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THE FUTURE OF NATO ENLARGEMENT

**JOHN R. SCHMIDT
COURSE 5605
MILITARY STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS**

**FACULTY SEMINAR LEADER
COL DAVID JUDGE**

**FACULTY ADVISOR
DR. BERNARD D. COLE**

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The Future of NATO Enlargement

We reaffirm that NATO remains open to new members under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Alliance will continue to welcome new members in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Alliance expects to extend further invitations in coming years to nations willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve the overall political and strategic interests of the Alliance and that the inclusion would enhance overall European security and stability.

NATO Madrid Summit Declaration
July 8, 1997

The most celebrated event at the NATO Summit in Madrid was the decision to invite Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to begin accession talks aimed at bringing them into the Alliance by the 50th Anniversary of the Washington Treaty in April 1999. Of equal importance, although not as well publicized at the time, was the decision cited above to continue the enlargement process after Madrid by committing NATO to take in additional new members in the future.

In this paper, I will explore the motivations behind the decision to continue the enlargement process past Madrid and then go on to consider how the future of enlargement is likely to unfold. In so doing, I will discuss the prospects of possible future candidates for membership, examine the sensitive question of Baltic membership, assess the impact of an enlarging Alliance on NATO unity and cohesion, and speculate on the ultimate limits of the enlargement process, including prospects for Russian membership.¹ Since the future of NATO enlargement cannot be understood without an understanding of its past, I will begin by reviewing the foreign policy motivations that led

¹ As Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council from April 1995 to July 1997 I was responsible for NATO policy, including enlargement. The analysis and views expressed are my own and are not necessarily shared by any other living human being.

the Clinton Administration to pursue NATO enlargement and describe the major developments and events leading up to the Madrid Summit

Motivations for Enlarging NATO

During the first years of this decade, the newly emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)² were struggling to implement democratic and market economic reforms while squabbling with neighbors over a troubling array of ethnic minority and territorial disputes that were suddenly reemerging after years of Cold War storage. In many countries, former communists were returning to power, replacing a failed first generation of non-communist reformers. Although the Soviet Union had disappeared, most of these nations felt palpably insecure both with respect to their immediate neighbors and in lingering fear of a revanchist threat from the East. To many, NATO membership seemed to offer the perfect remedy to the wide variety of ills afflicting them. Government leaders, former communists among them, began to call openly for NATO membership.

In Russia itself, the internal political and economic disarray was even more acute than in the CEE states, with the future of democracy seeming to depend on the continuing survival of Boris Yeltsin and, therefore, still very much in doubt. In the Balkans, meanwhile, communist Yugoslavia had broken down into its constituent parts, precipitating a tragic conflict in the ethnically complex former Bosnian republic.

The Clinton Administration came to power in early 1993 faced with the challenge of trying to fashion some kind of order and stability out of this very considerable chaos. The conventional wisdom at the time was that the key objective of Western policy should

² Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria constitute the traditional core CEE states. The Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Albania and states of the former Yugoslavia are also generally considered to be part of Central and Eastern Europe. This is the usage I will follow in this paper.

be to promote the survival of democratic reforms in Russia. Although the success of democratic and market economic reforms in the CEE states was also considered important, there was real concern that a positive response to growing CEE calls for NATO membership could play into the hands of Russian hard-liners, jeopardizing the reform process in Russia.

The policy that eventually emerged during the first eighteen months of the Clinton Administration seemed to stand this conventional wisdom on its head. The first installment, creation of the Partnership for Peace (PFP) at the January 1994 NATO Summit in Brussels, proved relatively non-controversial. PFP was designed as an outreach program aimed at promoting cooperation and interoperability between NATO and the military organizations of the non-NATO countries of Europe (including the CEE states, traditional European neutrals and the states of the former Soviet Union).

But even as PFP was being unveiled, the Clinton Administration was moving rapidly toward a much bolder decision to enlarge NATO by bringing in new members from Central and Eastern Europe. This decision was taken primarily out of concern that democratic and market economic reforms in the CEE states might fail to take hold, exacerbating existing regional tensions over ethnic minority and territorial issues. There was also great reluctance to leave these fragile states in a security "gray zone." Not only had both World Wars begun in Central and Eastern Europe, but the region had been caught between stronger powers to the East and West, and fought in and over, for centuries.

