

NATO Enlargement after the First Round

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At the Washington Summit in April, NATO will formally admit three new members: Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Together with the future enlargement of the European Union, the integration of these three countries into NATO will significantly diminish the prospect that Central Europe will again become a source of international tension and geopolitical rivalry. It will also resolve Germany's historical security dilemma. Rather than being the most exposed edge of the Western security community, Germany will now be surrounded by a group of democratic, peaceful allies.

However, the entry of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic into NATO does not end the process of enlargement. At the Madrid Summit, the Alliance agreed to maintain an "open door" to new members. Several countries – Slovenia, Romania, and the Baltic states – were singled out as potential candidates, though no explicit guarantee of membership or timetable was given.

This raises a number of new policy dilemmas for NATO. How should the enlargement issue be handled at the Washington Summit? If NATO does not issue invitations to any new members at the Washington Summit, how can the credibility of its "open door" policy be maintained? Who should be invited to join in the second round and when should it take place? What will be the impact of any further enlargement on relations with Russia and Ukraine? What effect will further enlargement have on NATO's cohesion and military effectiveness?

Finally, and most importantly, how does enlargement contribute to NATO's overall transformation and new missions? This question needs to be addressed

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before the second round takes place. The answer will significantly influence both the timing of the second round as well as which countries are included in it.

These dilemmas underscore the need for NATO to develop a coherent strategy for managing further enlargement. Otherwise, NATO could face new security dilemmas as difficult, if not more difficult, than those it faced during the initial round.

NATO's difficult balancing act

In approaching the issue of further enlargement, NATO will have to balance five competing demands:

- The need to maintain NATO's cohesion and military effectiveness. As NATO enlarges, it must be able to maintain its core competencies and military effectiveness. New members need to be able to contribute not only to NATO's old missions but to new ones as well. Collective defense (Article 5) will remain a core mission. However, most of NATO's operations in the future are likely to involve crisis management missions. Thus, one of the key criteria for selecting new members ought to be how well candidates can contribute to the full spectrum of new missions. This would help to give NATO enlargement a stronger strategic rationale as well as preserve NATO's core competencies.²
- The need to keep the open door credible. NATO will need to find ways to ensure that the open-door policy remains credible. If NATO postpones a second round of enlargement too long, many prospective members may begin to lose hope of ever attaining membership. This could undercut democratic forces and slow the momentum toward reform in these countries.
- The need to digest the first round. The fate and timing of the second round will, to a large extent, depend on how well NATO succeeds in integrating the first three new members. If they perform poorly and do not live up to expectations, this could diminish the willingness of NATO members – and particularly the US Senate – to support a second round of enlargement. Thus a lot will depend on how well the first new members meet their membership obligations.
- The need to maintain a viable partnership with Russia. As in the first round of enlargement, NATO will need to take into consideration the impact of enlargement on relations with Russia. Moscow will need time to adjust to the new strategic realities and NATO should be careful not to overburden the Russian political process. This could spark a dangerous backlash in Russia. At the same time, NATO will need to maintain momentum in the enlargement process and ensure the credibility of its open-door policy. If NATO acquiesces to Russian demands or accepts Russia's attempts to draw new "red lines", this

2 See H. Binnendijk and R. Kugler, "NATO Enlargement After the First Tranche", Strategic Forum, no. 149, October 1998, pp. 1-4.

could have a negative political impact on many prospective aspirants, especially the Baltic states, and reinforce imperial nostalgia in certain parts of the Russian political spectrum.

- The need to maintain internal consensus. Finally, NATO will need to maintain an internal consensus within the Alliance. At the moment, there is no consensus within NATO about who should be included in a second round or when the next round should take place. Some members, such as France and Italy, have pressed for the inclusion of Slovenia and Romania in an early second round. Others, such as Denmark and Norway, favor including the Baltic states. NATO will have to balance these internal pressures to forge an Alliance-wide consensus.

