

“NATO’s new enlargement will further complicate the workings of an alliance that is already politically unmanageable, militarily dysfunctional, and strategically irrelevant.”

Putting NATO Back Together Again

SEAN KAY

NATO’s strategic functions—keeping the United States in Europe, locking Germany into a web of transatlantic institutions, integrating a pro-Western Russia, and maintaining peace in the still-unstable Balkans—are at risk. Meeting in Prague in November 2002, the alliance invited seven East European countries to begin the process of becoming members. It was an auspicious moment: NATO had completed the process of removing the artificial barriers imposed on Europe by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in the 1940s. This dramatic break with the past, however, also undermines the alliance’s ability to adapt to the security challenges of the present—especially terrorism. Unless the United States Senate—which must ratify the enlargement decision—uses the debate over a larger alliance to demand reforms that would make NATO relevant to the twenty-first century, this round of enlargement might be NATO’s last gasp.

MOVING EASTWARD

The new round of membership invitations to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria continues NATO’s enlargement on the basis of political rather than military needs. Until 1999, when Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became members, every previous enlargement had a basic strategic rationale. What became NATO in 1948 and 1949 began as three-way discussions among the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which were soon joined by France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. As the treaty negotiations progressed, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Italy, and Portugal were added as founding

members. During the cold war, NATO grew to include Greece, Turkey, West Germany, and Spain. In each case, NATO enlarged to bolster collective defense against Soviet aggression. Political criteria did not guide enlargement. NATO was an alliance to deter against external attack and its membership was guided by strategic calculations.

NATO’s collective defense demands also meant overlooking gross violations of the same liberal principles that the alliance had promised to secure. NATO included Portugal as a founding member even though it was governed by an authoritarian dictatorship. In 1967 a military junta took over Greece—using a NATO counterinsurgency plan. NATO lived with this unconstitutional overthrow of democracy for seven years. In the case of Turkey, the military has carried out many extraconstitutional seizures of power, and freedoms of speech and expression have often been curtailed.

At the same time, NATO has helped mollify tensions between Greece and Turkey, two historical enemies, but in crises it was the exertion of American power outside NATO that prevented war between them from the 1960s into the 1990s. And NATO’s inclusion of West Germany reassured its neighbors that, when rearmed, it was the key cold war frontline state.

The end of the cold war provided a compelling reason to link NATO membership with political, economic, and military reform. By integrating new democracies into NATO’s internal political consultation, information sharing, and multilateral military planning, the alliance could act as a powerful force for the projection of stability into Central and Eastern Europe. Before receiving an invitation to join, aspirants were expected to uphold democracy, the rule of law, and free markets. They were also to ensure proper treatment of ethnic minorities and the administration of social justice as elaborated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

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Europe; resolution of territorial disputes on the basis of good neighborly relations; and democratic, civilian control of the military. NATO invitees were also required to demonstrate that they were willing to bear the economic costs of membership and were prepared to contribute to the full range of NATO missions, including collective defense. To ease this process, NATO created a program of political and military outreach to the east and to Europe's neutral countries through its 1994 Partnership for Peace. NATO enhanced this process in 1999 by creating a Membership Action Plan under which candidates for accession are evaluated annually on their efforts to meet membership criteria.

In 1999, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic entered NATO. As with previous enlargements, there was a strong geostrategic premise for including Poland in the alliance. By extending American power through NATO between a rising unified Germany and a declining post-Soviet Russia, the historic risk of great power competition over this strategic area could be reduced. But NATO limited the geostrategic promise of enlargement by excluding Romania, which could have provided important military and geographic assets, and by including the Czech Republic and Hungary, which offered marginal military or strategic gains. Although it had the support of a majority of NATO members, Romania was rejected by Washington because of insufficient political and economic reform and because the Clinton administration believed that the Senate would accept only a small enlargement package in 1997. Hungary and the Czech Republic boasted the moral stature of leaders such as Vaclav Havel, impressive postcommunist political and economic transformations, and a strong domestic lobby inside the United States.

With the inclusion of the Czech Republic and Hungary, NATO embarked on a politically open-ended enlargement. If the Czechs were included, why not the three Baltic countries—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania?

