

Here are the arguments, pro and con, about expanding the Alliance to include former Warsaw Pact adversaries and others.

NATO's Eastern Question

By Stewart M. Powell

AN AMBITIOUS, US-led campaign to bring new European nations into NATO has stirred controversy throughout the Western Alliance as well as in the lands of the old Soviet Union and its empire.

The Western plan proposes to consider full NATO membership for former members of the now-defunct Warsaw Pact, under certain conditions. Central and east Europeans overwhelmingly favor this prospect, especially the US-backed security guarantees that come with NATO membership.

However, anti-Western Russian nationalists—and even many pro-Western reformers—view the Alliance's planned eastward move with mounting alarm. Americans and western Europeans, for their part, appear deeply divided on the subject.

The problem dates to January 1994, when NATO offered a vague auxiliary status to central and eastern European nations and former Soviet republics.

In fifteen months, twenty-six nations—former Warsaw Pact members, Soviet republics, and European neutrals, such as Sweden, Finland, and Austria—had joined the Part-



AP photo / Luca Bruno

For almost five decades, NATO troops trained to repel an invasion they hoped would never come (opposite). They recently found themselves with a very different mission, helping to maintain a fragile peace in the Balkans (above), while decision-makers contemplate how best to expand the Alliance.

nership for Peace. By November 1995, twelve nations had become full-fledged "partners." Sixteen were participating in a "coordination cell" at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Belgium.

Now, the sixteen current members of the Alliance are coming face to face with the question of admitting



new members to the NATO structure and assessing the military, political, and economic consequences of these acts. What follows is an accounting of the major points made by proponents and opponents.

The Case for Expansion

NATO Stability

NATO, the most successful military and political alliance the world had ever seen, engendered a high degree of western European cooperation, integration, and stability for more than four decades.

In Europe's post-Cold War tumult, however, the formerly anti-Soviet Alliance increasingly came to seem anachronistic. The great issues and problems confronting Europeans were no longer to be found along the Iron Curtain but in newly democratic and independent nations of eastern Europe and the old USSR, with the political and economic futures of these countries at stake.

Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher contended that the Alliance faced a "historic choice." It could "embrace innovation" and find a new purpose, or it could go on as it had

for almost fifty years and "risk irrelevance" and perhaps break up.

It is this prospect—the specter of Europe without NATO—that deeply troubles US leaders. Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said expansion will bolster the US presence and western European "equilibrium" and help thwart "reemergence of historical European rivalries" between such big continental powers as France and Germany.

Extended Democracy

Alliance officials contend that the promise of membership gives the Western democracies greater leverage over the political transformations now under way in nations to the east.

NATO requires that prospective members be free-enterprise democracies with civilian control over the armed forces. This, proponents of expansion claim, strengthens the hand of political moderates in their inevitable showdowns with hardliners, right and left, in the formerly Communist nations.

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott contended, "Nations that are encouraged in their aspirations to

join NATO are more likely to make a successful transition from their Communist pasts."

In a September 1995 report on the matter, NATO stated, "The benefits of common defense and . . . integration are important to protecting the further democratic development of new members."

Damper on New Conflicts

In the view of proponents, NATO expansion will prevent or minimize simmering rivalries in the East, such as the one that has torn apart large swaths of what used to be Yugoslavia.

They say that the promise of NATO membership has helped fledgling democracies in newly independent nations cope with and overcome some of their chronic internal and external ethnic and territorial rivalries that have swept these nations into conflicts for centuries.

Participation in the Partnership for Peace and the promise of NATO membership, for example, is said to have induced Hungary to back away from open conflict with Slovakia and with Romania over borders and toward resolution of disputes, much as Tur-

key and Greece had muted their hostilities to gain admission to NATO.

Expanded Military Contacts

An expanded NATO and the Partnership for Peace, say proponents, would strengthen military-to-military ties between Western and Eastern nations and reduce the possibility of misunderstandings or miscalculations.

Already, the Partnership for Peace has provided some of the military-to-military relationships that enabled the United States and Russia to strike a landmark agreement in October that would enable them to field a joint 4,000-member force in Bosnia-

the US would be able to play a similar role in the nations emerging from the old Soviet empire.

