

# How to Enlarge NATO

M.E. Sarotte

The Debate inside the Clinton Administration, 1993–95

The expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to include Central and Eastern European (CEE) states represents one of the most controversial strategic choices of the post–Cold War era. According to former State Department official Ronald Asmus, “1994 was the year the Clinton Administration crossed the Rubicon in deciding to enlarge NATO.”<sup>1</sup> While it was clear by then that the administration would expand the alliance, it was less clear how it would do so. Neither the pacing of enlargement nor the method—the unconditional extension in 1999 to a small number of the states seeking to join, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—was initially self-evident. In fact, during the creation and Cold War expansion of the alliance, various countries had struck special deals on their memberships, generating a spectrum of historical precedents. Denmark, Iceland, and Norway had, as conditions for joining, restricted and/or refused nuclear warheads, bases, and certain kinds of military activity on their territory; Spain had also limited its military integration into the alliance; and France had withdrawn from the integrated military command in 1966.<sup>2</sup> There was even a post–Cold War example of contingent enlargement,

---

M.E. Sarotte is the Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis Distinguished Professor of Historical Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

---

The author thanks Francis Gavin, Serhii Plokhii, Svetlana Savranskaya, Vladislav Zubok, and participants in seminars on this project held at the California Institute of Technology, Harvard University, and Stanford University, as well as the anonymous reviewers, the staffs of the archives consulted, and the declassification authorities who helped secure release of many of the sources cited in this article. This article was submitted on August 18, 2018.

---

1. Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 58.

2. On the history of expansion and the various special deals, see the historical summaries on NATO's website, including “Denmark and NATO,” [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_162357.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_162357.htm?selectedLocale=en); “Norway and NATO,” [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_162353.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_162353.htm); and “A Short History of NATO,” [https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/declassified\\_139339.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/declassified_139339.htm) (Brussels, Belgium: NATO, n.d.). See also “France and NATO” (Paris: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, n.d.), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/france-and-nato>; William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia: European Security Institutions since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Wade Jacoby, *The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), pp. 25–34; Sean Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 43; Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2019); Ian Shapiro and Adam Tooze, eds., *Charter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2018), p. xi; Stanley R. Sloan, *Defense of the West:*

---

*International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Summer 2019), pp. 7–41, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00353](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00353)  
© 2019 M.E. Sarotte

namely, the extension of the alliance with restrictions on certain kinds of troops and weapons to the territory of former East Germany in 1990 as part of German unification.<sup>3</sup> As a result, throughout the 1990s, there was both a lively public discussion and an academic, theoretical debate—most notably, between liberal institutionalists and realists—addressing not only the pros and cons of varying modes of expansion but also the question of whether to expand at all.<sup>4</sup> And the stakes surrounding this debate could not have been higher; as President Bill Clinton put it to Russian President Boris Yeltsin,

---

NATO, the European Union, and the Transatlantic Bargain (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2016); and Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997: Blessings of Liberty* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), p. 22.

3. On expansion during the George H.W. Bush era, see Kimberly Marten, “Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s,” *European Journal of International Security*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 2018), pp. 135–161, doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.16; and Mary Elise Sarotte, 1989: *The Struggle to Create Post–Cold War Europe*, updated ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014). See also Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 110–137, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00005; Mary Elise Sarotte, “A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow about NATO Expansion,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014), pp. 90–97, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483307>; Mark Kramer and Mary Elise Sarotte, “Correspondence: No Such Promise,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 6 (November/December 2014), pp. 208–209, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483985>; Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 7–44, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00236; Kristina Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The ‘NATO Enlargement Question’ in the Triangular Bonn–Washington–Moscow Diplomacy of 1990–1991,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 4–54, doi.org/10.1162/JCWS\_a\_00275; and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), pp. 606–607.