By enlarging NATO to the East, the Alliance could ensure that the emerging CEE democracies would become firmly lodged within NATO, helping to remove them as objects of future strategic competition between NATO and any emerging peer competitor.

to the East, such as a revanchist Russia. Equally important, the prospect of possible NATO membership could serve as a powerful incentive to CEE states to follow through on their democratic and market economic reforms and compose their differences with their neighbors, particularly if NATO were to make these necessary conditions for membership consideration.

In taking the decision to pursue NATO enlargement, the Clinton Administration did not ignore Russia, the possible impact of enlargement on the Russian reform process, or the importance of securing constructive Russian engagement in European security affairs. From the very outset, it was understood and agreed that NATO would need to find some way to manage Russian concerns over enlargement and to avoid isolating Russia on the far side of a new European dividing line. The Administration sought to do this by proposing establishment of a formal NATO-Russia relationship in which the two sides would meet regularly to discuss European security issues and, where possible, take joint action. No one was under any illusion that promoting NATO-Russia cooperation would eliminate Russian concerns over NATO enlargement, but there was a consensus within the Administration that enlargement was unlikely to precipitate a crisis with Russia or play seriously into the hands of Russian hard-liners, so long as the process avoided the states of the former Soviet Union, in particular the Baltic states and Ukraine, where Russian nationalist sensitivities were much more deeply engaged.

Impact of the Enlargement Process

During the three-and-a-half years between the Brussels and Madrid NATO Summits, Clinton Administration policy on NATO enlargement unfolded more or less as intended. Although Russia vigorously opposed the enlargement process, no crisis developed over the issue, either between NATO and Russia or within Russia itself.

Vocal Russian opposition to enlargement did cause periodic nervousness on the part of several NATO allies, some of who were prepared to significantly delay the process in order to assuage Russian concerns. But Administration firmness managed to avert any serious moves in this direction, a posture that eventually paid off in the immediate run-up to the Madrid Summit, when Russia finally agreed to participate in the Administration-proposed NATO-Russia Joint Council.

At the same time, the Administration belief that the lure of NATO membership would help motivate CEE states to strengthen democratic and market economic reforms and resolve regional disputes seemed to be borne out. Although there were exceptions, such as Slovakia, and for a time, Bulgaria, most CEE states made considerable progress during the period in broadening and deepening their reforms. CEE government officials and political observers, moreover, were candid in attributing the pace, if not the fact, of the reform processes in their countries to their desire to enhance their prospects for consideration for NATO membership.

At the same time, CEE states concluded a number of historic agreements with their neighbors settling longstanding ethnic minority and territorial disputes. The agreement between Hungary and Romania guaranteeing their post-World War Two borders and providing for fair treatment for ethnic minorities was perhaps the most significant in a series of such agreements negotiated throughout the region.

At NATO headquarters in Brussels, meanwhile, the Alliance continued its own steady, deliberate progress toward an eventual enlargement decision. NATO devoted 1995 to a study of enlargement, setting out the responsibilities of NATO membership and detailing the considerations that should guide any NATO decision to take in new members. In 1996, NATO launched an "intensified dialogue" process as a forum for

discussing membership issues with PFP participants who wished to join the Alliance. Twelve of the fifteen CEE states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) decided to participate. The exceptions were the three states most deeply embroiled in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia), who had not yet become members of PFP.

Considerations for NATO Membership

By the summer of 1996, with the "intensified dialogue" process well underway, the Clinton Administration began to focus on the possible timing of a NATO enlargement summit and to give preliminary consideration to the question of who should be invited to begin accession with NATO at an enlargement summit. Also under consideration was the closely related question of what to do about those countries that wished to join NATO but who, for whatever reasons, were judged not yet ready for membership.

As the Administration pondered these questions, several key considerations guided the deliberation process. There was a consensus that, in order to be seriously considered for membership, a candidate would need to demonstrate the sustainability of its democratic and market economic reforms. NATO membership was a reward for success in this enterprise, it was not the function of the Alliance to serve as a halfway house for unstable governments. There was also broad agreement that successful candidates should be able to contribute both politically and militarily to the Alliance and that their presence in NATO should enhance European stability, not detract from it.