This is likely to take time and involve a certain degree of internal bargaining. Pressures for a southern enlargement will have to be balanced against pressures for a northern opening. Some countries such as France may also link enlargement to other issues, such as NATO reform and internal adaptation, complicating the enlargement calculus. But as the process of enlargement unfolds, NATO should not lose sight of its larger interests. Enlargement should not simply be reduced to a game of internal “horse trading” devoid of a larger strategic rationale. Otherwise it could end up weakening rather than strengthening NATO.

Enlargement and the new NATO

As Western policy-makers grapple with the dilemmas posed by further enlargement, the first question that needs to be addressed is how enlargement relates to NATO’s broader transformation. Enlargement is an important part of the adaptation process, but it is not the only – nor even the most important – element of this overall adaptation process. The basic purpose of this transformation is twofold: to help stabilize Europe, especially Central Europe; and to build a more effective partnership between the US and Europe which would allow the Alliance to deal more effectively with new security threats, including those beyond NATO’s immediate borders.

The two goals are, in fact, closely linked. A more stable and secure Europe will be a better partner for the United States and be more capable of helping to manage the new security challenges that NATO is likely to face in the coming decades. Many of these new challenges – indeed most of them – will be outside the NATO area, either on NATO’s periphery or beyond its borders. Enlargement is needed both to help stabilize Europe and as a stepping stone to building this new partnership and a new NATO.³

In effect, the task confronting NATO is really one that can be termed “double

3 See R. D. Asmus, R. Kugler, and F. S. Larrabee, “Building a New NATO”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 4, September-October 1993, pp. 28-40. For a more comprehensive discussion, see D. Gompert and F. S. Larrabee (eds) *America and Europe: A Partnership for a New Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

enlargement”: Enlargement I is to enlarge the structure and institutions of the transatlantic partnership to the new democracies of Eastern Europe; Enlargement II is to enlarge the horizons, functions, and agenda of the transatlantic partnership beyond the European continent to those areas and issues where the US and Europe have shared common interests.⁴

The two enlargements, however, are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. A Europe successfully on its way to being knit together as a coherent political economic entity will be far more capable of helping the new challenges that the Alliance is likely to face in the coming decades. Thus Enlargement I is an indispensable step not only toward creating a more stable security order in Europe but also toward building a more outward looking Alliance, one not only more capable of addressing threats to its borders but also of managing crises beyond its borders.

There is, moreover, an important linkage between enlargement and NATO’s new missions. If it is to live up to its promise – and maintain public support, especially in the United States – NATO needs to remain an effective military alliance. That was one of the key messages that emerged from the Senate debate on NATO ratification. Thus NATO needs to both enlarge and take on relevant new missions. This is the best way to ensure that it remains a militarily effective alliance well into the 21st Century and also to disarm critics who argue that enlargement will dilute NATO and turn it into a talk shop.

Clarifying NATO’s strategic purpose will also help manage and structure the enlargement process. Potential new members will not only have to be able to contribute to NATO’s traditional missions such as collective defense but also to NATO’s new missions such as crisis management and peacekeeping. Thus one criterion – but by no means the only criterion – for judging potential candidates for membership ought to be how they contribute to NATO’s new as well as its traditional missions. This would provide a yardstick for measuring aspirants’ performance and readiness for membership.

A candidate’s performance alone, however, does not automatically ensure membership. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for membership. Membership also needs to be in NATO’s strategic interest. Some candidates may score well in a number of key areas – democratic reform, viable market economy, civilian control of their military, etc. However, a good “scorecard” alone does not automatically guarantee membership. There still must be a strong consensus within NATO that admitting a particular candidate is in NATO’s strategic interest.

The strategic rationale

NATO also needs to be clear about the strategic rationale behind the next round of enlargement. The first round of enlargement was designed to help stabilize

4 R. D. Asmus, “Double Enlargement: Redefining the Atlantic Partnership After the Cold War”, in Gompert and Larrabee, *America and Europe*, pp. 19-50.

