

THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL

OF THE UNITED STATES

BULLETIN

Vol. XIII, No. 2
March 2002

NATO ENLARGEMENT: ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES FOR PRAGUE

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In November 2002, NATO will hold a summit in Prague to discuss, amongst other issues, which candidate countries will be invited to join the alliance. At least one country is expected to receive an invitation in what will be the second round of NATO enlargement. The following analysis by Thomas S. Szayna, a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, provides a "scorecard" for assessing the progress of each applicant toward achieving the membership criteria established by NATO, as well as the impact on the alliance should they become members.

Barring some unforeseen event of major magnitude, leaders of the 19 NATO members will assemble at a summit in Prague in November 2002 and will invite one or more countries to membership in the alliance. The decision to enlarge NATO further in 2002 was made at the alliance's June 2001 summit, when the "zero option" of not inviting any country was taken "off the table." If the 1997-99 round of enlargement offers any lessons, the six months before the Prague summit will witness intense scrutiny of the candidate countries and extensive political maneuvering by them (as well as by their supporters and detractors in current NATO countries) in order to secure a membership invitation at the summit. It will also be a crucial period for considering how the addition of each new member might affect NATO and its ability to carry out its mission. This analysis seeks to present a "scorecard" for evaluating the progress of the applicant countries in meeting the criteria for membership and the likely impact of each potential accession on NATO itself. Of course, many other less tangible and political factors will come into play as the alliance decides whom to invite at Prague. But this analysis provides at least a starting point for assessing the candidates.¹

In 1997, NATO's decision as to which countries should become new members of the alliance was relatively easy. Once the basic decision to enlarge was made, it quickly became obvious that three of the candidates were ahead of the other former communist states in central Europe in terms of their post-communist transformation process. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary each brought with them already established democratic credentials and military forces of potential significance, while adding to the alliance's strategic depth.

The calculations surrounding the choices of invitees for the 2002 enlargement are not as easy. None of the candidates have the size and potential importance of the states that joined in 1999.² Each of the nine states participating in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) — who thus form the "long list" of former communist states currently in line to join NATO — is either less ready for membership and/or brings fewer advantages to NATO than any of the first round invitees. Moreover, the decision will have to be made in the context of a rapidly and unexpectedly changed security environment. Not only are the full implications of the September 11

¹ 2015: *Determinants and Implications for Defense Planning and Shaping*, MR-1243-AF, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001.

² Romania's large size is offset by its relatively low level of affluence and development.

¹ This analysis draws on a more comprehensive effort developed as part of a RAND research effort. See Thomas S. Szayna, *NATO Enlargement 2000-*

attacks far from clear, but the role of NATO in responding to those attacks is still uncertain. In the view of many observers, NATO's relevance in the post-9/11 world has declined while Russia's importance has risen. The post-9/11 situation also has provided the United States and Russia with an opportunity to establish a qualitatively new relationship. In such conditions, many "truths" of the pre-9/11 world, such as the assumptions that Russia would object to further NATO enlargement or that Russia would not be welcomed into NATO any time soon, are no longer so clear.

Despite this uncertainty, and the fact that the decision to enlarge NATO in 2002 is itself a product of the pre-9/11 world, enlargement is a process that has developed a dynamic of its own, and NATO remains committed to it. The following analysis provides an assessment of the progress made by each candidate toward meeting NATO's guidelines and an analysis of the costs and benefits to NATO of accession by specific countries. This work is drawn from the RAND study cited earlier, but has been updated to reflect the continued progress of the MAP countries and the changed security environment. The analysis is limited to seven states currently in MAP (Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria), since these form the set of more realistic candidates from which the invitees in 2002 will be chosen. Albania and Macedonia are also in MAP but, in view of their internal situation, they are longer-term candidates.³ States that are currently not declared candidates for NATO membership, but that generally would be attractive to NATO if they chose to pursue that option, include the current EU members not in NATO (Austria, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden). None from this group is now under consideration for the 2002 enlargement.