The drive toward NATO by former Soviet bloc members was motivated by a political desire to join the West and to be rewarded for liberal political and economic reform. Most aspirant states were also motivated by a historical wish to escape the long shadow of Russian power. Yet in attaining their political objectives, these countries accelerated the transformation of NATO into an organization that no longer provides direct security guarantees. NATO has enlarged politically, but not militarily. No troops, no nuclear weapons, and no infrastructure for nuclear

weapons are to be deployed on the territory of new members. NATO asserts that allied forces will consider reinforcing the territory of a new ally only if it is threatened. And NATO will try to gain consensus among all its members to fight a war on the territory of a new member state—but not to provide for direct security guarantees.

When NATO waged war over Kosovo in 1999, serious operational limitations were exposed; its rules and procedures prevented development of an efficient war-fighting plan, and only the United States and Britain were sufficiently prepared to project modern military power. Since the Kosovo war, the United States has rapidly deemphasized NATO for military planning to prevent small, noncontributing allies from vetoing American military priorities. The war in Afghanistan in 2001 further demonstrated that NATO was no longer central to United States strategic interests. NATO is growing, but its deterrent functions, military capability, and political effectiveness are diminishing.

ENLARGEMENT AND SEPTEMBER 11

Unlike the 1997 enlargement invitations to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the decision in 2002 to open the institution to seven new countries sparked little debate. This was startling because of the implications the enlargement would have for NATO's relevance. The central question in 1997 was whether NATO enlargement would provoke hostility from Russia. By 2002 Russia had reconsidered its opposition. Russian leaders evidently understood, perhaps better than many European and American officials, that NATO's growth would seriously dilute the organization's military effectiveness, which would serve Russia's interests. Moscow also made significant gains when, in May 2002, it was invited to join a NATO–Russia council in which it would have veto authority over joint activities, including weapons proliferation, peace support operations, and counterterrorism.

Without Russian opposition, NATO enlargement would seem to have been a fairly simple proposition. It was not always clear, however, that President George W. Bush would support NATO expansion. The trend away from NATO's military core seemed to contradict the president's 2000 campaign promises. Bush's platform included strengthening United States alliances. Policies that severely diluted America's most important alliance—NATO—would undermine his objective. After coming to office, Bush appointed senior officials, such as national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, who

had warned against expanding NATO too quickly at the expense of its military effectiveness, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who had argued for a reduction in America's commitment to major NATO operations in the Balkans. Secretary of State Colin Powell was known to have been skeptical of NATO enlargement during his chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the early 1990s.

Nevertheless, a small group of NATO enlargement advocates—including some Republican Senate staff members, defense industry lobbyists, and neo-conservative officials in the Department of Defense and Office of the Vice President—pushed in early 2001 to create a “snowball” of momentum at a time when opponents were not paying attention. By June, President Bush was calling for a broad expansion of NATO. A bigger NATO would demonstrate to Russia that the United States had freedom of movement in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. NATO enlargement would also undercut the growing appeal of the European Union as a security alternative for countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Domestically, NATO enlargement became an important part of the neoconservative foreign policy agenda of spreading American primacy.

America's response to the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. altered the strategic calculation for NATO. Immediately following the attacks, America's NATO allies invoked Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, declaring those events as attacks on them all. NATO carried out symbolic, but limited, operational responses, including patrolling American airspace with AWAC surveillance planes and initiating naval operations in

the Mediterranean Sea to interdict terrorist movements. But Washington's bilateral relationships with Russia and a few other countries and individual allies like Turkey became more important than working through the multilateral channels of NATO. When the European NATO members offered to assist the United States in its war in Afghanistan, Washington declined the offer. Although European allies have contributed forces to peace support operations since the collapse of the Taliban, this has not been a formal NATO operation because Washington explicitly rejected European offers to engage in actual warfighting in Afghanistan.

Since the September 11 attacks, NATO has experienced a fundamental disconnect between its growing political function and its declining military-strategic relevance. NATO's role in the campaign against terrorism has been extremely limited, even though international terrorism is now the only significant

threat its members face. When NATO leaders met in Prague in November 2002, they confronted the challenge of aligning enlargement with the realities of the changed threat environment.

REFORM AT PRAGUE

The Prague summit's most important development was not, as many observers initially expected, NATO's enlargement. Rather, the summit established a foundation for further major NATO reform.