Central Europe and prevent the emergence of a security vacuum that could rekindle historical geopolitical rivalries. With the entry of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic into NATO, this goal has largely been achieved. What is the strategic rationale behind the second round?

Conceptually, one can envisage two options. The first is a “southern” option. This would be designed to stabilize and enhance security in Southeastern Europe. This is strongly favored by a number of countries, particularly France and Italy, but also Greece and Turkey. A second option would be a “northern” option designed to extend stability to the Baltic states and anchor them more tightly to Europe. This option is strongly favored by Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Poland.

In the initial post-Madrid period the prevailing view was that the next round would probably involve an expansion to the south. Expanding to the Baltics was regarded as too risky particularly because of the feared impact on relations with Russia. However, the enlargement landscape has changed significantly in the period since Madrid.

Romania was considered a prime candidate for the second round in the initial period after Madrid. But its chances have slipped somewhat since Madrid, due in large part to the continued infighting within the ruling coalition, which has led to a slowdown in economic reform.⁵ Whether Romania is admitted in the second round will largely depend on whether it succeeds in putting its internal house in order.

At the same time, Bulgaria’s chances have improved somewhat as a result of its strong economic and political performance since the May 1997 elections, which resulted in the emergence of a more democratically oriented reformist government in Sofia. However, Bulgaria still has a long way to go before it is ready for membership. Military reform, for instance, has barely started.⁶ Moreover, admitting Romania without Bulgaria could leave Bulgaria isolated and could have a strongly negative impact on the prospects for Bulgaria’s democratic evolution.

Slovakia’s prospects have also improved. As long as former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar was in power, Slovakia’s chances of NATO (or EU) membership were virtually nil. But the election of a new democratic government in Bratislava has cast Slovakia’s candidacy in a new light. The new government, headed by Mikulas Dzurinda, has embarked on a significant reform path and made membership in NATO and the EU a top priority. If Slovakia continues on its reformist course, it could become a strong candidate for NATO membership down the line. Moreover, Slovak membership would open up a land corridor to Hungary – an important consideration if NATO ever needed to reinforce Hungary in a crisis.

Austria could also emerge as a possible candidate. The present Austrian coalition is divided, with the conservative Peoples Party favoring Austrian

5 See “La Roumanie s’enlise dans la crise économique et monétaire”, *Le Monde*, 26 November 1998. Also “La Roumanie est en proie au mécontentement social en l’absence de réformes économiques,” *Ibid.*, 17 November 1998.

6 See J. Simon, “Bulgaria and NATO: Seven Lost Years”, *Strategic Forum*, no. 142, May 1998, pp. 1-6.

membership in NATO and the Social Democrats opposed. However, the situation in Austria is very fluid. Public opinion is shifting and it is quite possible that Austria might decide to apply for membership in the next few years, especially now that Hungary has become a member.

Austria clearly qualifies on economic and political grounds, and if it were to apply, there would be strong pressure to admit it. Austria's weak point, however, is defense. Austria spends less than one percent of its GNP on defense – well below the two percent NATO average. Thus, it would have to significantly increase its defense spending before it could seriously be considered for NATO membership. The last thing the Alliance needs is a new free rider.

Finally, Lithuania has emerged as a possible dark horse contender for a second round. Vilnius has made NATO membership a high priority and has moved vigorously to modernize its military forces. In January 1999, the Lithuanian parliament passed a law committing the government to raise defense expenditures to 1.95-2.00 percent of GDP by the year 2001. This has led some observers to suggest that Lithuania should be included in a second round.⁷ Lithuania's membership is also strongly supported by Poland.