NATO's 1995 *Study on Enlargement* introduced a number of guidelines that prospective members are to meet prior to accession.⁴ These include: 1) a functioning democratic political system (including free and fair elections and respect for individual liberty and the rule of law) and a market economy; 2) democratic-style civil-military relations; 3) treatment of minority populations in accordance with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) guidelines; 4) resolution

of disputes with neighboring countries and a commitment to solving international disputes peacefully; and 5) a military contribution to the alliance, including a willingness to take steps to achieve interoperability with other alliance members. In addition, NATO requires new members to commit themselves to keeping the door open to further enlargement. But an important caveat is in order — these guidelines are not set in stone. In fact, as the alliance specifically outlined in its *Study on Enlargement*, it is not obligated in any way to use the guidelines when it actually makes decisions regarding new members. Should NATO agree that the strategic conditions have changed significantly since the enlargement process was launched, the alliance could interpret the guidelines liberally, make them into long-term goals, or even ignore them altogether. In other words, full-scale enlargement or the stopping of enlargement would be within the bounds of NATO's *Study on Enlargement*.

Assessing the progress of individual MAP states in meeting the guidelines is difficult because the guidelines are inherently (indeed, purposely) vague. But difficult does not mean impossible. One guideline — the willingness to resolve peacefully disputes with neighbors — is fairly simple to judge and is met by all those under consideration for Prague. Another guideline — democratic-style civil-military relations — is also relatively straightforward because NATO's threshold for considering a state to have democratic civil-military relations is low. As shown by the decision to invite the three new members in 1997, budgetary and formal oversight by civilians is sufficient. All of the candidates under consideration for Prague meet this standard.⁵

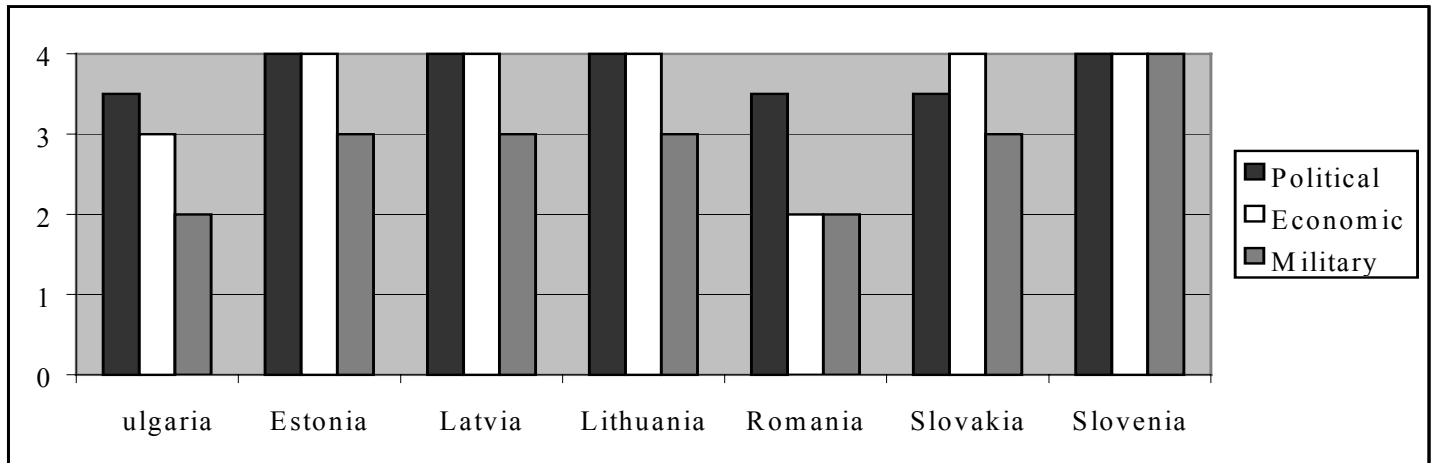
For analytical purposes, the other guidelines can be collapsed into three categories: political, economic, and military. NATO did not identify any particular level of progress as a "passing grade" for those seeking membership. But it certainly can be argued that any MAP state that matches or exceeds the level of achievement by any current NATO member in terms of the specified political, economic, and military criteria should be regarded as minimally qualified to join NATO. The results of this assessment of the MAP states' success in meeting the political, economic, and military criteria are portrayed in figure 1. The scale ranges from 1 to 4, with 4 signifying that the state has met the minimum criteria in that category and 1 meaning that it still has a long way to go.