At Prague, NATO members began to modernize the institution's power-projection capabilities by organizing a NATO Response Force. By 2006, NATO is to develop a force of about 21,000 troops that will be technologically advanced, deployable, interoper-



erable, and sustainable; include land, sea, and air elements; and maintain the capability to move quickly to wherever it might be needed. To this end a “Prague Capabilities Commitment” was announced. Building on core United States and British capabilities, members promised to improve their ability to operate in a threat environment that includes new challenges such as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. They will also improve intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition; command, control, and communications; combat effectiveness, including the use of precision-guided munitions and better suppression of enemy air defenses; strategic lift and sea lift; air-to-air refueling; and deployable combat support and combat service units. NATO also agreed to implement work on civil emergency planning and to develop further its institutional capacity for managing the proliferation, and possible use by terrorists, of weapons of mass destruction.

The NATO Response Force was an important step toward making NATO more relevant to meeting the new collective defense

needs of its members. But how NATO’s enlargement decision fits into this revised force concept is unclear. NATO’s recent additions might

focus primarily on new “niche” capabilities they can bring to the NATO Response Force. Thus they could claim they are contributing directly to NATO’s defense requirements without increasing defense spending or modernizing their overall forces. Yet if the new NATO members focus only on niche contributions to the force, it would undermine the kind of deployments NATO is most likely to undertake: peacekeeping and peace support operations following an intervention by coalitions of the willing acting outside NATO decision-making procedures but still benefiting from shared cooperative planning, training, and exercises within NATO. As has been made clear in Afghanistan—and most likely in any postinvasion Iraq peace support operations—it is after major military action that European forces may be in greatest demand, not at the “spearhead” of any intervention force. Conversely, some invitees might not want the few elite forces and capabilities they develop directed away from the perceived territorial defense concerns that initially drove them toward NATO.

Still, the NATO Response Force is a creative concept since it allows NATO members to pool high-end resources without increasing their individual

defense budgets. Whether a force of 21,000 that does not include plans for reinforcements will succeed is an open question. Moreover, the failure of NATO’s members to link the organization’s counterterrorism functions to the political, civilian, and multinational police capabilities available in the European Union underscores that NATO’s moves to date are half measures. Most important, it is not clear how the other major decision taken at Prague—to invite seven new members—fits into NATO’s new mission.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

If NATO’s political, economic, and military criteria for membership had been fully applied to each of the seven invitees, none would have qualified for invitations at the Prague summit. Moreover, if revitalizing NATO’s capabilities is crucial to its relevance, none of these countries helps meet that objective. This is a serious challenge for NATO because the previous round of enlargement—including Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—demonstrated

that the alliance only has leverage over a member before it is invited. Since joining NATO in 1999, all three countries have failed to fulfill promises

regarding unmet membership criteria made during their membership negotiations and ratification processes. Each member has experienced considerable difficulty integrating into NATO structures, fallen short of promised defense investment and armed forces restructuring, and found it a challenge even fielding representatives who speak English to NATO headquarters. Poland is purchasing, with United States–guaranteed “pay as you can” loans, 48 F-16 fighter jets—yet the country’s military has no pilots who are able to fly F-16s.

Because membership criteria are based on pre-September 11 security concepts, NATO’s enlargement especially complicates its transition to an institution capable of meeting new security challenges. Under these criteria, new members are expected to facilitate peace support operations and prepare for reinforcement of their territory in the unlikely event of a Russia-style conventional threat. NATO has never undertaken a post-September 11 reassessment of membership criteria—even after issuing its declaration that terrorism is a collective defense concern. The alliance confronts the problem of adapting itself to counterterrorism at the

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same time it needs to ensure that new members do not emphasize niche capabilities at the expense of their ability to contribute to peace support operations. The enlargement experience to date suggests that NATO is headed in a direction that will go from bad to worse if significant adjustments in the process are not made.

The new NATO invitees do have something to offer in terms of military capabilities. Romania has active armed forces of 99,200 and defense spending of about 2.5 percent of GDP. Its location on the Black Sea and border with Ukraine enhance its geostrategic contributions. Romania has also sent 400 troops to aid in peace support operations in the Afghanistan intervention. Bulgaria has active armed forces of 68,450 and 2.8 percent of GDP spent annually on defense. Bulgaria also brings a strategic location on the Balkan peninsula and serves as an important bridge to Turkey and the Black Sea. After Romania and Bulgaria, however, the military and strategic value of enlargement falls significantly.