The Baltic dimension

The question of Lithuania's possible inclusion in the second round raises the larger issue of how to manage the aspirations of the Baltic countries. All three Baltic states have openly declared their desire to join NATO. However, Baltic membership in NATO raises a number of special problems:

- Russian opposition. Russia is strongly opposed to Baltic membership in NATO. While the Alliance should not give Russia a veto over NATO's enlargement, the Alliance does have to take Russian concerns into account. Admitting the Baltic states – or at least admitting them too quickly – could cause a crisis in relations with Russia.
- Defensibility. The Baltic states' geographic proximity to Russia raises the issue of their defensibility. However, extending an Article 5 commitment to them that could not be carried out could seriously undermine the credibility of NATO's security guarantee.
- The Russian minority. The presence of a large Russian minority on the soil of the Baltic states and unresolved minority issues with Russia make many NATO members reluctant to admit the Baltic states into NATO. While Latvia and Estonia have recently relaxed their citizenship laws, Russia continues to complain of discrimination against the Russian minority in both countries.
- Kaliningrad. The close proximity of the Baltics to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad further complicates the Baltic issue. Kaliningrad was one of the

7 Z. Brzezinski, "NATO: The Dilemmas of Expansion", *The National Interest*, Fall 1998, pp. 13-17.

most highly militarized regions in Russia during the Soviet period. While Russia has been gradually reducing its military presence in the region, there is still a high concentration of Russian military forces there. Moreover, the collapse of Kaliningrad's economy has led to a dramatic increase in crime, smuggling, and drug activity.

- Low military capability. Unlike the other East European states which inherited armies from the Soviet period, the Baltic states had to create armies from scratch. As a result, the military capability of the Baltic states is very low. It will take years before they will be in a position to match the capabilities of even the least advanced NATO militaries.

To avoid the complications associated with NATO membership, some observers have suggested that the Nordic countries should assume responsibility for the security of the Baltic states. The Nordic countries, however, reject this approach. They do not want to see Baltic security decoupled from European security. This is also the reason they have rejected Russian calls for creating a special security zone in the Baltics. Moreover, a Nordic security guarantee, as the Nordic and Baltic states well know, would not be credible.

Others have suggested that the Baltic states should join the EU – but not NATO – and that this would solve their security problems. Clearly membership in the EU would help to diminish the prospect of outside attack or intimidation. Once they were members of the EU, any attempt by Russia to put pressure on the Baltic states would have serious implications for Russia's relations with the EU.

However, if there were a serious threat to the security of any Baltic state, the EU does not have the military capability – at least not at the moment – to respond to such a threat. It would have to turn to NATO. Thus, in the case of a serious threat to the Baltic states NATO would eventually become involved.

In short, it is an illusion to think that EU membership and NATO membership can be neatly separated. EU membership will enhance the security of the Baltic states. But it by no means solves all their security dilemmas. Indeed, in some ways, it raises the security issue even more starkly, and highlights the close connection between EU and NATO membership.

A stronger EU security and defense identity, along the lines proposed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in no way resolves this problem. Even if the EU were able to build such a capability, it would still need to draw on NATO assets in any crisis for the foreseeable future. Moreover, a crisis in the Baltics would almost invariably involve Russia and thus require US – and NATO – involvement if Western actions were to be credible. Thus, the NATO membership issue cannot be avoided.

At the same time, given Russian sensitivities, the issue of Baltic membership must be managed carefully. Russian efforts to draw “red lines” should be categorically rejected. Russia cannot be allowed to have a veto over the security options of individual countries just because they were once a part of the former Soviet Union. The Baltic countries, like other East European countries, have a legitimate right to choose their own security orientation. At the same time, Russian security concerns need to be taken into account. NATO should avoid actions that

unnecessarily exacerbate their concerns.

The Nordic connection

How the Baltic issue is managed will also depend on the course of the security debate within the Nordic countries, especially Finland and Sweden. As in Austria, the end of the Cold War has eroded the concept of neutrality and raised new security dilemmas for Sweden and Finland. Both countries have taken important steps away from neutrality by joining the EU and the Partnership for Peace (PfP). While neither country has officially expressed a desire to join NATO, behind the scenes a debate has emerged among policy elites in both countries regarding the desirability of and prospects for eventual NATO membership.

