Ukraine, and the Mediterranean countries. NATO has also encouraged the strengthening of the Alliance’s European pillar through the European Security and Defense Identity, thereby enabling Europeans to address crises on their own continent more effectively. [\[126\]](#)

The direction and scope of further NATO enlargement will continue to exert a defining impact on the current geo-political landscape. It will also determine the nature, context, and future of cooperative security. Will the decision on enlargement announced at Prague be primarily political, or will it focus on military wherewithal? Might it be a combination of the two? Technical criteria such as successful accomplishment of MAP criteria will (and must, lest the Alliance lose credibility) count, but political realities are certain to loom large. Indeed, events that occurred on the heels of the Washington Summit measurably altered the configuration of the enlargement picture.

The outlines of the decisions to be announced in Prague remain blurred. From the point of view of the candidate

countries, one year is a short period in which to definitively demonstrate readiness to join the Alliance. But aspirant performance is only part of the story. At least as important will be the attitude of the new U.S. Administration, as well as the on-going events in Europe and Russia.^[127] The machinations will be complex, for the consensus-based NATO decision-making process allows each NATO member an effective veto.

Multiple enlargement scenarios are possible at Prague.^[128] They range from the “big bang,” in which a large group of countries—perhaps all nine—is invited to begin accession negotiations, to a further delay in issuing any invitations at all. The former is unlikely; the aspirants are at differing levels of preparation, they enjoy differing levels of support throughout the Alliance, and Russia would become agitated should such an eventuality come to fruition.^[129] But at the same time, the prospect of no expansion is equally unlikely. Should the Alliance not choose to expand, the credibility of the professed “open door” policy, and of NATO itself, would be dealt a serious blow. After all, given aspirant support (in varying degrees) for Operation Allied Force, the likelihood of future collaboration with NATO may well hinge on the extent to which support during the Kosovo crisis is rewarded. Further, the mere existence of a MAP constitutes a *de facto* (albeit not *de jure*) assurance of some degree of enlargement that would render any refusal to enlarge at Prague a breach of faith. And closing the door, even temporarily, would surely weaken the position of pro-NATO political players in aspirant states and strengthen that of those who hearken back to the bi-polar past.

The most likely and reasonable solution for all involved, from NATO members to aspirants to Russia, would be an invitation extended to a limited number of countries. This prospect begs the questions of who, and based on what criteria?^[130] Some urge a symbolic admission of states from the former Soviet Union, *i.e.*, one or more of the Baltic countries. Others argue for a relatively controversy-free admission, perhaps of Slovenia and, because of Czech accession in 1999, Slovakia. Still others look to those states that were standout contributors during the Kosovo crisis—and that have suffered severely as a result of the Balkans crises—Albania and Macedonia. Finally, some focus on stability in Southeastern Europe generally, asserting that it makes good geostrategic sense to gather Bulgaria and Romania into the NATO fold. Perhaps, and in light of the differences of opinion, an arguable compromise

alternative would be to adopt the EU model of enlargement by establishing a calendar and thereby stimulating countries to make progress on a regular basis. Whatever eventually occurs, it is useful to survey the various dimensions of enlargement as the Prague Summit approaches.

The First Round of Enlargement. In order to be able to envision how the next round of NATO enlargement might take place, it is useful to begin by looking back at the admission of the three members of the Visegrad Group—Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The decision to invite the three former communist countries to join NATO was, to a large extent, based on arguments unrelated to their military capability. Rather, the focus of attention centered on their progress in democratizing and creating market economies. Moreover, admission of Poland and the Czech Republic meant that for the first time in Alliance history, Germany, which had not long before constituted its easternmost part, would no longer serve as a NATO “border state.” This was, of course, reassuring to the Germans. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the danger of angering Russia through enlargement was minimized by the fact that none of the three bordered Russia, nor were any of them part of the former Soviet Union.

Obviously, the situation on the “eve” of the Prague Summit is dramatically different. Mixed results with “the Visegrad group” have done little to encourage members of the Alliance to aggressively pursue enlargement, even though the current aspirants have benefited from the MAP (second MAP cycle in some cases) process when preparing for admission. Indeed, much of the pre-Prague dialogue among the pundits centers on the “net consumer/net producer of security” debate. In other words, will a particular aspirant bring as much to the security table as it takes away? Additionally, in this round the aspirants include countries carved out of the former Soviet Union, as well as states bordering the volatile Balkans. Thus, Russian interests are more sensitive now than during the first round of enlargement.