³ Croatian aspirations to join NATO have yet to be recognized formally by the alliance. If NATO were to do so, Croatia stands a good chance to be well along in the process of preparation for membership.

⁴ See NATO *Study on Enlargement* issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, 3 September 1995, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/enl-9501.htm>.

⁵ It should be noted that the extent of civilian control over the military in one member state, Turkey, falls below these thresholds.

Figure 1. Assessment of MAP States' Progress on NATO Guidelines



Political criteria: Assessing a country's progress toward democracy is always difficult, but Freedom House provides a credible measure of political and civil rights around the world, updated on an annual basis according to a standard methodology.⁶ All current NATO countries score in the range of 1,1 or 1,2 (political rights, civil rights), with the exception of Turkey (4,5) and Greece (1,3). Because Turkey's score is so much lower than that of other NATO members, it provides the one exception to the rule that the lowest NATO member score serves as an acceptable "floor" for the candidate country scores. Instead, candidates should score in the more usual NATO range of 1,1 or 1,2. In fact, Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia all score 1,2. Slovakia and Romania follow with 2,2, and Bulgaria with 2,3. All seven countries receive a combined assessment as "Free," according to Freedom House. An additional assessment of these countries' progress towards democracy is conducted by the European Union each year as part of its own accession procedure. These evaluations are based on the Copenhagen criteria, which call for "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for one's protection of minorities." The EU's November 2001 country assessments echo the Freedom House assessments, judging all seven countries as having fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria.⁷ It should be noted,

however, that these political assessments can change. In particular, if Vladimir Meciar returns to power following the Slovak elections in September, the credibility of Slovakia's democratic credentials will suffer, Meciar's recent pro-EU and pro-NATO statements notwithstanding.⁸ Based on the current situation, the scores indicated for political progress in figure 1 are a composite of the Freedom House and EU assessments.⁹

Economic criteria: The EU also provides a thorough assessment of economic reform in its progress reports. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia receive the highest marks as functioning market economies able to withstand the competitive pressures within the Union in the near term. Bulgaria is seen as "close to being a functioning market economy," able to withstand the competitive pressures within the Union in the medium term. Romania ranks lower, as "having made progress toward establishing a market economy," though unable to withstand the competitive pressures in the Union in the medium term. The scores indicated in figure 1 for progress are based on the EU assessments of extent of economic transformation.

Military Criteria: In terms of a country's ability to contribute militarily to NATO, the more important indicators involve defense expenditures and size of armed forces. Median defense expenditures (as a percentage of GDP) have declined to 2.0 percent in NATO Europe, and the alliance has made the 2 percent of GDP

⁶ Freedom House ratings range from 1 (free) to 7 (not free) in each of two categories: political rights and civil liberties. The most recent ratings (used here) are for 2000-2001. Ratings for 2001-2002 are scheduled to be released in spring 2002. For updated ratings and complete methodology see www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/.

⁷ For more details on EU enlargement, including the progress reports, see www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement. The 2002 assessments are scheduled to be released just days before the Prague summit.

⁸ For an assessment of Meciar's ability to "reform," see Thomas S. Szayna, "Slovak Civil-Military Relations: A Balance Sheet After Nine Years of Independence," in Graeme P. Herd, ed., *Civil-Military Relations in Post-Cold War Europe*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, December 2001, pp.43-53, especially pp.49-51.