It was clear from the outset that, of the twelve candidates for membership, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary unambiguously met the above conditions. The reform processes in all three countries were well advanced and NATO allies were fully satisfied

that all three would be able to contribute politically and militarily to the Alliance. Subsequent deliberations, therefore, focused on the question of whether any of the other nine candidates could succeed in meeting these conditions prior to an enlargement summit, as well as on the related question of what to do about those candidates who failed to meet the conditions.

Motivations for Continuing the Enlargement Process

With respect to the latter question, there was early unanimity in Washington. The Administration was mindful of the strong role that the prospect of possible NATO membership had played in strengthening the reform process in Central and Eastern Europe. There was no support for abandoning the incentive of NATO membership at a time when the success of the reform process in many parts of the region was still in doubt. The obvious solution was to continue the enlargement process past an initial enlargement summit in order to keep the incentive of NATO membership alive and to foster conditions in which additional CEE states could meet the agreed conditions for membership.

In moving toward this solution, the situation of the Baltic states was of special concern. The United States had never recognized the forcible incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union and the Clinton Administration did not want to permanently abandon them to a security "gray zone" in northeastern Europe. The Administration was also mindful of the considerable domestic support for the Baltic cause that existed in the United States. At the same time, however, the Administration was equally cognizant that any attempt to bring the Baltic states into NATO under current circumstances could precipitate a genuine crisis with Russia, given their status as former Soviet republics and their large Russian minority populations. Enlargement to the Baltic states would also

result in the virtual encirclement by NATO of the already isolated Russian outpost of Kaliningrad

In responding to these competing factors the Administration was unwilling either to risk extending membership invitations to the Baltics at an initial enlargement summit or to permanently reject their candidacies. The workable solution was to continue the enlargement process past an initial summit and hold open the prospect of Baltic membership down the road should conditions permit.

The Run-Up to Madrid

By December 1996, the Clinton Administration had succeeded in forging an Alliance consensus to hold a NATO summit in Madrid in July 1997 for the express purpose of extending invitations to one or more candidates to begin accession talks aimed at bringing them into NATO. Discussions within the Alliance in the run-up to Madrid revealed unanimous support for the candidacies of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. There was also firm majority support for Romania and Slovenia, with France strongly supporting the former and Italy championing the cause of the latter. Much of this support reflected a desire on the part of southern region NATO allies to bring early geographical balance into the enlargement process by including nations from southeastern Europe.

The Clinton Administration gave serious consideration to both candidacies, but eventually rejected them. Although Romania had made great progress in implementing reforms in the year leading up to Madrid, there was concern that the reform process there was still fragile and needed more time to mature. While internal Slovenian reforms were fully mature, Slovenia had little to offer the Alliance either politically or militarily.

Although the Administration had good reason to reject Romania and Slovenia on their merits, there were other factors that also contributed to the decision. By blocking Alliance consensus on the applications of two popular, if marginally qualified, candidates, the U S helped ensure strong support from a majority of allies for a second round of enlargement further down the road, thus ensuring continuance of the enlargement process. This was particularly important since one key NATO ally, the United Kingdom, not only opposed Romanian and Slovenian membership, but strongly opposed continuing the enlargement process past Madrid due to fears that continuing to add new members would erode Alliance effectiveness and cohesion.

The Administration also had an interest in keeping one or more non-Baltic candidates waiting in the wings after Madrid as plausible candidates for future membership. If Romania and Slovenia were included in the first enlargement decision along with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, the Baltic states could emerge as the most credible candidates for a second enlargement decision. This, in turn, would put early pressure on NATO to extend them invitations, at a time when Russian sensitivities over possible Baltic membership were likely to remain at a high pitch. By retaining Romania and Slovenia as plausible candidates for a second enlargement decision, the Administration would gain additional time and flexibility in addressing the Baltic question, while helping to avoid jeopardizing the extremely important new NATO-Russia relationship.