4. A useful overview of the voluminous public discussion appears in George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999). The academic debate was extensive as well; in this journal alone, a number of major articles appeared during the period under study. See, for example, Charles L. Glaser, “Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Summer 1993), pp. 5–50, doi.org/10.2307/2539031; Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 39–51, doi.org/10.2307/2539214; John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 5–49, doi.org/10.2307/2539078; and William C. Wohlforth, “Realism and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 91–129, doi.org/10.2307/2539080. For relevant later discussion of the same issues, see also Michael Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), pp. 7–48, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00197; John Lewis Gaddis, “History, Grand Strategy, and NATO Enlargement,” *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 145–151, doi.org/10.1093/survival/40.1.145; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018); Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014); Dan Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 41–67, doi.org/10.1162/01622880151091899; and Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41, doi.org/10.1162/016228800560372. The author is grateful to Daniel Drezner for emails on the debate among political scientists.

"We have the first chance ever since the rise of the nation state to have the entire continent of Europe live in peace."<sup>5</sup>

Given the wide range of options and high stakes, which issues did the Clinton administration prioritize in choosing the course of expansion that it ultimately did twenty-five years ago? Accounts by participants in decisions leading to enlargement have already shed light on this question.<sup>6</sup> Synoptic evaluation of the historical evidence by scholars with no personal involvement in the events remains essential, however. This article offers such an evaluation, based largely on sources declassified by the Clinton Presidential Library, the Department of Defense, and the Department of State because of numerous requests and appeals by the author.<sup>7</sup> These documents include, most notably, internal records from Clinton-Yeltsin conversations. The article also draws on interviews, on related U.S. and foreign archival collections, and on declassified materials secured by other researchers.

Using these sources to reconstruct an analytical narrative of the critical period, this article illuminates the contest inside the Clinton administration over expansion. As President Clinton repeatedly remarked, the two key questions about enlargement were when and how. The argument here is that supporters of a relatively swift conferral of full membership to a narrow range of countries outmaneuvered proponents of a slower, wider, and looser process of

---

5. "President's Dinner with President Yeltsin," described in State Department cable, 1994-Moscow-01457, January 14, 1994, declassified by author's appeal and made available by the U.S. Department of State, Office of Information Programs and Services, Washington, D.C. (hereafter DS-OIPS).

6. Recommended accounts by former participants in Clinton-era policymaking include Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*; Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); James M. Goldgeier, "Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin Was Told about NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters," *War on the Rocks* blog, July 12, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/promises-made-promises-broken-what-yeltsin-was-told-about-nato-in-1993-and-why-it-matters/>; William J. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2015); and Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002).

7. The declassification process is described in Svetlana Savranskaya and Mary Sarotte, "The Clinton-Yeltsin Relationship in Their Own Words" (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, George Washington University, October 2, 2018), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-10-02/clinton-yeltsin-relationship-their-own-words>. The declassification resulting from my successful appeals generated commentary in late summer 2018. See, for example, Masha Gessen, "The Undoing of Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin's Friendship, and How It Changed Both of Their Countries," *New Yorker*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-undoing-of-bill-clinton-and-boris-yeltsin-friendship-and-how-it-changed-both-countries/>; and James Goldgeier, "Bill and Boris: A Window into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship," *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (August 2018), pp. 43–54, [doi.org/10.15781/T27M04M3M](https://doi.org/10.15781/T27M04M3M).

enlargement, embodied in a program known as the Partnership for Peace (PfP). The Partnership had offered a contingent form of affiliation open to all Eurasian countries, including Russia and the other post-Soviet states.<sup>8</sup> Full Article 5 guarantees (under which an attack on any member would be considered an attack on the alliance as a whole) would come later, and only as a reward for strong performance in the PfP. Advocates of a full-guarantee mode of expansion triumphed, however, not least thanks to the 1994 Republican Party victory in the midterm elections—a victory resting in part on support for more aggressive expansion. This mode of enlargement strained Western relations with Russia, although it did not by itself spell the demise of U.S.-Russian post-Cold War cooperation. Far more important to that development were Russian domestic politics, the economic trauma of the 1990s, and the rise of Vladimir Putin's grim, murderous regime; but the phased approach would most likely not have exacerbated to the same extent the ongoing deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations caused by those factors.<sup>9</sup>