This debate has gone furthest in Finland, in part because neutrality was imposed on Finland whereas in Sweden it was voluntary. Some Finnish commentators, such as Max Jacobson, former Finnish Ambassador to the UN and a leading security expert, have suggested that Finland will have little choice but to join NATO, not because Finland faces any particular threat to its sovereignty but in order to ensure that it has a "seat at the table" on matters that directly affect Finnish security interests.

In Sweden, as well, voices in the media and the Moderate Party have begun to raise the issue of NATO membership. Carl Bildt, the leader of the Moderate Party, has openly called for Sweden to join NATO. The need for defense cuts has also caused some members of the Swedish policy elite to question whether Sweden can afford to remain outside the Alliance over the long run.

This is not to suggest that Finland or Sweden are about to join NATO in the near future. This is unlikely. But the security outlook in both countries is slowly shifting, as both seek to adjust to the changes unleashed by the end of the Cold War. Thus, the prospect that both countries might at some point opt to join NATO can no longer entirely be excluded, particularly if Austria decides to join.

Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO would cast the whole Baltic issue in a new light. In particular, it could help to defuse the "defensibility" argument. If NATO were ready to assume an Article 5 commitment to Finland with its long border with Russia, then there would be less reason not to extend a similar guarantee to the Baltic states.

However, for the time being, there are strong advantages to having Sweden and Finland outside the Alliance. Their non-membership provides a certain "cover" for the Baltic states and reduces their exposure and vulnerability. If Sweden and Finland were to join the Alliance, many of the other objections to Baltic membership – Russia, the low level of Baltic military forces, diminished Alliance cohesion, etc. – would still exist. Moreover, with Sweden and Finland inside NATO, the Baltic states would be left more isolated and exposed. This could exacerbate their security anxieties.

Instead of pushing Sweden and Finland to join NATO, Western policy-makers may be better off trying to reduce the difference between members and non-

members and intensifying military cooperation with the Baltic states in a variety of areas, particularly through enhanced PfP. This could help defuse the saliency of the membership issue and would buy time for the European security environment – and Russian attitudes – to evolve. Such an evolution, in turn, could make it easier to manage the issue of Baltic membership in NATO.

The Russian factor

Russia is an important part of the enlargement puzzle. In many ways, NATO's dilemma in the second round remains the same as it was during the first round of enlargement: how to enlarge in a steady, deliberate way without provoking a rupture of relations with Russia. However, Russia is considerably weaker today than it was during the first round. As a consequence, it is less able to act as a partner. At the same time, it has fewer means to thwart NATO's further enlargement.

This does not mean that NATO can or should ignore legitimate Russian security concerns. This would be unwise and counterproductive. NATO has a strong interest in Russia's democratic evolution and in developing a cooperative relationship with Moscow. This is essential for NATO to be able to pursue a viable enlargement policy as well as a number of the other important foreign policy goals, such as conventional arms control.

Moreover, Russia will need time to adjust to the new strategic realities. This argues for a slow purposeful approach to the second round, rather than a hasty new round of enlargement. However, Russia should not be given a veto over NATO's enlargement. NATO should make clear that there are no "red lines" and that continued efforts to draw such lines will only lead to Russia's isolation from Europe.

At the same time, NATO should reaffirm that the Alliance remains open to all European states – including Russia – that meet the criteria for membership and accept the basic values on which membership is based. As Zbigniew Brzezinski has noted, Russia cannot be expected to accept NATO enlargement if at the same time it is excluded from the process forever.⁸ For the foreseeable future, Russian membership in NATO is not a realistic option. It would require major changes in Russia, in NATO and the European security environment. But we cannot predict what Russia or the European environment will look like in thirty or fifty years. Thus, it would be wrong to needlessly antagonize Russia by ruling out Russian membership out of hand.