But, all of that said, it remains the case that Central Europe is developing into a pole of regional prosperity. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are now partially integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures and have begun serious negotiations with the European Union regarding admission. Of course, these advances, considered in light of the fact that the three were beneficiaries of the first round of NATO accession, beg a “chicken or egg” question—are NATO expansion and heightened European integration the causes or effects of their

relative success in transition? Whatever the correct response, it is unquestionable that NATO membership has contributed to some degree, and it is likely that it would have an analogous impact elsewhere in the region.

Partnership. Of particular relevance to the issue of enlargement are partnership efforts, particularly the Partnership for Peace, created in 1994. Its strategic value has been repeatedly demonstrated through Partner contributions to peace operations in the Balkans. Despite the turmoil presently enveloping Macedonia, NATO, operating hand in hand with the Partners and other states, has fostered a far greater degree of stability and security in that region than would otherwise exist. In Bosnia and Kosovo, for example, the refugee problem is subsiding, communities are being rebuilt, and democratic institutions are surfacing resolutely. In much the same cooperative vein, the EAPC has proven its value as a forum for consultation and cooperation in working on such European security issues as regional security structures, arms control, peace-keeping, and civil emergency planning.

The contributions of the Partner countries will prove even more constructive in the future, primarily because of the unstable Balkan situation, but also in response to new types of threats like organized crime, terrorism, drug smuggling, and arms trafficking. Kosovo demonstrated the value of Partner support in crisis management and peacekeeping. One unambiguous lesson of the crisis is that the Partners must continue improving their ability to operate jointly with the NATO allies as seamlessly as possible. Yet Kosovo also suggested that NATO would benefit by allowing Partners that are willing to share risks and costs to participate appropriately in the political control and military command of such an operation. Of course, as NATO missions expand, Article V collective defense will remain at the core of the Alliance. Quite apart from the issue of what the aspirant Partners can contribute to collective defense, merely extending the guarantee to new members will help deter interstate aggression in an unstable region, thereby enhancing overall regional security.

Simply put, the Partnership works well...but not to the limit of its potential. The Partnership for Peace and other partnership ventures no longer suffice for aspirants that continue contributing to European security after a decade of transition from communism to capitalism. These countries need an unambiguous confirmation that their efforts are recognized as useful and vital. NATO membership is that confirmation.

MAP. The contribution of the Partners will improve qualitatively as regional cooperation intensifies and internal reform processes continue. With respect to the latter trend, and consistent with MAP guidelines, NATO aspirants are elaborating Annual National Programs that establish clear objectives in political, economic, military, resource, information security, and legal matters. Through participation in these programs, they are improving their ability to correlate available resources with established objectives, and to leverage cooperation with NATO members and other Partners to expand their capabilities in activities ranging from combat training to media affairs.

The MAP process also encourages cooperative efforts with neighboring countries through bilateral political treaties,^[131] tri-lateral cooperative schemes,^[132] and multilateral efforts that enhance regional stability and security.^[133] For instance, a number of Balkan states, cooperating with others interested in the process, are working closely to implement the South Eastern Europe Common Assessment Paper (SEECAP), which is designed to identify and assess risks in the region, thereby assisting participants to find common solutions to common problems.^[134] An effort is being made to actively engage the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the project as part of NATO's Southeast Europe Initiative.^[135] Along the same lines, certain aspirant countries are actively involved in Stability Pact endeavors designed to help the Former Republic of Yugoslavia become more integrated into European structures.^[136] Such confidence- and security-building measures constitute extremely effective *de facto* conflict prevention tools. Based on the common values of the countries involved, they create a strong regional network that promotes mutual security and stability interests. Admission of participating states into the Alliance will render such mechanisms and arrangements valuable NATO assets.

Geostrategic Realities. Aside from the benefits that overt cooperative ventures such as those cited would yield to an enlarged NATO, geo-strategic realities support enlargement. Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, combined with current NATO member Hungary, cap the highly volatile Balkans. Thus, they serve as a potential shield against the spillover of that region's instability into NATO Europe. Conversely, they offer a useful bridge into the region for conflict prevention,

conflict management, and conflict recovery purposes. ^[137] At the same time, Romania and Slovakia, together with NATO members Hungary and Poland, serve the same bridge/shield functions *vis à vis* the increasingly unstable states of Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. ^[138] Similar, geostrategic concerns surround the Black Sea area. Two aspirants, Bulgaria and Romania, are Black Sea coastal states and, thus are well situated to take advantage of the opportunities that body of water's transit possibilities to the Mediterranean Sea and NATO's southern flank present. Furthermore, they would prove valuable in the event of serious problems in either the Caucasus or Caspian Sea regions.