Slovakia serves as a land bridge to Hungary and further extends the West to the Ukrainian border. Slovakia's active armed forces number 26,200 and defense spending is about 2 percent of GDP. Slovenia also offers a land bridge to Hungary and plays a symbolic role in NATO because it is a former Yugoslav state. Slovenia's active armed forces of about 9,000 and defense budget of 1.5 percent of GDP, however, limit its military contribution.

With regard to the three Baltic states, Estonia has armed forces of 5,510 and spends 1.7 percent of GDP on defense; Latvia has armed forces of 5,500 and a defense budget of about 1.2 percent of GDP; and Lithuania has 13,510 active members in its armed forces and spends 1.8 percent of GDP on defense. The Baltics have worked together on projects such as the first-class BALTNET air surveillance system, but the limited contributions these countries make to NATO's new collective defense mission are encapsulated in Estonia's military commitment in Afghanistan: five men and three dogs.

The three Baltic countries and Slovenia are the most politically and economically advanced of the seven invitees. Slovakia's political situation is tenuous: the fall 2002 general election saw an authoritarian and nationalist political leader lose, but compete seriously for victory. Neither Bulgaria nor Romania, the two countries that offer the greatest geostrategic value, meets political or economic criteria for NATO membership. Each confronts major challenges: poorly performing economies, the need for military reform, and political corruption. The

United States has also cited Bulgaria for facilitating the transfer of military technology to states that are pursuing the development of weapons of mass destruction, and in Romania communist-era security personnel still hold key military and intelligence positions. Bulgaria and Latvia also have serious problems with the protection of sensitive intelligence secrets. In fact, senior United States Defense officials lobbied in the weeks prior to the Prague summit to take Bulgaria, Latvia, and Slovenia (because of its minimal military contributions and low public support for NATO membership) off the invitation list.

Two remaining applicants—Albania and Macedonia—were kept off the list because they were not even close to meeting NATO criteria for admission and because they were seen as importing instability into the alliance. Albania's and Macedonia's security problems stem from the ongoing tensions in the Balkan region and the risk that the collapse of either state could lead to a regional war. NATO is thus providing membership to countries that least need it, while leaving out those who would benefit the most. (Ironically, since the Kosovo war, NATO troops—including United States forces—have been stationed in Albania and Macedonia to provide tangible security guarantees.)

CONSENSUS IN "OLD" AND "NEW" EUROPE

NATO makes decisions by consensus; all its members must agree on new NATO policy. With 7 new members, NATO now will require all 26 countries that belong to the alliance to agree before acting (the special relationship with Russia adds to the complexity of the decision-making process). A crisis in which a member blocked NATO action would accelerate the American drive away from Europe and direct the Europeans toward the European Union as a place where continental interests might be more fully realized. In 2003 this concern became real when key NATO members Germany and France blocked NATO planning for a support role in any United States-led invasion of Iraq (France also promised to lead a common European Union effort to delay war).

Washington is thus likely to project military power alone while Europeans look to constrain the unilateral power of the United States by strengthening the European Union. These structural divergences will test NATO's new members: What is more important, European or American priorities? The new members might be more reliable in consensus building than the "old" NATO allies as they seek to

prove themselves worthy of membership. Indeed, in an attempt to exploit this political advantage, United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested, in the debate over Iraq policy, that France and Germany represented the “old Europe” and that those countries in the East, which better understood the demand for liberty, represented the “new Europe.” Worried that the United States Senate might not ratify their entrance into NATO, the seven invitees in the “new Europe” have been eager to demonstrate political support for United States policy toward Iraq. But in reality they do not offer any serious capabilities for a United States–led coalition in Iraq.

The seven new NATO allies are gaining access to agenda setting in European security that is not commensurate with their capabilities or geostrategic value. The ability of any member to block consensus makes it difficult—if not impossible—to ensure that new members emerge as contributors to NATO’s principles or defense requirements. NATO has no mechanism for punishing violators of institutional norms, principles, or procedures, and any member can prevent an action by blocking its discussion. The consequences of inaction can be severe: more than 200,000 people are dead or missing in Bosnia and Herzegovina because NATO between 1993 and 1995 was unable to reach consensus on taking action in the former Yugoslav republic.