For the time being, however, Russian membership in NATO is not a realistic option. Russia has not asked to join, and if it should apply in the near future, it would not meet most of the basic requirements for membership. Thus, there is little reason to lose much sleep over what is – and for a long time will remain – merely a theoretical problem.

NATO's main attention should be devoted to trying to make the NATO-Russian relationship, particularly the Permanent Joint Council (PJC), established

⁸ Brzezinski, "NATO: The Dilemmas of Expansion", p. 17.

in May 1997, more effective. The criticism of some observers such as Henry Kissinger that the Permanent Joint Council dilutes the NATO Council's power and gives Russia a veto over NATO's decision making are unfounded, as NATO's handling of the Kosovo crisis underscores. Russia was not able to prevent NATO from taking action in Kosovo.

Indeed, the danger is just the opposite: that Russia and NATO may not exploit the PJC's full potential and that, as a result, it will languish and become a dead letter. Thus, both sides need to find ways to reinvigorate the PJC and ensure that the PJC remains an effective mechanism for expanding cooperation.

Partnership with Ukraine

NATO also has a strong interest in helping to preserve Ukraine's independence and sovereignty. An independent Ukraine serves as an important buffer between NATO and Russia, giving NATO important strategic warning in the event of a resurgence of an aggressive militaristic Russia. If Ukraine's independence were to be weakened or compromised, this could have important implications for NATO's military posture and could bring the shadow of Russian military power to Poland's border.

Ukraine has not applied for NATO membership and is not likely to do so in the near future. But it has signaled a strong interest in closer cooperation with NATO. It was the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to join PfP and at the Madrid Summit in July 1997 it signed a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership with NATO. The charter goes beyond anything NATO has signed with any other CIS country except Russia. While it does not contain an explicit security guarantee, the charter provides for a broad expansion of cooperation in a number of important areas, including exercises, training, education, and technology. NATO also recently established a liaison office in Kiev, giving it a permanent presence in Ukraine.

For the time being, this probably marks the limits of NATO's relationship with Ukraine. Kiev is not likely to apply for membership in the near future (though some Ukrainian officials do not rule it out over the long run). And even if Ukraine did apply, Kiev has a long way to go before it would qualify for membership. Moreover, the impact of Ukrainian membership on Russia would need to be considered. Russia would regard Ukrainian membership in NATO as much more threatening than inclusion of Poland or the Baltic countries.

It is important, however, that NATO find ways to enhance cooperation with Ukraine and support its aspirations for independence. In particular, cooperation through PfP should be intensified. Polish membership in NATO also offers a useful mechanism for intensifying ties to Ukraine. Poland and Ukraine have recently established a joint peacekeeping battalion. This could provide a building block for expanded cooperation. The trilateral military cooperation between Poland, Germany and Denmark could also eventually be expanded to include Ukraine. Ukraine could be invited to participate in exercises with the three countries and to send liaison officers to the headquarters in Stettin (Poland).

At the same time, NATO members need to encourage Ukraine to accelerate the pace of its economic reform program. Unless Ukraine addresses its economic problems more seriously, its chances of being integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions are dim. Without more consistent reform, Ukraine will become increasingly dependent on the Russian market and find it difficult to maintain its Western orientation.

NATO's enlargement options

As NATO approaches the Washington Summit, it has a variety of options for managing enlargement:

Slovenia only

In this option NATO would enlarge to Slovenia only. This option has several advantages. It could be done relatively easily and quickly: Slovenia is a small country and incorporating it would not pose major problems for NATO. Slovenia's membership would also reinforce the credibility of NATO's open-door policy, and demonstrate NATO's sincerity about its readiness to admit new members beyond those admitted in the first round. At the same time, it would buy time for NATO to digest the first round and provide time for other aspirants to undertake the reforms necessary to make themselves better qualified candidates for membership. It also would not antagonize Russia, while demonstrating to Moscow that enlargement was an ongoing process. Finally, it would provide a land bridge to Hungary, allowing NATO to reinforce Hungary more easily in a crisis.