More generally, instability has attractive properties, *i.e.*, initially isolated pockets of instability tend to grow towards each other over time. There are multiple explanations for this phenomenon, such availability of arms, availability of rebel force sanctuaries, shared ethnic or religious identity, etc. Given this tendency, there is a danger that instability in the Balkans and on the fringes of the former Soviet Union will eventually begin to affect each other. Lying between the two regions are Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. This band could serve to keep any these pockets of instability separate.

Admittedly, such arguments could be turned on their heads. The pervasive unrest and conflict in the Balkans, where NATO has been engaged for a period measured in years, far from proving that NATO is a viable conflict manager, may be evidence of just the opposite—that it performs such tasks poorly. But any conclusion along these lines would be based on false logic. When conducting this analysis, the proper comparison is not between stability and the current state of affairs, but rather between the current state of affairs and what the situation would likely have been but for NATO involvement. Arguably the situation could, and in our view would, have been far worse, involving religious, ethnic, and nationalistic carnage and a high risk of initially bounded conflicts spreading across the region.

And, of course, then there are the Russian Federation and the Community of Independent States (CIS). The CIS is in the midst of an identity crisis, uncertain as to its own *raison d'être*, while Russia is fraught with economic and political turmoil.

^[139] Such instability, albeit indefinite in terms of its external dimension, understandably makes for an insecure neighborhood. NATO enlargement could operate as a valuable

hedge against it.

An additional geostrategic consideration is that aspirant countries in Southeastern Europe are situated along key conduits of such global security threats as organized crime, arms trafficking, drug transit, and human smuggling. While NATO membership is not intended to address these and similar phenomena *per se*, it in fact does. NATO states—because of joint training, common command, control, and communications capabilities, the sharing of resources and assets, and regular cooperation with neighbors in a wide range of NATO based activities—are better placed to combat transnational regional threats than would otherwise be the case. Moreover, because threats are increasingly tied to ongoing NATO operations in the region (*e.g.*, drug trafficking in order to acquire funds to purchase arms), there are direct benefits for NATO in improving regional capability to arrest such trends.

Simply put, NATO needs the support of the aspirants because it knows that sustained stability and security can only be achieved with the cooperation of the countries in the region. If it hopes to continue to receive, and to build on, that support, the Alliance must respond to the commitment shown by the Partners, to recognize the momentum generated by their common engagement in Kosovo, and to take a qualitative step in its relations with “the nine” by inviting them through the “open door” in a timely fashion. There must be a *quid pro quo* for the support they offer NATO.

European Integration. Aside from questions of geography, the political impetus toward European integration would be enhanced by enlargement. The “nine” are seeking membership in both the EU and NATO; indeed, all NATO candidates are also European Union associate members. Thus, membership in NATO brings EU associate members into “the European Club,” thereby giving them a greater sense of European identity. This can only serve to ease the transition to European Union full membership. NATO enlargement will also serve to gradually erase Cold War dividing lines in Europe. As long as Russia supports this process, and as long as the Alliance continues to support democratic transformation in the countries of the region, including Russia itself, enlargement will advance efforts to create a single integrated Euro-Atlantic community.

The European Union’s crisis management capability would be an especially tangible benefit of enlargement. NATO membership in advance of EU membership would improve the

crisis management capabilities of those states desirous of joining the EU, thereby enabling them to more effectively shoulder crisis management burdens once they are admitted.

Obviously, an improved crisis management capability on the part of the Europeans will serve to balance the transatlantic link through a fairer sharing of burdens and responsibilities. But the transatlantic partnership is more than simply an equitable division of labor. It is an opportunity for synergism in responding to a shared agenda, an agenda that includes bringing long-term stability to Southeastern Europe, managing regional crises, enlarging NATO and the EU, supporting Russia's democratic transformation, stabilizing the newly independent nations, encouraging open markets, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Strengthening the European arm of NATO, and, indeed, the EU, expands the opportunities for cooperation in deterring shared threats and taking advantage of common opportunities.