⁹ For further details on the methodology behind the scores for all the criteria, please refer to the RAND study.

threshold an explicit goal for aspiring members. In principle, all of the Prague candidates have accepted the threshold, although some have plans to reach it at a gradual pace, spanning several years. In practice, insufficiently developed resource management and accounting methods make ascertaining achievement of the threshold difficult and assessing efficiency of spending near impossible. NATO's stipulation that new members contribute to the alliance's military operations means that a candidate's forces must be able to fit into the alliance framework. Given NATO's emphasis on technologically sophisticated forces, the more meaningful contribution would involve troops able to be integrated easily into NATO's C4ISR assets.¹⁰ In this sense, the level of defense expenditures per troop during peacetime provides a proxy measure of the technological sophistication of a country's armed forces and thus its potential compatibility with NATO forces in combat operations.¹¹ Along these lines, Slovenia is far in the lead, spending at higher levels than several current NATO members. The other aspirants, however, fall below the current member with the lowest expenditure per troop (Poland).¹² In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic, and arguably Hungary (by most measures) met or exceeded the minimum NATO standards for defense expenditures as a percentage of GDP and defense expenditures per troop (using the same definitions with indicators at that time). The scores indicated in figure 1 are based on defense expenditures per troop.

Meeting the minimal standards of NATO's guidelines in no way assures a MAP state of being invited to the alliance, however. Ultimately, NATO members must agree that the decision makes sense from a strategic perspective. Even though NATO's decision-making process is political and borders on idiosyncratic, any analysis of the enlargement process must recognize that strategic rationale — the impact on NATO's core mission and abilities — will be key in deciding whether to invite a particular country to join, no matter how successful that country has been in meeting NATO's guidelines. To assess the likelihood of a given candidate being invited into NATO in 2002, a cost-benefit assessment of what that new member would mean to NATO can be

constructed. This assessment focuses on two key issues: *strategic position*, that is, the impact a new member will have on NATO's main missions; and *armed forces*, specifically the additional requirements for military forces that any enlargement will entail, balanced by the new member's military contribution to NATO.

Strategic position can be assessed along the following dimensions:

- the ability to project power in areas of likely contingencies, including the anti-terrorism campaign, as well as the Balkans;
- the creation of easily defensible borders around NATO and the avoidance of long, exposed borders that might need to be defended at added cost;
- the impact on NATO's cohesion and ability to perform its main missions on the basis of consensus; and
- risks that may accrue from a commitment to a new ally, including drawing NATO into a bilateral dispute, forcing NATO to forgo other initiatives, and eroding the alliance's overall security environment.

The 9/11 attacks have introduced a great deal of uncertainty into the strategic calculations. Whereas the Balkans represented the primary area of NATO engagement prior to the attacks, the importance of the Balkans peace operations has diminished after 9/11 relative to the anti-terrorism campaign. Trying to assess the relative importance of the two in NATO's strategic calculations regarding enlargement is a difficult endeavor at this stage, complicated by the fact that it is not obvious how NATO enlargement may contribute to the anti-terrorism campaign.

This analysis assumes that, in terms of power projection, the Balkans will continue to be the major future theater of operations for NATO (even if that may not be true for the United States). With that assumption, the alliance would benefit more from the membership of Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania, and less from membership by the Baltic states. In terms of the anti-terrorism campaign, the same countries emerge as beneficial (indeed, the United States used a Bulgarian air base to support its forces during the combat operations in Afghanistan). Based purely on vulnerability calculations, the impact of enlargement on the defensibility of NATO's borders would be positive if Slovenia and Slovakia joined the alliance. The addition of Romania, Lithuania, or Bulgaria would elongate NATO's border, while the most costly and least beneficial option would be to include a non-contiguous country such as Latvia or Estonia (if all the Baltic states joined at

¹⁰ C4ISR refers to command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

¹¹ The measure is not without problems, since it says nothing about efficiency of defense expenditures and it has a bias in favor of the smaller militaries, but it represents fairly accurately the level of compatibility among current NATO members. As such, the metric is useful in assessing the candidates.