Enlarging to Slovenia only, however, has a number of disadvantages. Given Slovenia's small military (about 10,000 men), admitting Slovenia does not really add much to NATO's military potential or ability to carry out new strategic missions. Moreover, it might be seen by many countries as an "easy out", thus undermining its original intention of reinforcing the credibility of the open door. Finally, if Romania were not admitted at the same time, it might create problems with France, Romania's strongest patron, at a time when, strategically, the Alliance needs to rebuild bridges to Paris.

Slovenia, Slovakia and Austria

In this option NATO would admit Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria together. This option would enhance stability in Central Europe and complete the Alliance's Central European opening: the entire Central European region would now be a part of NATO. It would also ensure land access to Hungary in a crisis. Finally, Austria's inclusion could accelerate the debate in Sweden and Finland about joining NATO.

Admitting Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria, however, also has a number of drawbacks. It would not add much to the Alliance's military capabilities or ability to carry out its new missions. None of these countries have very capable military forces. Indeed, Austria and Slovenia could prove to be free riders. Moreover,

while sentiment for NATO membership is growing in Austria, Austria has not yet applied for membership and it is not clear if and/or when it will.

Finally, it is not clear how permanent Slovakia's recent democratic opening is. Does the recent victory by the new democratic coalition represent a true break with the past? Or will it prove short-lived and result in the return of neo-communist and authoritarian forces, as happened in Bulgaria after the victory of the democratic forces in 1991? Finally, admitting Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria would disappoint many of the southern members of the Alliance, especially France and Italy, and could exacerbate internal tensions within the Alliance.

Slovenia and Romania

In this option, the Alliance would admit Slovenia and Romania together. This would provide an opening to the south, and satisfy the demand of some southern members for a better geographic balance within the Alliance. It would also give the Alliance a stronger foothold in the Balkans and provide a staging area for peace operations in the region. Finally, it could help to "lock in" Romanian democracy and foster closer rapprochement between Hungary and Romania, who would be forced to cooperate even more closely as NATO members.

There are a number of disadvantages to this option as well. Despite considerable progress, there are serious questions whether Romania is at present ready for NATO membership. Continued political bickering within the ruling coalition has led to a slowdown in reform. If the current coalition does not get a better grip on the economy, it could collapse or be forced from office, leading to a return of the neo-communists, led by former President Ion Iliescu. Moreover, admitting Slovenia and Romania without Bulgaria would leave Bulgaria exposed and could have a negative political-psychological impact in Bulgaria, undercutting support for the reform course undertaken by the democratic government in Sofia. It would also have a negative impact on the Baltic states, several of which are at least as qualified for membership as Romania.

Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria

In this option the Alliance would bring in Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria together. This option would help to stabilize the Balkans and also avoid Bulgaria's isolation. In addition, it would close the geographic gap between Romania and Turkey, creating a contiguous NATO southern region. It would also end any Russian hopes of using economic pressure and leverage to regain a foothold in Bulgaria.

However, this option would have all the disadvantages of the previous option, plus some additional ones. The most serious disadvantage would be its impact on the Baltic states, which would feel left out and increasingly vulnerable. It might also encourage Russia to believe that NATO had accepted a new "red line", making the Baltic area off limits to NATO enlargement. In addition, as noted earlier, Bulgaria is far from ready for NATO membership. Waiting for Bulgaria to catch up

would make NATO enlargement – and the integration of other candidates – dependent on the pace of reform in Bulgaria.

A southern and northern enlargement

In this option, NATO would admit one or two countries from the south – say Slovenia and perhaps Romania, if it is ready – together with one Baltic country, perhaps Lithuania, which is the most militarily advanced of the Baltic states at the moment. This would help to stabilize both the Balkans and the Baltic region, and avoid an internal squabble between proponents of a southern opening, such as France and Italy, and those who favor bringing in the Baltic states, such as Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Poland. Each would achieve a key part of their strategic agenda. Adding one Baltic country would make clear to Moscow that there are no “red lines”.