The Results of Madrid

Although Administration refusal to go along with the majority on Romania and Slovenia generated some temporary frictions within the Alliance, the United States achieved its most important objectives at Madrid. NATO not only extended membership

invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, it committed the Alliance to take in additional members in the future. To give substance to this latter commitment, NATO agreed to maintain the "intensified dialogue" program for those nations continuing to aspire to NATO membership and to review the results at the next NATO summit, which was scheduled to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the Alliance in April 1999. However, although the Madrid Summit Declaration explicitly praised Romania and Slovenia for their progress in implementing reforms, NATO made no commitment to extend invitations to them or to any other membership candidates at the 1999 summit.

The Immediate Road Ahead

In the wake of the Madrid Summit, Clinton Administration motives in pursuing NATO enlargement appear much the same as they were at the very beginning of the process. Enlargement remains an engine for promoting democratic and market economic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe and for bringing stability and predictability to the region through the medium of Alliance membership. Administration thinking in the months following Madrid has focused primarily on what to do about enlargement at the 50th Anniversary summit, which will be held in Washington.³ Not surprisingly, Romania and Slovenia have figured significantly in this thinking, since they were the strongest unsuccessful candidates to emerge from Madrid.

Although France and Italy retain their solid support for these two candidates, other allies are much more cautious. The United Kingdom remains opposed to further enlargement while Germany has lost a good deal of its own interest in the enlargement process now that its three near CEE neighbors have been invited to join. In this mixed setting, Administration views on the subject are likely to prove decisive. Much could

³ At Madrid, NATO set the 50th anniversary summit as the venue for formally bringing Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary into the Alliance.

depend on the success of the economic reform process in Romania, which has run into difficulty in the aftermath of Madrid

This fact, and the fact that Slovenia by itself offers little to the Alliance, could cause the Administration to delay a second enlargement decision until after the 1999 summit. This would not only give Romania more time to demonstrate the sustainability of its reforms but also give the fledging NATO-Russia relationship more time to mature, perhaps paving the way for Baltic membership further down the road. Since invitations to join the Alliance are usually only extended at NATO summits, this would mean that a second enlargement decision would be taken no earlier than at a follow-on to the 1999 summit, presumably sometime during the first half of the next decade.

The Limits of NATO Enlargement

Up to now, I have focused my examination of NATO enlargement squarely on the most serious candidates for NATO membership and have had little or nothing to say about the prospects of other possible candidates or about the ultimate limits of the enlargement process. In so doing, I have mirrored the basic approach of the Clinton Administration. Although the Administration has harbored broad strategic objectives for the enlargement process, it has tended to focus more narrowly on the twin aims of beginning the process in earnest by bringing in the strongest candidates, while keeping the Alliance firmly on the path to future enlargement. Relatively little thought has been given to the question of how many new members NATO should be prepared to bring in or whether there should be any artificial limit imposed on the ultimate size of the Alliance. As noted earlier, this is an issue that has already been considered by the British, who fear that continuing the enlargement process will reduce NATO to an unwieldy debating society, robbed of its capacity for effective and cohesive decision

making. Other allies are less worried about this, but harbor their own misgivings that adding additional members could lessen their own relative influence within the organization.

One reason the Clinton Administration has given relatively little thought to the ultimate limits of enlargement is that it simply does not share the British view that adding new members will seriously dilute the operational effectiveness of the Alliance. Having dominated NATO politically and militarily for so long, the U.S. harbors a well-founded, almost inbred, belief that it can bend the Alliance to its will on issues of critical importance regardless of the size of the organization. There is also a sense that the advantages of enlargement in promoting reforms and stability in Central and Eastern Europe are likely to outweigh whatever loss of operational effectiveness might occur as the result of taking in additional new members.