"Worst Case" Hedging

Some believe that the West must move quickly to erect a defensive structure to guard against a possible collapse of reform in Russia and a revival of Russian imperialism.

The establishmentarian Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in New York recently called for NATO to move more quickly to accept the participants in the Partnership for Peace as full-fledged members, as well as for the "partners" to prepare

themselves more rapidly for full integration.

Charles Kupchan, a former European affairs expert on the National Security Council who wrote the CFR report, said, "If Russia again comes to pose a military threat to central Europe, NATO should be prepared to carry out its traditional mission of territorial defense."

The belief is that this capability alone would have a major influence on Russian political behavior.

The Case Against Expansion

Kremlin Politics

Critics note that even the reform-minded Russian leadership has repeatedly warned against expansion of the Alliance.

The Alliance's emphasis on expansion threatens to undercut the all-important relationship with Russia, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) warned at a seminar in Norfolk, Va., last June, and leads to the kinds of aggressive behavior NATO seeks to deter.

The influential senior Democrat, who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, added, "This is the stuff that self-fulfilling prophecies and historic tragedies are made of."

Such critics as Senator Nunn say that this type of move is likely to fan ultranationalist Russian sentiments and strengthen the very anti-

USAF photo by SrA Phillip Ulmer



Hercegovina to carry out engineering, construction, and transportation duties in support of the planned 60,000-member NATO-led peace implementation force.

Extended US Influence

For Washington, an important, if unstated, goal is to ensure continued US influence in the affairs of Europe and to have a major say in eastern European security developments. "The bedrock of United States security policy" remains the commitment to Europe, said Walter B. Slocumbe, under secretary of defense for Policy. "We will remain fully involved in European security issues."

For half a century, NATO has served as the mechanism for exerting that influence, providing Washington's all-important bridge to the Continent. Eastward expansion would ensure that



AP photo / Frank Boxler

USAF C-130s (top) have a pivotal role in getting US troops to Bosnia and keeping them supplied. US soldiers (above) in Europe have always trained to be ready for anything, even a worst-case chemical warfare attack.

Western fanatics that NATO wants to thwart by expanding into the east.

The Clinton Administration, in fact, braced for resurgent ultranationalists to make broad gains in Russia's parliamentary elections, setting the stage for a more dangerous backlash in the Russian presidential election in June.

Robert Legvold, a Russian scholar at Columbia University, warns that the political climate could change dramatically and bring greater danger. "What we have now are Russians shouting, complaining, and criticizing Western policies," he said, "but with the rise of the ultranationalists, we could see Russia actually doing something about it."

New Lines of Division

Many Russians, reeling from their nation's embarrassing strategic, po-



AP photo / Olga Shalygin

Russia's willingness to use force in such places as Grozny, Chechnya (above), troubles those opposed to expansion of the Alliance, who believe that fast-track expansion will strengthen anti-Western extremists in Moscow.

Partnership For Peace

Nation	Date of Signing
Former Warsaw Pact	
Bulgaria	February 14, 1994
Czech Republic	March 10, 1994
Hungary	February 8, 1994
Poland	February 2, 1994
Romania	January 26, 1994
Slovakia	February 9, 1994
Neutrals, Nonaligned	
Albania	February 23, 1994
Austria	February 10, 1995
Finland	May 9, 1994
Malta	April 26, 1995
Slovenia	March 30, 1994
Sweden	May 9, 1994
Baltic States	
Estonia	February 3, 1994
Latvia	February 14, 1994
Lithuania	January 27, 1994
Other Former Soviet States	
Armenia	October 5, 1994
Azerbaijan	May 4, 1994
Belarus	January 11, 1995
Georgia	March 23, 1994
Kazakhstan	May 27, 1994
Kyrgyzstan	June 1, 1994
Moldova	March 16, 1994
Russia	June 22, 1994
Turkmenistan	May 10, 1994
Ukraine	February 8, 1994
Uzbekistan	July 13, 1994

Source: NATO

litical, and economic setbacks, worry that NATO is attempting to exploit Russia's weaknesses "to gain the most favorable strategic position for further confrontation," said Alexander Kononov, director of Moscow's Center for Military Policy and Systems Analysis.