At the same time, it would be less provocative – and thus easier for Moscow to accept – than admitting all three Baltic states at once. Russia would undoubtedly object, but it would be hard for Moscow to reasonably argue that the inclusion of one Baltic country posed a serious threat to its security, especially if that country were Lithuania, since Lithuania is the Baltic country with which Moscow has the best relations.

One of the disadvantages of this approach would be that it would leave Latvia more exposed. Estonia and Lithuania have strong regional patrons (Finland and Poland, respectively). Latvia, by contrast, has no regional patron. Nor does it currently have a clear prospect for early membership in the EU or NATO. Moreover, it is the most vulnerable to Russian economic pressure because of its strong dependence on trade with Moscow.

Thus, in order to avoid Latvia becoming even more vulnerable to Russian pressure, some special compensation package would need to be devised for Latvia. One possibility would be to put Latvia on the fast track for EU membership along with Estonia. Latvia’s economic performance is nearly as good as Estonia’s – thus there are solid grounds for putting it on the EU fast track. Doing so would strengthen Latvia’s security and send a strong signal to Moscow that any attempt to put pressure on Latvia would have adverse consequences for Moscow’s relations with the EU.

Conclusion

All the options discussed above have advantages as well as disadvantages. Which one NATO chooses will depend to a large degree on NATO’s strategic purpose – which is evolving. Will NATO remain an integrated political military alliance or will it evolve more in the direction of a regional security alliance? Or will it retain elements of both?

The answers to these questions will have important consequences for how enlargement is structured. They need to be sorted out before the next round of enlargement begins. Once NATO has decided its strategic purpose, it will be easier to structure the next round of enlargement and decide which countries should be

included in it.

Moreover, NATO needs time to digest the first round of enlargement before it initiates a second round. It is important that this first round be perceived as successful. Otherwise, support for a second round, especially in the US Senate, could diminish. Many US senators fear that further enlargement will dilute NATO's military effectiveness. They need to be shown that this is not the case – that enlargement will enhance, not weaken, NATO's military effectiveness. This is another reason why it is important to get NATO's strategic rationale – and missions – sorted out.

Finally, Russia will need time to adjust to the new strategic realities. While Russia should not be given a veto over further expansion, proceeding with a second round too quickly – before Russia has had a chance to digest the impact of the first round – could inhibit, rather than facilitate, this process. This is all the more important because Russia is nearing the end of the Yeltsin era. Yeltsin's successor may not have the same stake in good relations with the West that Yeltsin had.

These factors argue for a deliberate, measured approach to further enlargement – one that gives NATO time to sort out its strategic priorities and digest the first round and also gives Russia time to adjust to the new strategic situation, while making clear that NATO enlargement is a continuing process.

At the same time, NATO needs to enhance the credibility of the open door. Otherwise many aspirants will lose hope and their incentive to continue to pursue domestic reforms could be weakened. Simply reiterating the wording in the Madrid communiqué about the door being open will not be enough. Without naming specific names, NATO needs to lay out a clearer road map at the Washington Summit, which goes beyond the Madrid Declaration and identifies concrete steps that will be taken to ensure that the door truly remains open.

NATO should announce at the summit that it will review the performance of aspirants at a special summit in 2001, with an eye to identifying specific candidates for a second round if their performance in the interval warrants it. Foreign and defense ministers should be tasked with preparing a progress report similar to the Report on Enlargement published by NATO in September 1995, which could be presented at their ministerial prior to the special summit. This report should assess the progress made by the aspirants and identify potential candidate members for a second round. Invitations to new candidate members could then be issued at the special summit. The new candidate members could thus formally join the Alliance some time in 2002.

Such a procedure would help enhance the credibility of the open door and give prospective candidate members an incentive to undertake the necessary reforms to improve their chances for membership. It would also buy time for NATO to digest the first round and give Russia time to gradually accustom itself to the fact that NATO enlargement is an ongoing process.