In developing its argument, this article focuses on three decisionmaking junctures, or “ratchets,” in U.S. foreign policy, the first of which predated the Clinton era. After long decades spent dealing with a set of limited strategic options in Cold War Europe, in 1989 the U.S. government suddenly faced a bewildering array of choices after the unexpected opening of the Berlin Wall.<sup>10</sup> The George H.W. Bush administration responded with the first ratchet in 1990: President Bush and his advisers blocked proposed alternatives to NATO's dominance in Europe and expanded the alliance into eastern Germany, thereby closing down alternatives to NATO while keeping open the option of future enlargement. Because of the shift in the United States' focus to the Persian Gulf after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the U.S.-led war in that region in 1991, and Bush's subsequent loss in the 1992 election, however, it ultimately fell to the Clinton administration to decide

8. For a retroactive assessment of the costs of NATO expansion as it actually occurred, see Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), p. 395. See also the review of Steil's book in Melvyn P. Leffler, “Divide and Invest: Why the Marshall Plan Worked,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (July/August 2018), pp. 170–175, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2018-06-14/divide-and-invest>.

9. On Russian domestic politics from the 1990s to the present, see Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017); Timothy J. Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Peter Conradi, *Who Lost Russia? How the World Entered a New Cold War* (London: Oneworld, 2017); Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: The Inside Story of Russia and America* (London: Allen Lane, 2018); Chris Miller, *Putinomics: Power and Money in Resurgent Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); and Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (New York: Free Press, 2011).

10. On the opening of the Wall, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

whether, when, and how to bring CEE states into the alliance. Concerned about a possible Russian backlash against NATO enlargement, with deleterious consequences for a host of arms control agreements under negotiation, the Clinton administration initially carried out a second ratchet in 1993: Washington proposed a pragmatic compromise—namely, the creation of the PfP. Despite a promising start, the third ratchet in late 1994 to full-guarantee expansion soon marginalized the PfP. This article explores the factors driving these ratchets, some of them known, but some new and surprising, such as the ways in which Ukrainian politics affected the enlargement debate, and the complex roles played by both Strobe Talbott, a U.S. ambassador and later deputy secretary of state, and Andrei Kozyrev, the Russian foreign minister. Finally, the article's conclusion assesses ways that this evidence requires a reframing of previous debates on expansion.

### *The First Ratchet: No Alternative to NATO*

Although the main focus of this article is the Clinton era, it is essential to understand the legacy bequeathed to President Clinton and his administration by the previous administration as a result of the decisions that President Bush made following the surprise fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>11</sup> A number of European actors, including both former East European dissidents and Western leaders, proposed new alternatives for their countries' future security after the opening of the Wall—all of them anathema to Washington. Among the worst alternatives from the U.S. point of view was a proposal by former peace activists who had helped to end Soviet domination of their homelands. They called for Central and Eastern Europe to become a demilitarized zone and neutral buffer between East and West (although some dissidents would later change their view and support NATO enlargement to the region).<sup>12</sup> Also worrisome was Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's interest, shared by some West European leaders, in creating a pan-European security organization, perhaps based on the existing Conference for Security and Cooperation (CSCE), which already had members from both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.<sup>13</sup> In response,

11. For an overview of the Bush era, see Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2017).

12. For a discussion of alternative visions for the future, see Sarotte, 1989, pp. 48–194.

13. Marie-Pierre Rey, "'Europe Is Our Common Home': A Study of Gorbachev's Diplomatic Concept," *Cold War History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 2004), pp. 33–65, doi.org/10.1080/14682740412331391805; and Frédéric Bozo, "The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand's European Confederation, 1989–1991," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (August 2008), pp. 391–412, doi.org/10.1017/S0960777308004542. See also Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, The End of the Cold War, and German Unification*, trans. Susan Emanuel (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

President Bush moved swiftly and assertively to ensure that NATO—and thereby U.S. leadership in Europe, given the United States' domination of the alliance—would not only survive the end of the Cold War but also shape the post-Cold War future.<sup>14</sup> Through a series of successful diplomatic maneuvers, Bush perpetuated NATO's leading role in European security and set a precedent of acquiring new eastern territory, all without signing anything binding about the alliance's future behavior (other than on former East German soil, where there were some restrictions).