This does not mean that this Administration (or any like-minded successor) is likely to prevail on this issue. Congressional opposition to continuing the enlargement process has already begun to emerge, fueled by concerns about diluting the Alliance and extending security guarantees to more marginal CEE states. Although enlargement remains popular with Congress today, it could prove increasingly difficult for subsequent Administrations to sustain domestic support for the enlargement process, particularly if the candidacies of the Baltic states, which have considerable support in Congress, remain on the back burner. And, while current Administration thinking tends to downplay the possible negative impact of continuing to enlarge the Alliance, this might change if the number of credible candidates were to significantly increase. Adding three new members to the current sixteen is a much different proposition than adding ten or fifteen

Prospects of Possible Future Candidates

Perhaps the most productive way to assess the future course of the enlargement process is to examine the prospects of current and possible future candidates for NATO membership. At present, there are nine CEE membership candidates left over from the Madrid Summit, each of whom is participating in the expanded "intensified dialogue" process established at Madrid. These are Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria from the CEE heartland, Macedonia and Albania from the south Balkan region, and the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Three additional CEE states, Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, are still enmeshed in the Bosnia conflict and are not yet members of PFP, much less candidates for NATO membership. Bosnia and Serbia are likely to remain highly unstable for some time to come, but Croatia could conceivably become a viable candidate for membership at some point during the next decade.

NATO membership has also recently become a serious topic of debate in three traditional European neutral countries, Austria, Sweden and Finland. It is not inconceivable that one or more of these nations could seek NATO membership within the coming decade. With respect to the non-Baltic states of the former Soviet Union, neither Russia, Ukraine, Belarus nor Moldova have expressed any desire to join, although there is speculation that Ukraine might be prepared to seek membership were it not for concerns about the Russian reaction. The newly independent states of central Asia and the Caucasus, on the other hand, are too far from Europe, and too marginally interested in European affairs, to be serious candidates for NATO membership. Similarly, there are a number of other European neutrals, including Switzerland, Ireland, Malta and Cyprus, who could possibly seek NATO membership at some point in the future, but who have yet to demonstrate any serious interest in doing so.

In the following paragraphs I will attempt to assess the prospects of some of the more important possible candidates for future membership and conclude by speculating on how the enlargement process is likely to unfold

Romania and Slovenia. Given the solid majority support within NATO for their candidacies, both these nations remain strong candidates for eventual NATO membership. As I mentioned earlier, they are unlikely to receive invitations at the 50th Anniversary summit next year, but could expect to be invited to begin accession talks at a follow-on summit early in the next decade, provided that Romania is able to follow through on its reform process. If Romania fails to make sufficient progress, Slovenia is unlikely to be judged a strong enough candidate to take in by itself. On the other hand, given the demonstrated sustainability of its own internal reforms, Slovenia is almost certain to be included in the next round of enlargement, whenever it does occur.

Bulgaria. Bulgaria occupies an important strategic position in southeastern Europe and currently has a reformist government strongly committed to NATO membership. The present government came to power in the wake of a grave economic crisis that thoroughly discredited the previous regime, led by unreconstructed former communists who opposed NATO membership. Although currently in disarray, the former communists remain the natural opposition within the country. As a consequence, in order to be seriously considered for membership, Bulgaria will probably need to satisfy NATO that a political consensus exists in the country for NATO membership, while also demonstrating the sustainability of its reforms. Although these conditions could possibly be met during the next several years, it is equally likely that Bulgaria will not emerge as a serious candidate until later in the coming decade.

Slovakia. At the very beginning of the enlargement process, Slovakia enjoyed equal status with its Visegrad neighbors Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary as a strong candidate for early NATO membership. This status quickly eroded under the authoritarian leadership of Prime Minister Meciar. Although Slovakia continues to seek NATO membership and participates in the "intensified dialogue" process, it is unlikely to be seriously considered for NATO membership so long as Meciar remains in power. When Meciar passes from the scene, Slovakia will then need to begin demonstrating that his era was an aberration by moving to implement sustainable democratic and market economic reforms. This could delay Slovakian membership until late in the next decade or longer. Given its central location, however, and close ethnic ties to its regional neighbors, Slovakia will remain a strong candidate for eventual NATO membership.

Sweden, Finland and Austria. These three neutral states have no need to demonstrate the sustainability of their democratic and market economic reforms. They are among the most stable and prosperous democracies in the world. Nor do they share the feelings of psychological and physical insecurity harbored by their CEE neighbors. Their interest in NATO enlargement, which is only now beginning to emerge, reflects instead a growing concern that their neutrality is robbing them of influence in a post-Cold War Europe dominated by NATO. At the same time, their fear of political marginalization is itself counterbalanced by their long traditions of neutrality, which continue to pull strongly in the opposite direction.