Existing NATO rules make decision-making reform difficult to achieve. NATO could create a committee to monitor member adherence to political, economic, and military criteria and issue a report each year to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the alliance’s principal political authority. The NAC could then be endowed with the power to sanction noncomplying members—including suspension of membership rights or even expulsion. Since many current NATO allies do not meet NATO standards, they would likely block the creation of such a committee. Alternatively, NATO could establish a “consensus-minus-one” process in which NATO could act over the objections of one state should that state be in violation of NATO principles and rules. While this too would allow NATO to act short of consensus, it would still require consensus initially to institute the rule change. NATO members would not likely give up their right to block a NATO action that violates their own interests. Finally, NATO could form an elite council comprised of its primary military contributors, which would include the United States, Britain, Germany, Turkey, and France (France would be included only if it returned to the

NATO military committee it left in 1966). This council could have rotating members of several smaller NATO allies, much like the UN Security Council’s framework of permanent and rotating members. This proposal would also require consensus to implement, and the smaller NATO members probably would not cede their institutional leverage.

Most likely the solution lies in creating such a framework outside NATO. A “European Security Council” would include the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, and Russia; the rotating membership would consist of the smaller NATO states. The council could make decisions on behalf of Europe, with NATO serving as the mechanism for implementing policy, and requiring consensus to act only on matters of collective defense. NATO members would have to agree in advance not to block agreement if the European Security Council were in major-power consensus.

The need to generate creative institutional decision-making reform for European security is urgent. If 26 NATO members cannot make functional decisions, and also fail to adapt to new threats, then a broader question may be raised in Washington: Why does the United States still need to station nearly 100,000 troops in Europe?

RATIFYING REAL CHANGE

NATO’s political leaders appear unwilling to make the hard decisions required to manage the institutional complexity created by NATO’s new enlargement. Consequently, the parliaments and legislatures of NATO’s members, all of which must ratify the new members’ accession to the North Atlantic Treaty, may be the last best hope to affect serious change to protect NATO’s relevance. The role of the United States Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority for ratification, is crucial because it will signal the depth of American support for NATO.

At first glance the possibilities of Senate engagement on NATO appear gloomy. The number of senators who pay significant attention to NATO has declined; many have concluded that NATO no longer matters. As recently as 1998, 41 American senators supported an amendment requiring a freeze on future NATO enlargement. Most likely, the Republican majority in the Senate will follow the Bush administration’s wishes and amend the NATO treaty to admit the seven new invitees. But while it may be politically convenient to expedite ratification, failure to use this last opportunity to mandate major NATO reform would mean that the Senate, and the United States more broadly, no longer takes NATO seriously.

In a time of war, should a senator ratify an enlargement of NATO that has no relationship to the clear and present danger confronting American citizens?

The Senate could consider three specific amendments to the protocols of accession that would pave the way to admitting the seven new NATO members. Senators might require NATO to certify that the seven invitees have met all existing membership criteria and to add new criteria for counterterrorism capabilities, contributions to the NATO Response Force, and plans to meet the Prague Capabilities Commitment. The amendment would require the Bush administration to establish consensus in NATO for the creation of an "Invitee Action Plan." Under this plan, NATO could create a committee to report back to the North Atlantic Council on the degree of adherence to all specified membership criteria. Only when NATO could certify that all criteria had been met by an invitee would the Senate hold a formal vote on ratification. If criteria were not met, NATO would begin annual reviews of an invitee's progress toward that goal. Although this process would extend the NATO accession process significantly, it would result in a stronger organization. New members would benefit since this regimen would ensure that they would join NATO as serious contributors to its missions and thus carry real political weight.

The Senate could use the enlargement process to force even bolder action. Through the amendment process, the Senate could require the Bush admin-

istration to develop a comprehensive strategy to redesign Europe's security institutions to combat terrorism, beginning with the development of direct operational linkages between NATO and the European Union. The Senate could also offer an amendment that would require the Bush administration to review NATO decision-making procedures. This amendment would establish a timeframe within which the administration would formally report to Congress on the various options for institutional decision-making reform.

Absent a quick course redirection from the United States Senate, NATO's new enlargement will further complicate the workings of an alliance that is already politically unmanageable, militarily dysfunctional, and strategically irrelevant. The Senate has a distinguished history of using its constitutional authority to shape NATO policy, including the Mansfield and Nunn amendments of the 1960s and 1970s, which promoted burden sharing between the United States and its European allies. Legislative pressure has forced various administrations and European governments to think harder about the direction in which NATO was headed and produced creative solutions. The new invitees and their political advocates will insist that their admission remain separate from the larger questions confronting NATO. But this argument ignores the reality that NATO's current enlargement strategy is fundamental to the alliance's institutional decline. ■