

## FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

## 43. *NATO Expansion*

**Congress should** *refuse to approve the enlargement of NATO for the following reasons:*

- NATO is a military alliance, whose purpose is to deter and fight wars, not merely an association for political cooperation.
- NATO expansion is motivated overwhelmingly by the fear of Russia that exists in the states clamoring for membership in the alliance; those states want reliable protection, not just paper guarantees.
- No Russian political figure of any significance welcomes NATO expansion, or even takes the Western justifications for it seriously.
- Russia, despite its weak conventional military forces, still possesses one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, making any NATO-Russian confrontation over Eastern Europe especially dangerous.
- The United States is obliged to use nuclear weapons, if necessary, to protect all the other members of the alliance; many of the proposed new members could not be defended by conventional means.
- NATO expansion risks dividing Europe and increasing the danger of major war in Europe.

NATO is a military alliance, not a political association. When World War II ended, the hope was that the United Nations would succeed where the League of Nations had failed. But collective security under the banner of the United Nations quickly became a victim of the Cold War. As hopes for a collective security system vanished, the United States decided to substitute a security guarantee to the nations of Western Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Several years after the formation of NATO, the Soviet Union responded by creating its own alliance, the Warsaw Pact.

With the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union dissolved the Warsaw Pact, but NATO, the alliance of the victors, survived. Without a clear adversary, however, it was an alliance in search of a purpose. The conflict in Bosnia gave it one mission: “out-of-area operations”—preserving peace in the portions of Europe that are not part of the alliance. Why have such a powerful armed force, people asked, if it cannot be used where peace is threatened?

NATO's involvement in Bosnia underlines its central purpose: to deter and fight wars. It is not surprising that the expansion of NATO's role in Bosnia has involved it in its first armed missions ever. What that signifies, however, is that the expansion of NATO's role carries with it the danger of even more armed conflict.

During the Cold War the Soviet Union typically backed down when confronted by the United States and its allies. But the United States made no effort to unilaterally challenge the Soviet Empire. Nevertheless, there were miscalculations that could have proved catastrophic, notably the Cuban missile crisis. And although it is sometimes said that the Cold War was won without a shot being fired, that statement ignores the veterans of Korea and Vietnam, whose sacrifice deserves greater recognition. Those wars were fought in large part to preserve the credibility of Washington's alliance commitments, including NATO.

In the debate over NATO expansion, that central purpose of a military alliance—to deter and fight wars—has been overlooked. To be sure, a military alliance can serve additional purposes, and NATO played a role in fostering democracy in its members. But other international institutions can also serve that purpose. As NATO's role in Bosnia reminds us, the distinctive features of a military alliance are its war-fighting capabilities and responsibilities.

### ***Fear of Russia***

Since the purpose of a military alliance is to deter and fight wars, the countries that want to join the alliance typically have a particular threat in mind. Alliances are different from collective security systems. Collective security is designed to be inclusive. Any country can join, and any country, even a member, can become an enemy that must then be disciplined by the other members. As noted, the United Nations was designed as a collective security system. After the Cold War ended and Iraq invaded Kuwait, the United Nations authorized military action against Iraq even though it was a UN member.

Alliances are very different. Unlike collective security systems, they are exclusive, because they have a particular enemy in mind. For NATO, that threat was the Soviet Union. During the Cold War it was inconceivable that the Soviet Union or the other members of the Warsaw Pact would have been allowed to join NATO.

With the Cold War over, why is a military alliance in Europe necessary? Why retain NATO, which even with expansion will remain exclusive—because it will inevitably exclude Russia?

That, of course, is the nub of the argument. Despite all the rhetoric about the end of the Cold War, a new NATO, and so forth, the fundamental purpose of NATO is to provide an American security guarantee to countries that are afraid of Russia. To be sure, those fears are not baseless. We cannot know how the political and economic turbulence in Russia will turn out, and certainly some statements by Russian leaders provide cause for concern.

But we should be honest about the motives of the Central and even the Western European nations that desire the expansion of NATO. If NATO expansion is not designed with Russia in mind as a likely adversary, why is Russia excluded from possible membership? When the United Nations was formed, nobody thought of excluding Russia. Russia was even given a veto in the Security Council, whereas now the common refrain is that Russia must not have a veto in Europe. The conclusion is inescapable: NATO expansion is motivated by fear of Russia, combined with the (somewhat contradictory) conviction that Russia is too weak to do anything to resist expansion of the alliance. And despite the sugary assurances issuing from Western capitals that an enlarged NATO is not directed against Russia, the Russians are not fooled.

### ***Russia's Reaction***

When Andrei Kozyrev was Russia's foreign minister, Western leaders thought some deal could be reached so that NATO could expand without antagonizing Moscow. Those expectations still exist, but now they are based on little more than wishful thinking. When foreign observers interpreted some remarks by Kozyrev's successor, Yevgeny Primakov, as moderating the Russian opposition to NATO expansion, he quickly shot them down.