The debate over NATO membership is furthest along in Austria, which could well seek membership in the next two or three years. The debate in Sweden and Finland is likely to play out over a much longer timeframe and it is by no means a foregone conclusion that either will seek membership. Although NATO has not encouraged

Austrian, Swedish or Finnish interest in NATO membership. the conventional wisdom within the Clinton Administration has been that Austrian, Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO would be welcomed. Although some allies, such as the British, might have concerns based on their broader objections to enlarging the Alliance, the fact that the three neutrals are already fellow members of the EU makes it highly likely that they would also be welcomed into NATO

The Baltic States. The question of Baltic membership in NATO is the greatest imponderable in the enlargement process. Judged solely on the basis of democratic and market economic reforms, Estonia is already a strong candidate for NATO membership. Latvia and Lithuania are having greater difficulties in implementing reforms, but their long-term prospects are certainly as good as those of Romania or Bulgaria. The great concern within the Clinton Administration, as within NATO generally, has been that any attempt to bring these former Soviet republics into NATO could precipitate a serious crisis in NATO-Russia relations and play into the hands of Russian hard-liners, thereby jeopardizing internal Russian reforms. Given this concern, the basic Administration approach has been to play for time, keeping Baltic membership aspirations alive, while promoting Baltic-Russian reconciliation and a constructive NATO-Russian relationship, in the hope that what now seems difficult will become easier in the future.

With Romania and Slovenia, and perhaps Austria, looming on the horizon as strong candidates for inclusion in a second round of enlargement, NATO can probably avoid giving serious consideration to Baltic membership until at least late in the next decade. Although a number of Clinton Administration officials believe that the Russian problem can be managed and that Baltic membership in NATO is inevitable, others are more skeptical. My own sense is that no Administration will be prepared to risk trying to

bring the Baltic states into NATO unless it has a high degree of confidence that it can do so without precipitating a serious crisis with Russia. Whether such a high degree of confidence will ever be reached, or if it is reached, when that might happen, is currently impossible to predict.

Albania and Macedonia. These are arguably the two most backward nations in Europe. Although self-selected candidates for NATO membership, they have a very long way to go to demonstrate the sustainability of their democratic and market economic reforms. Both nations are plagued by inherently unstable internal political conditions. Macedonia has a large, unassimilated Albanian population, while Albania is only now beginning to emerge from an episode of virtual anarchy precipitated by the collapse of a popular, but disastrous nationwide pyramid scheme. Neither country is likely to be seriously considered for NATO membership for the foreseeable future.

Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. As the main protagonists in the conflict in Bosnia, neither Croatia, Bosnia nor Serbia are likely to be given serious consideration for NATO membership until conditions in the region become much more stable than they are today. Serbia is an authoritarian state with a socialist economy that is massively repressing its large Albanian minority in Kosovo. Bosnia remains occupied by NATO peacekeeping forces and has yet to demonstrate an ability to survive on its own as a stable, unitary, multiethnic state. Although Croatia is further along than the others in instituting democratic and market economic reforms, its government retains an authoritarian flavor and has proved reluctant to cooperate in strengthening the Bosnian Federation or in reconciling with its own minority Serbian community. NATO is currently tying Croatian membership in PFP to improved Croatian performance on these issues. Although the possibility of NATO membership is just that much further down the road, Croatia is the

only one of these three states that has any reasonable prospect of being considered for NATO membership in the foreseeable future

Russia and the Former Soviet Union. At the very outset of the enlargement process, the Clinton Administration took the position that no European state should be excluded *a priori* from possible consideration for NATO membership, Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union included. The Administration took this position, and has held it ever since, primarily as a way of demonstrating to Russia that NATO enlargement is not directed against it. Although President Yeltsin briefly flirted with the idea of NATO membership early in the enlargement process, Russia has subsequently made clear that it has no interest in joining the Alliance. The reasons for this are not hard to fathom. Russian attitudes toward NATO were shaped by the Cold War and the Russian foreign policy establishment still tends to regard NATO as a rival with interests significantly different from its own. The Russians are also uninterested in joining an organization so clearly dominated by another power and in which they would clearly have to play second fiddle.