U.S.-Russian Relations. The Kosovo conflict soured U.S.-Russia relations dramatically, as post-1989 U.S. successes in bringing Russia closer to NATO collapsed overnight and Russia withdrew from participation in the Partnership for Peace. The United States now needs to convince Russia that cooperation within the Euro-Atlantic framework would prove beneficial. Unfortunately, this will be an uphill battle because Alliance involvement in the Balkan conflicts has generated Russian mistrust of the United States. In particular, Russia questions U.S. motives regarding NATO enlargement towards Russian borders.

If the United States is to successfully mend relations with Russia, particularly as to potential NATO enlargement, it must afford candidate countries a voice in the dialogue. Indeed, convincing Russia that the enlargement of the Alliance will prove beneficial for overall European security will depend on the effectiveness with which aspirant nations convey that message eastward. This yields a Catch-22 quandary. On the one hand, aspirants are well situated to help alleviate tension between Russia and the West; they are essential to the dialogue that will reassure Russia that NATO enlargement is non-threatening. On the other, enlargement is an issue, to the extent that it is viewed as anti-Russian in nature, with the potential to damage relations with Russia. Given these conflicting potentialities, perhaps the only ultimate resolution of this dilemma is enlargement itself. Over time, an enlarged NATO will demonstrate that it is not only an organization uniting states with common values and common security

needs, but also an efficient instrument that can work with Russia to smooth over old rivalries. Thus, quite aside from the military dimension, enlargement would yield a new political dimension that facilitates building trust among former enemies.

Cooperative security. While official enlargement discussions have not yet commenced within the Alliance, the nine NATO candidate countries are presently endeavoring to make the next wave a priority agenda item for the nineteen existing members. The imperative at this point is more than simply inclusion within the Alliance based on prior contributions to the regional security in the region, or progress in the transition process. Rather, events in the Balkans, and the insecure regional environment they generate, demand a substantive decision from NATO that includes long-term solutions. Failure to meet this need will necessarily cause aspirants to rethink their security options.

The core benefit of NATO enlargement is certainly that the wider the inclusionary net is cast, the wider the zone of European security. Beyond that, there has been a commonality of values throughout the history of NATO. It has been, and will remain, in the common interest of all members of the Alliance—present and future—to promote the principles of freedom, individual liberty, the rule of law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. They lie at the core of the inherent logic of Euro-Atlantic cooperation, and are what ultimately make NATO attractive to members and nonmembers alike.

Looking deeper, the enlargement of the Alliance does not merely extend the cooperative process into new nations. NATO is the organization where Americans and Europeans jointly decide what is best for the transatlantic partnership in terms of ensuring stability. Of course, stability is first and foremost about security, and NATO has proven remarkably efficient in providing security for the region. Since its formation over 50 years ago, and the resultant coupling of U.S. and European security, Europe has been spared the major conflicts that so peppered its past. This is not to say there have been no conflicts in Europe since the formation of NATO. On the contrary, most of the period was characterized by the Cold War, and even as that war faded away, recurrent conflict in the Balkans continued to destabilize Europe. But there were no “hot” wars, nor any which directly affected the core security of Europe.

Indeed, even in those conflicts that did occur, NATO played a stabilizing role. During the Cold War, for instance, NATO

deterred actual conflict, thereby proving itself an effective conflict prevention tool. Indeed, the fact that the Cold War had European roots helped make it apparent that European unity was a stabilizing force and, correspondingly, that it makes sense for NATO to continue to enlarge to achieve longer-term stability. More recently, it was NATO that made conflict termination possible in the Balkans. From classic wars, to cold wars, to regional conflicts, then, the logic of a sustainable peace seems to rely on cooperative security approaches. This being the case, U.S. and the European interests in long-term regional stability are best supported through strong, intertwined relationships with the countries in the region—that is, through enlargement. Reduced to basics, U.S. security will be increased through enlargement because it will help prevent future European conflicts that risk involving the United States, while the Alliance as a whole will be stronger and better able to address future security challenges. At the same time, NATO enlargement will help consolidate democracy and stability in Europe, and will gradually help [\[140\]](#) erase the Cold War dividing lines.