Consequently, those promoting NATO expansion increasingly say that Russian opposition doesn't matter, that Russia will have to accept expan-

sion because it has no other options. But that is not the way the Russians see it. Three possible responses, in particular, should be noted.

### *Alliance with China*

Over the last few years, Russia's relations with China have been growing warmer. Although no one should desire hostility between two major powers, the basis of their rapprochement seems to be their mutual resentment of U.S. policy. NATO expansion is evidently one of the reasons Moscow is drawing closer to Beijing. "Various highly-placed Russian leaders began to talk about 'looking' for allies in the East in the second half of last year, purportedly in response to a possible expansion of NATO," the Athenian newspaper *New Europe*, which follows events in Russia closely, reported in May 1996. "The idea of the need for such an alliance is becoming more and more acceptable to Russia." In fact, when Russian president Boris Yeltsin was in Beijing in 1996, meeting with his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin, he declared that the Chinese leader "strongly supports Russia's stand that the eastward expansion of NATO to the Russian Federation's borders is unacceptable."

### *Pressure on Neighbors*

If NATO expands to the east, Russia will probably respond by putting pressure on its closest neighbors. In December 1994, a Russian scholar at Moscow's USA and Canada Institute warned that "Russia may meet NATO's advance eastward with its own advance westward." Warnings like that, it must be stressed, come from Russians who want to prevent a confrontation and who are telling Americans what the reaction is likely to be in their country. "In these conditions, quite moderate politicians will favor a remilitarization of the country," argues Dmitri Trenin, a Russian foreign policy specialist at the Moscow office of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The formation of a military and political alliance within the [Commonwealth of Independent States] . . . will become a priority trend of post-Soviet integration."

Indeed, one Russian correspondent with close ties to the defense ministry has even reported that Russia might launch a preemptive attack if NATO deploys troops forward as part of any expansion:

Russia's future reaction to any attempt to deploy foreign troops near its border (including such a move under the guise of conducting maneuvers) is quite predictable. It will be exactly the same as Washington's reaction in 1961 [*sic*], when our troops landed in Cuba. First there will be a blockade

(if the geographic location of the future conflict zone allows this), then an ultimatum demanding an immediate troop withdrawal and, if the ultimatum is not complied with, a preventive strike that would deprive the adversary of offensive capabilities.

The danger is especially great for the Baltic states. According to the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a working group on Russia's policy with respect to NATO, "the Baltic states' desire to join NATO . . . will create a potential source of real crisis in the center of Europe." Given the location of the Baltic states, it is doubtful that NATO could provide any effective conventional military assistance if they were threatened by Russia. And even though Russian forces did not perform well in Chechnya, they still pose a threat to the Baltic republics. As the Defense Intelligence Agency recently told Congress, "Through the next 5 years . . . Russia will retain the capability . . . to overwhelm any other former Soviet state with a conventional offensive, provided it has sufficient time to prepare." In these circumstances, the prospect of NATO membership for the Baltic republics will offer false hope, much like the British and French guarantee to Poland in 1939. Even worse, far from deterring Russian action, it could actually incite Russia to take the action we all seek to avert.

### *Repudiation of Arms Control*

During the Cold War, the capstone of East-West negotiations was arms control, especially the agreements designed to limit the nuclear arms race. Given the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the weakness of Russian conventional forces, people have tended to forget that Russia still possesses a vast nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the United States. Indeed, despite Washington's worries about security threats around the world, that arsenal still represents the only threat to America's national survival, and consequently it still deserves attention as our highest national security priority.

In early 1996 the Senate consented to ratification of the START II Treaty, which would dramatically reduce the arsenals of Russia and the United States and create a more stable balance. However, Russian political leaders have grown disenchanted with the treaty as overall U.S.-Russian relations have soured. In particular, they have begun to link NATO expansion with START n. In 1994 Duma Defense Committee chairman Sergei Yushenkov warned that NATO expansion would deliver "a probably fatal blow to arms limitation regimes." More recently, Sergei Karaganov,

chairman of Russia's Council of Foreign and Defense Policy, told a conference sponsored by the Congressional Research Service that "almost inevitably, Russia will be pushed, whatever the government is, toward more emphasis on nuclear weapons in its strategic policy and in pushing the nuclear matter to the forefront of European politics."

### ***Dangerous U.S. Obligations***

As noted, the United States is obligated to defend any NATO member that is the victim of aggression. During the Cold War, the threat was the Soviet Union. That was why the United States had such a massive military presence in Germany, which was the major line of confrontation with Soviet forces in Europe. With the end of the Cold War, those forces have been significantly reduced, as have those of Washington's NATO allies. Given the even greater degradation of Russian conventional forces, those defense drawdowns do not undercut the security of existing NATO members even if relations between Russia and NATO deteriorate.