Although that outcome was always the most likely, it is worth noting that Bush's strong endorsement of this policy foreclosed other, less likely options at a very early date, thus blocking or eliminating alternative policy choices for transatlantic security well before Clinton became president. In other words, the Bush administration performed the first "ratcheting down" of options, a process not without its costs. It raised the question, controversial to this day, of whether the Bush administration promised Moscow that, in exchange for tolerating the extension of NATO across a united Germany, the alliance would not seek further expansion eastward. Opinions on this topic range from absolutely not to absolutely yes.<sup>15</sup>

This article takes as its basis the view that, although the issue arose frequently as part of discussions over German unification—including speculative discussion about CEE states—no binding written agreement prohibiting later enlargement emerged.<sup>16</sup> As former Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov wrote in 2015, "With great regret, one has to conclude that the assurances by Western leaders were not put into a treaty or legal form." This lack of written codification was all the more regrettable, he noted, because "we have every reason to believe that at that time it could have been done." But it was not. Instead, what emerged in writing had a very different character. The Soviet Union and the United States (together with Britain and France) signed in September 1990 the Final Settlement restoring sovereignty to Germany—a settlement that, rather than prohibiting the movement of NATO across the

---

14. Sarotte, "A Broken Promise?"; and Shiffrinon, "Deal or No Deal?"

15. For a brief summary of these two competing views, see the exchange between Mark Kramer and Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrinon, "Correspondence: NATO Enlargement—Was There a Promise?" *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 189–192, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_c\_00287. See also, in the "absolutely not" camp, Michael Rühle, "NATO Enlargement and Russia: Myths and Realities," *NATO Review*, n.d., <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/nato-enlargement-russia/en/index.htm>.

16. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 15; Kramer and Shiffrinon, "Correspondence: NATO Enlargement"; Sarotte, "A Broken Promise?"; and M.E. Sarotte, "The Convincing Call from Central Europe: Let Us into NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-03-12/convincing-call-central-europe-let-us-nato>.

1989 line, explicitly enabled a united Germany to join the military alliance of its choice, thereby allowing NATO to expand eastward.<sup>17</sup>

By the time of this settlement, however, Bush's attention was riveted on the Persian Gulf, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. U.S. policy toward Europe had, as a result of that invasion, moved dramatically down Bush's list of priorities; his administration seems to have assumed it could return to these issues after the 1992 election. Policymaking after that election fell to Clinton and his appointees instead, but they had to operate within the constraints of the Bush legacy. As the scholar and former Foreign Service Officer William Hill has put it, "Neither Americans nor Europeans may have fully recognized it at the time, but between 1989 and 1991 they indeed made the most crucial decisions and steps in crafting a new post-Cold War world order."<sup>18</sup>

### *The Second Ratchet: A Phased Approach and the Pfp*

Bush thus bequeathed to Clinton a number of "givens," but there were still a host of open issues. What factors shaped the new president's decisionmaking? A first critical component was the ongoing pressure from CEE leaders for membership of their countries in Western political, economic, and security institutions—most notably, the European Union (EU) and NATO. By the time Clinton came to office, however, it was already apparent to the CEE states that the EU preferred a slow, gradual process of post-Cold War expansion. As a result, CEE leaders redoubled their efforts on NATO expansion, efforts that were on full display during a series of April 1993 bilateral meetings in Washington accompanying the formal opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. As Lech Walesa, the Polish-dissident-turned-president, warned Clinton: "We are all afraid of Russia . . . If Russia again adopts an aggressive foreign policy, that aggression will be directed toward Ukraine and Poland."