"Moscow faces a take-it-or-leave-it offer—either agree to a formal enlargement of NATO, or the enlargement will happen without Moscow's approval," explained Alexei K. Pushkov, a foreign policy advisor and speech writer who worked for former Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. "This is confrontational."

Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin shook up a Europe-wide summit in Budapest in 1994 by claiming that NATO expansion raised the "danger of plunging [the world] into a cold peace."

A year later, at the UN General Assembly last October, he again warned, "The strengthening of one bloc today means a new confrontation, beginning tomorrow."

Alex Pravda, director of the Russian and East European Center at St. Anthony's College at Oxford, said, "The overwhelming perception in Russia is that [it] has no specific enemies, but neither does it have any reliable friends."

Better Options

Critics of NATO expansion maintain that NATO's goals may be laud-

The Immediate Future

A Delicate Balance

Faced with these competing pressures, Western leaders have sought to reassure Russia, but they have not throttled back on the timetable for the formal expansion.

To help assuage Moscow's deepening anxieties, the Alliance has forged a direct relationship with Russia, dubbed "NATO Plus One." The NATO Enlargement Study completed last September stated that cooperation between NATO and Russia could "help to overcome any lingering distrust from the Cold War period and help ensure that Europe is never again divided into opposing camps."

Secretary of Defense William J. Perry urged the Russians to broaden their ties with the Western Alliance, links that could potentially include a "standing consultative commission" to coordinate defense cooperation.

A NATO-Russia treaty, or something approximating it, "would go some way toward reassuring Moscow," said Mr. Pravda.

However, the Clinton Administration seemed prepared to go only so far to comfort Russia, fearing that Moscow might interpret more overt moves as evidence that it held a *de facto* veto over NATO expansion. Washington would offer Moscow "deeper and deeper dialogue," National Security Advisor W. Anthony Lake said, but he added that NATO would expand despite Russian objections.

"That is our policy, has been our policy, will be our policy," Mr. Lake declared. "It is not going to shift, because it's the right policy to create a more peaceful Europe."

One Russian expert on the National Security Council observed that the Clinton Administration was striking a delicate balance.

"Anybody can expand NATO," he said. "The trick is to expand it in a way that engages the Russians and doesn't draw new lines. We will neither hit the accelerator nor slam on the brakes." ■



Proponents of expansion believe that military-to-military contacts reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and miscalculation. The US is maintaining such contacts with Russia in the Pacific (above) as well as in Europe.

able but that there are better, less perilous ways to attain them.

Some contend that multinational European organizations would be better suited to the task of securing European stability than a nuclear-armed military alliance that had deployed forces against Russia for more than forty years.

One group of analysts believes the Western European Union should take responsibility for replacing NATO as the primary guarantor of European security.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei V. Kozyrev said that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ought to take on "overriding responsibility" for the "maintenance of peace and the strengthening of democracy and stability for the Euro-Atlantic area." President Yeltsin himself suggested wider responsibilities for the United Nations—where Russia enjoys a veto over the actions of the fifteen-member Security Council.

New Military Dangers

The fast-moving pace of NATO expansion left little time for a hard-nosed assessment of the military impact of the Alliance protecting a vastly larger area.

John E. Peters, a European security specialist at RAND Corp., foresees military and political headaches in this development. While NATO remained "a sound Alliance for the

defense of the sixteen, it is unlikely to succeed at extending security eastward," Mr. Peters cautioned. While he conceded that current Alliance members would enjoy "marginal gains in crisis response and theater missile defenses" by moving its boundaries to the east, the benefits "seem small" when compared to the potential for trouble caused by alienating Russia.

Finally, some critics assert that while the US has no vital interest in eastern Europe, it will be committed to defending these vulnerable countries.

First Things First

According to Senator Nunn and others, NATO membership does not deal effectively with the vexing question of east European economic integration and thus sets the stage for conflicts and disagreements in this area.

Senator Nunn suggested that the former Warsaw Pact nations first ought to secure full economic integration in the exclusive fifteen-member European Union and demonstrate that they are irreversibly committed to democracy and free enterprise before gaining membership in NATO.

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