Expansion of NATO eastward, however, is something else altogether. The farther east one goes, the greater the potential Russian military threat and the harder the NATO conventional defense. As already noted, with regard to the Baltic states, it is difficult to imagine how NATO could mount an effective conventional defense at all. Thus, the paradox of NATO expansion is that those countries most likely to enter NATO in a first round of **enlargement**—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—are the least threatened because they are farthest away from Russia. Their entry, however, is likely to increase the threat to the most vulnerable countries. Moreover, their entry is also likely to increase the Russian nuclear threat to them. So long as they are not NATO members, they are not likely to be targets of Russian nuclear forces. But if Russia makes good on threats to increase reliance on nuclear weapons in response to NATO expansion, it is likely that the new members of NATO will be on the target list. And the United States cannot protect them against *nuclear* attack.

The extent of the U.S. obligation to defend its NATO allies should not be underestimated. If they are attacked, we *must* defend them, or we will be dishonored. And if we cannot defend them by conventional means, we **shall** have to initiate nuclear war. That is what NATO means. That is why we refused Soviet entreaties during the 1980s to adopt a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons. We did not want to initiate nuclear war, and we deployed large conventional forces in Europe to forestall the

**Table 43.1**  
**Results of Public Opinion Poll**

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland
Support	8%	9%	23%
Oppose	85%	85%	67%

SOURCE: Stanley R. Sloan and Rosan Hollak, *NATO's Future and U.S. Interests: Edited Transcript of a Congressional-Executive Dialogue*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress 96-400 F, May 3, 1996, p. 128.

possibility that we would have to initiate nuclear war. But we never disavowed the option. *The U.S. obligation under NATO involves the initiation of nuclear war if there is no other way to defend a NATO member under attack.* It should go without saying—but it nevertheless needs to be said, since advocates of NATO enlargement seem determined to ignore the point—that this is not a commitment to be extended lightly.

There is also the question of expense. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the cost of NATO expansion over a 15-year period would be \$61 billion to \$125 billion, with the United States expected to pay between \$5 billion and \$19 billion. “Such U.S. costs might be manageable,” the CBO concludes, “but only if—as NATO and CBO assume—the Visegrad nations [Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia] themselves bear a substantial portion of the costs of expansion.”

With all due respect to NATO and the CBO, that assumption is wildly unrealistic. Given the economic situation of the Visegrad states, and even of the existing NATO allies, they cannot be expected to come up with that kind of money. More to the point, their own citizens do not want to do so. In 1995 the U.S. Information Agency conducted a public opinion poll of citizens of the Visegrad countries to learn whether they were willing to increase defense expenditures as a condition of membership in NATO. The responses are given in Table 43.1. In short, if NATO expands, the United States will assume greater military risks and a vastly increased defense burden. No one else can make good on the security guarantee, and no one else can—or will—pay for it.

### **Provoking a New Cold War?**

The end of the Cold War brought a sigh of relief throughout the world. The new relationship between Russia and the United States, in particular, provided assurance that the nuclear threat to civilization was vastly dimin-



ished. Democracy had won and Russia would be accepted as part of the West. There would be no Third World War to follow the First and Second.

Now those hopes are ebbing. Many in the West do not realize it yet, but there is a change in Russia, a change that has been inspired largely by our attitudes. And NATO expansion is a major reason for that change. "We had been very successful in changing the attitude toward NATO in Russia until the decision was made to enlarge NATO," Karaganov told the CRS conference. "NATO expansion, because of the reaction in the country, is killing the partnership."

The purpose of NATO expansion is misconstrued by its proponents. It is presented as an effort to overcome Yalta, but it will simply recreate Yalta by moving the frontier of "the democratic West" farther east. In NATO jargon, that new boundary does not mean creating a new division of Europe. Although Russia will not be allowed into the new NATO, it is to be offered a formal charter with NATO in compensation. American officials seem genuinely surprised that Russians are offended when they are told, as in the television commercial, that an imitation brand "is just as good as a Xerox."

We should have no illusions. NATO expansion will set back relations with Russia. There will be adverse consequences. Moreover, enlargement will not even provide greater security for those countries admitted to NATO. We risk repeating the empty guarantees of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno. Those who point to Munich and warn of appeasement if NATO does not expand should remember the empty British and French guarantee to Poland. As the historian A. J. P. Taylor asked, was it better to be a betrayed Czech or a saved Pole?

The arguments for NATO expansion have been characterized by naivete and dishonesty. When NATO expansion comes before the Senate, that body should engage in serious debate and not be rushed into a hasty decision. The NATO treaty involves a commitment to risk America's very survival in defense of other countries. That is not an obligation to be undertaken without the most careful consideration.

### **Suggested Readings**

- Brown, Michael E. "The Flawed Logic of NATO Expansion." *Survival* (Spring 1995).
- Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Beyond NATO: Staying Out of Europe's Wars*. Washington: Cato Institute, 1994.
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- Sloan, Stanley R., and Steve **Woehrel**. "NATO Enlargement and Russia: From Cold War to Cold Peace?" Congressional Research Service Report for Congress 95-594S, May 15, 1995.
- Sieff, Martin. "Russians Feel Isolated as NATO Grows: Policy Could Push Ties to Iran, China." *Washington Times*, September 23, 1996.

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