Although the Clinton Administration continues to regard Russian membership in NATO as a formal possibility, no one is under any illusion that this is likely anytime soon. Russian democratic and market economic reforms are still in their infancy and the ultimate success of democracy in the country is by no means assured. There is also a reciprocal sense that U.S. interests do in fact clash with those of Russia on many issues. Nor would the U.S. necessarily want such a potentially powerful competitor in the Alliance. For all these reasons, Russian membership in NATO is unlikely for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, if Russia is able to sustain its democratic and market economic reforms and begins to look and behave like some of the more advanced

CEE states, then the arguments against Russian membership could begin to erode. While no one would want to predict such an outcome, the possibility cannot be completely excluded.

Any interest that Ukraine might have in NATO membership is sharply constrained by a justifiable concern that pursuing membership could provoke a serious confrontation with its larger Russian neighbor. This is a perception shared by the Clinton Administration and by NATO allies generally. Ukraine not only has a large Russian ethnic population but, unlike the Baltics, its status as an integral component of the Soviet Union, and of the Russian Empire before that, has never been questioned by the West. Therefore, any attempt to bring Ukraine into NATO would be certain to have an even more incendiary impact on Russia sensitivities than attempting to enlarge to the Baltics. More or less the same can be said for Belarus. Given this fact, both nations seem better placed to serve as buffers between an enlarged NATO and Russia rather than as NATO members themselves.

Predicting the Future

Based on the above discussion, my own best prediction as to the future of the NATO enlargement is that it will continue for two or three more rounds and eventually include Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria, and possibly Austria, Sweden, Finland, Croatia and the Baltics. Bringing the first four of these states into NATO is likely to emerge as a conscious if unpublicized Alliance goal, since their inclusion in NATO would open up the prospect of a contiguous Alliance "zone of stability" running through the CEE heartland from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic.

Although the exact timing will almost certainly depend on the progress of the reform process in Romania, I would expect NATO to carry out a second round of

enlargement at an Alliance summit sometime during the first half of the next decade, most likely between 2001 and 2004. Romania, Slovenia and Austria (if it decides to seek membership) would be the most likely invitees. This could then be followed by a third enlargement decision at a subsequent NATO summit somewhat later in the decade, perhaps in the 2006 to 2008 timeframe. The timing would very much depend on the progress of reforms in Bulgaria and Slovakia, who would be the most likely invitees. Sweden and Finland would also be powerful candidates if they were to decide to seek membership at this time. A third enlargement summit could also be the earliest likely venue for extending invitations to the Baltic states, provided that NATO feels confident that the impact on NATO-Russia would be manageable. Croatia could also conceivably emerge as a credible candidate by this time.

Since the scenario described above could take at least a decade to unfold, it assumes a continuing U.S. commitment to the enlargement process. Needless to say, there is no guarantee that succeeding Administrations will share the Clinton Administration commitment to enlargement or be able to marshal continuing Congressional support for ratification. My suspicion is that, even if succeeding Administrations continue to support the enlargement process, it will become increasingly difficult to mobilize domestic political support for the process, since the highest profile candidates have already been taken in. The one important exception to this is Baltic membership, given the solid support that exists in Congress and domestically for the Baltic cause.

Continuation of the enlargement process will also require the support or acquiescence of our NATO allies. However, although the British and others will continue to harbor doubts about the impact of increasing the size of the Alliance, they are

unlikely to stand in the way of a determined U S effort to continue the enlargement effort My own sense is that the scenario outlined above, which would raise overall NATO membership to somewhere between 23 and 30, would be considered manageable from a U S perspective

Most importantly, by the end of the process NATO would hopefully have brought into being a much more stable and secure Central and Eastern Europe, populated by well-entrenched market-oriented democracies that are no longer objects of strategic competition between East and West If NATO can at the same time succeed in its ongoing efforts to establish a sustainable, cooperative relationship with a reforming, increasingly democratic Russia, then Europe can look forward to the most stable and longest lasting era of peace and prosperity in its history