Raison d'être. There are, of course, potential downsides to further enlarging NATO. One persistent argument is that in the absence of any clear threat there is little reason to enlarge, an argument finding its genesis in earlier suggestions that NATO would fade away as its *raison d'être*, the Soviet threat, did likewise. In other words, why should the Alliance assume both the fiscal and non-pecuniary costs of expansion without being able to identify a clear military threat? Such arguments are shallow, for, as repeatedly demonstrated throughout the last century, threats seldom emerge slowly and along predictable lines. On the contrary, fresh threats may surface quickly, especially given the current pace of technological change, and may assume unconventional and asymmetrical forms. Moreover, NATO's roles and missions have expanded since the days when Article V, the North Atlantic Treaty's collective self-defense provision, essentially defined the boundaries of Alliance operations.

Decision-making. Perhaps a better argument against enlargement surrounds decision-making. NATO decision-making is consensus based; each of the nineteen members must concur in, or at least abstain from, decisions. The obstacles to achieving consensus have been aggravated in the post-Cold War world, where there is no common, powerful enemy to provide a unifying effect. Consider, for instance, Greek hesitancy over Operation Allied Force, or the playing of

the French “Red Card” during the bombing campaign. ^[141]

There are several counters to this point. First, most of the aspirants have demonstrated particular willingness to support NATO operations and decisions over the past decade. Recall, for instance, Romania’s support during the Kosovo crisis despite negative consequences for its economy, particularly as trade along the Danube River was shut off. Moreover, the support of NATO damaged relations with the Serbs, historical friends and trade partners of the Romanians.

While it is difficult to anticipate the future, the various examples of Partner cooperation in difficult circumstances demonstrate that perhaps the concern that enlargement will necessarily frustrate decision-making is overstated and that, instead, mutual trust and cooperation between member states may counter-balance the myopia of strict national interest analysis. Alliance dilution would only be a serious risk if the values and interests of prospective members differed significantly from those of existing members. But, at least for the foreseeable future, newly admitted states will be unlikely to vehemently oppose positions taken by the existing members— if only out of concern that doing so might negatively affect other national interests, such as entry into the EU, aid, or investment from abroad. A further reassurance is NATO’s

Combined Joint Task Force structure. ^[142] This structure facilitates coalitions of the willing whenever full consensus on an operation cannot be achieved. Finally, and most importantly, the question is not whether enlargement has downsides. Of course it does, and it is indisputable that enlargement of a consensus-based organization renders decision-making potentially more unwieldy. Rather the question is whether or not the downsides are outweighed by the upsides. In this case, the net gain to regional security surely outweighs the potential losses.

The Russia factor. Russian opposition is a regularly cited downside to expansion. ^[143] As with decision-making, this is a fair point—Russia is clearly opposed to further enlargement, whatever its form, and enlargement risks worsening relations between Russia and Alliance members, at least in the near term. However, the remedy to Russian opposition is hardly acquiescence to its objections. To allow Russia to “control,” or even to “guide,” NATO expansion would be to forfeit the advantage in terms of shaping the security landscape that the West enjoys after having emerged from the Cold War in a position of strategic dominance. ^[144] Instead, a far more

profitable course of action would be to fully and actively embrace NATO's strategy of fostering an ever more robust partnership with Russia pursuant to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and via such mechanisms as the Permanent Joint Council.^[145] In such a strategy, enlargement towards the East actually creates bridges to Russia such that expansion could facilitate improved relations.

Alternatives to NATO enlargement. Finally, some assert that further NATO enlargement is superfluous given the existence of viable security alternatives. Most often cited is Partnership. Indeed, PfP activities have intensified measurably since 1999, when this instrument became "enhanced and more operational." The role of partnership is receiving increased emphasis as participating governments realize that it is beneficial in and of itself, rather than simply a waiting room for NATO admission. As a representative example, Romania continues to place high priority on strengthening its partnership with all members of the Euro-Atlantic community, not simply with other candidates to NATO membership, through EAPC and PfP. It shares the consensus view that partnership is pivotal to the role NATO plays in promoting security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic space, and contributes to the enhancement of NATO's capabilities in crisis management. Thus, in the future, Romania will increase its participation in EAPC/PfP (including SFOR and KFOR^[146]), and it is unalterably committed to the continued development of EAPC as a key forum for political consultation. Other aspirants are likely to follow its lead.

Yet one must be careful of the conclusions to be drawn from the success of partnership endeavors. While the PfP is growing in vitality, it must be borne in mind that Partnership does not entail the mutual security commitments, specifically the Article V collective defense guarantees, that lie at the core of NATO membership. Additionally, it fails to give members the voice in NATO, or NATO-led, operations that full membership would provide. Finally, it groups states that wish to engage actively with NATO together with those whose Partnership expectations fall far short of that level of involvement. A more logical division would group the former states within the Alliance itself, for aspirants have, as evidenced by their desires to join, greater common security interests and goals with NATO members than with PfP members more broadly.