¹² For 2000-2001, calculated from SIPRI and IISS data.

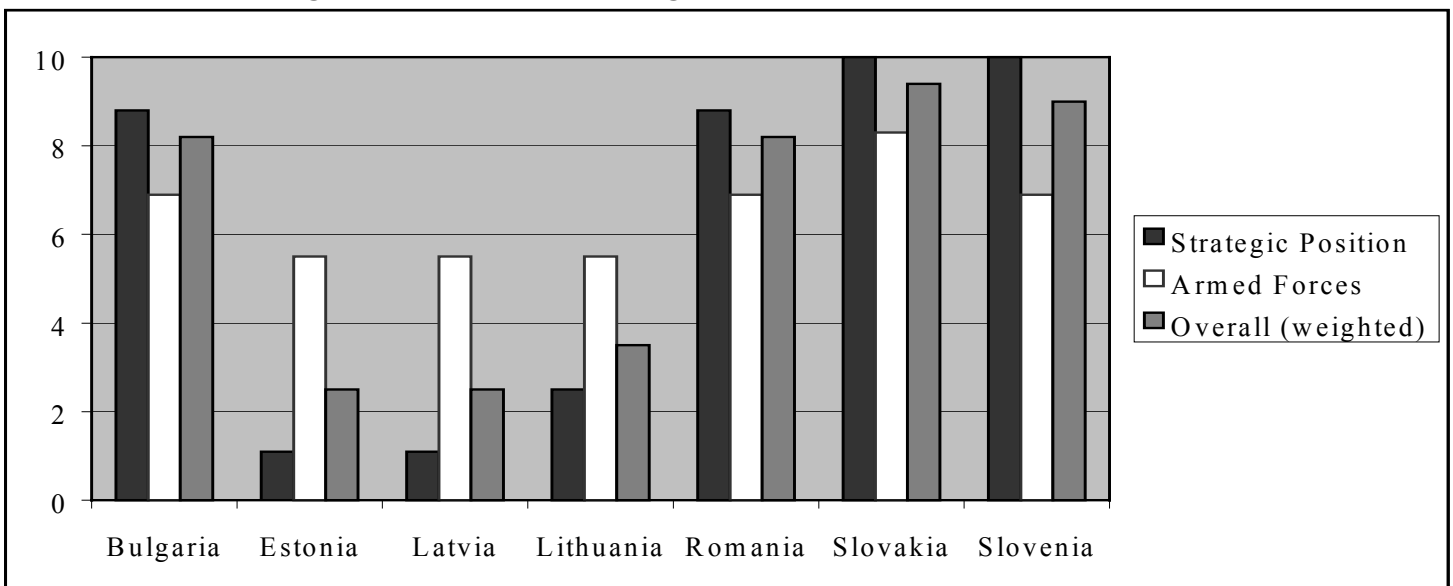
once, this would elongate NATO's border considerably). The impact of enlargement on alliance cohesion is still uncertain, but the idea that more members will make the decision process even more complex must be balanced by the remarkable similarity of the European NATO members' views on security and their membership in what is an increasingly unified and integrated EU. As for the additional risks NATO would face if it admitted new members, there seems to be little danger of being drawn into bilateral disputes (the exception being the possibility of an escalation in Latvia and Estonia's minority-related problems with Russia), nor are there significant opportunity costs in view.

As for risks associated with the overall security environment, here the key factor is Russia. However, the entire NATO-Russian relationship is in a state of considerable flux in the wake of September 11 and the decision to form a new NATO-Russian Council in the spring. Thus, it is unclear whether Russia will seek to impose a high cost for enlargement. If Russia continues to oppose enlargement, a review of the Russian reaction to the 1997-99 NATO enlargement suggests that when confronted with a unified and determined alliance, Russia will acquiesce and attempt to get the best deal it can. If a similar deal were to be struck in 2002, then its outline is also likely to differ greatly depending on which countries are invited, with Slovenia's admission to NATO the least problematic and that of the Baltic states the most. In any event, although enlargement may proceed without irreparably damaging Russia's willingness to cooperate with the West, it is unclear what

strategic benefits might accrue to NATO in exchange for the reduced but still inevitable political costs such a deal would entail. Should the 9/11 attacks alter fundamentally the entire plane of U.S. and NATO relations with Russia, and NATO emerge as a vehicle for security integration of Russia with the West, then NATO's further transformation would make some of the above points moot.

The candidates can also be assessed according to the ability of their armed forces to provide basic deterrence and border defense and to contribute to NATO's power projection missions. Based on the size and modernization level of forces, the size of the defense budget, and other factors, Slovakia seems most qualified in this area. However, not all of these criteria can be regarded equally. Given that forces of some NATO members (and especially the armed forces of the United States, the leader behind the enlargement process) are engaged in post-conflict stabilization operations (or outright combat) in central Asia and will remain so during the run up to the 2002 Prague summit, the ability of a candidate to project power and to minimize new risks facing NATO must be key factors. Figure 2 displays the results of an assessment of the candidates' strategic positions and armed forces, as well as a combined score that weighs the criteria. The scale ranges from 0-10, with 10 meaning that the candidate fully meets the strategic attractiveness criteria and 0 meaning that there are no strategic grounds for NATO to invite the country to join under current conditions (and given the assumptions outlined above).

Figure 2. Assessment of Strategic Attractiveness of MAP States to NATO



In sum, this analysis demonstrates the varying degrees of progress made by the candidate countries and the diverse costs and benefits each would bring to the alliance. Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, Slovakia have made much progress on NATO's guidelines for being considered for membership and there are good strategic reasons to invite them into the alliance. In contrast, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have made much progress on NATO's guidelines but the strategic reasons for inviting these countries to join NATO at this time and in the current security environment are not obvious. Much depends on the evolution of NATO's relations with Russia and the anti-terrorism campaign. In fact, if NATO emerges as the vehicle for security integration of Russia with the West, then the hurdle of strategic rationale for the entry of Baltic states into NATO may be transcended. Romania and Bulgaria have the opposite problem, in that they have some way to go in terms of meeting NATO's guidelines but NATO has good strategic reasons to invite them to join the alliance. In the end, the actual decision on NATO enlargement will be incredibly complex, and politics will inevitably play a major role. But the first step must be to assess each candidate, its likely contributions to the alliance and, most of all, the larger strategic ramifications of inviting each candidate to join

NATO — a factor that has assumed an even more important role in the post-9/11 security environment.

If the world has indeed changed as a result of the September attacks, then NATO should consider the choice of invitees and even the rationale for enlargement itself in light of the possible contribution to the anti-terrorism campaign and NATO's role in that effort. As of early 2002, this has not happened, and the alliance appears to be approaching the impending enlargement without a fundamental reevaluation that takes into account the changed security environment.¹³ What is needed is a genuine cost-benefit assessment, along with answers to some tough questions, including: how does enlargement improve NATO as a military tool in the war on terrorism? how might enlargement affect the role of key actors, such as Russia, in the war on terrorism? It may well be that a full-speed ahead "big" enlargement, perhaps staging the actual accession of the invitees, is the proper response. But that is not obvious, and with less than nine months to go before the Prague summit, it is high time for the debate to start.

¹³ Senator Richard Lugar recently has spoken eloquently in support of such a reevaluation. See the speech by Senator Lugar on January 17, 2002; <http://www.senate.gov/~lugar/011702.htm>

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