In addition, no other organizations offer the security blanket provided by NATO. It is clear that most of the countries

hoping for NATO membership will not receive an invitation to join the EU in the immediate future. ^[147] But even if they did, EU membership alone would be insufficient to secure their security interests. The envisaged EU defense force is primarily oriented towards crisis response; it will lack the kind of advanced, integrated, large-scale military capability that remains at the heart of NATO's strength and that continues to underlie European security. Additionally, the European Union offers its members no formal collective defense guarantee. Perhaps most significantly, the United States is not a member of the European Union. The reality remains that any major threat to the security of aspirant states would have to be addressed with the participation of the United States; hence, NATO remains the most important and effective tool for transatlantic security. ^[148]

Concluding Reflections

And so to the million-dollar question: If NATO did not exist today, would we have to invent it? The answer is quite simply, Yes. The rationale, well articulated by former President Clinton, is simple: "NATO can do for Europe's east what it did for Europe's west—protect new democracies against aggression, prevent a return to local rivalries, create the conditions in which prosperity can flourish." ^[149]

But what of enlargement, and when? NATO members assessing the costs and benefits of enlargement must bear the temporal factor in mind. To the extent that NATO (or the EU) is seen as a stabilizing influence domestically, any delay in admission expands the window of opportunity for instability. Indeed, to the extent that integration into the EU is an objective, NATO membership arguably provides a sound (or at least more sound) security environment within which to conduct the difficult and oft disruptive economic, social, and legal restructuring necessary to comply with EU admission criteria. Additionally, there is always a risk that forces hostile to NATO (or at least to the "West" that NATO represents) might gain strength in the candidate countries, especially if hopes of being included in the next round of enlargement are dashed. The "failed expectations" backlash would prove destabilizing not only for the state involved, but perhaps regionally, for democratic consolidation by states in the region is to some degree interdependent.

And what of the aspirants, if their hopes for an invitation at Prague are dashed? The expressed Romanian perspective on

this possibility serves as an excellent model of how best to handle failed expectations—it intends to stay the course. First, “rejection” would require continuation of reform implementation because it speeds the transition process, and does so quite aside from the issue of NATO membership. Second, higher levels of interoperability with the structures of the Alliance through the activities within the Enhanced and More Operational PFP would need to be achieved. Last, but certainly not least, Romania intends to continue building bilateral relations with Alliance members. In pursuit of such goals, the Strategic Partnership with the United States, as well as the special relations that Romania enjoys with Italy, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany have to be continuously enhanced. [\[150\]](#)

In the end, though, NATO’s decision to enlarge, and to continue the process, is well founded strategically, politically, and militarily. Strategically, an enlarged NATO will project security eastward and foster peaceful resolution of disputes among the nations of Central and Southeastern Europe. Politically, it will bolster the processes of democracy building, market reform, and European integration. Militarily, an enlarged NATO will greatly improve the geostrategic situation of NATO, particularly in terms of managing potential crises that might emerge, while bringing to NATO the military capabilities resident in the aspirants’ armed forces.

Of particular note are the “boutique” (but very real) dangers which threaten international peace and stability—proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, lingering ethnic, religious, and territorial tensions, refugee flows stemming from conflicts, international crime, terrorism, and the fragility of nascent democracies. Enlargement empowers the current NATO member states to deal with each of these threats more effectively. Furthermore, the contention that NATO will import instability should it enlarge collapses upon itself. Quite to the contrary, NATO enlargement will export stability, promote the rule of law, and strengthen democratic development. This reality is already apparent as the aspirants take concrete steps to consolidate political and economic reforms, place their militaries under civilian control, and resolve long-standing ethnic and territorial tensions. [\[151\]](#)

We must be careful, however, to avoid proclaiming NATO enlargement a panacea for the woes of those who seek to join “the transatlantic club.” Their success in mastering the transition from communism and in ensuring their own security

will ultimately depend on their own sweat, not that of others. Nevertheless, NATO enlargement does facilitate military, defense, and security reforms in an agreed-upon, predictable, and transparent framework throughout the region. Admitting the new democracies to NATO will consolidate the reforms and contribute substantially to the development of a more durable and stable European security space. Enlargement is, quite simply put, a win-win scenario.



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