---

17. Yevgeniy Primakov, *Vstrechi na Perekrestkakh* (Meetings at the crossroads) (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2015), pp. 209–211, doc. 22, in Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, eds., "NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard" (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, March 16, 2018), [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4390836-Document-22-Excerpt-from-Evgeny-Primakov-Memoir;Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4390836-Document-22-Excerpt-from-Evgeny-Primakov-Memoir;Treaty%20on%20the%20Final%20Settlement%20with%20Respect%20to%20Germany), September 12, 1990, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/2plusfour8994e.htm>; and Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 185.

18. Dennis B. Ross, "Memorandum for the Secretary [James Baker], Subject: Foreign Policy in the Second Bush Administration: An Overview," April 30, 1992, State Department, posted online by Ambassador William J. Burns, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/back-channel/>, as part of the publicity for his memoir, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal* (New York: Random House, 2019); and Hill, *No Place for Russia*, p. 67.

Because "Poland cannot be left defenseless," it "need[s] to have the protection of U.S. muscle."<sup>19</sup>

Initially, the State Department was reluctant to accede to Polish wishes. On June 10, 1993, Secretary of State Warren Christopher told a meeting of NATO foreign ministers that at "an appropriate time, we may choose to enlarge NATO membership. But this is not now on the agenda."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it was necessary to keep other U.S. foreign policy goals in mind, such as the denuclearization of Ukraine. If NATO expanded, it was "hard to see how Ukraine can accept being the buffer between NATO, Europe and Russia. This will militate against our efforts to get rid of Ukraine's nuclear weapons."<sup>21</sup> Gen. John Shalikashvili, who served as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe before becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October 1993, was similarly worried about U.S. relations with Russia and the other former Soviet republics. In notes distributed within the administration, he argued that Russia was "not mature enough to understand expanded membership," and that the United States could not "risk Russian perceptions of NATO expansion at Russia's expense."<sup>22</sup>

In the midst of this wavering in Washington, Walesa decided to try to force matters with a dramatic gamble: pushing President Yeltsin to express a willingness to let Poland become part of NATO. Over dinner and drinks in Warsaw on August 24, 1993, Walesa convinced Yeltsin to agree to a statement that Polish membership in NATO was "'not contrary to the interest of any state, also including Russia.'"<sup>23</sup> Sobering up the next morning, and under pressure from his advisers, Yeltsin tried unsuccessfully to walk the statement back. But when Walesa asked him if he believed that Poland "'was a sovereign country,'" the Russian president said "'yes.'" Walesa then informed Yeltsin that, "'as a sovereign country,'" Poland would join NATO and that getting Yeltsin's "'concurrence now'" would prevent conflict in the future. Yeltsin relented, but not without reportedly getting something that he wanted as well. The U.S. embassy in Warsaw cabled Washington that Walesa and Yeltsin had reached "an implicit understanding that the Poles would not intervene in the Ukraine in any dispute involving Russia except in the event of a military

---

19. State Department cable, 1993-State-134465, May 4, 1993, DS-OIPS, containing summary of Clinton-Walesa conversation of April 21, 1993.

20. Transcript, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Intervention by Secretary of State Warren Christopher before the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting, Nafsika Hotel," Thursday, June 10, 1993, DS-OIPS. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 29.

21. "Talking Points," with handwritten note on top, "used by S at NAC lunch," n.d. (but, from context, just before or on June 10, 1993), DS-OIPS. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 29.

22. "Strengthening Outreach to the East," with handwritten note on top, "Shali speaking notes," n.d. (but, from context, probably August 3, 1993), DS-OIPS. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 35.

23. State Department cable, 1993-Moscow-26972, August 26, 1993, DS-OIPS.

attack.” This “quid pro quo on Ukraine is widely rumored and plausible, but unconfirmed.”<sup>24</sup> Whether it existed remains unclear, but at the time Ukrainian politicians reportedly noticed a distancing between themselves and their Polish colleagues.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless, Yeltsin was clearly in a mood to accede to Polish wishes, because soon thereafter he also informed Clinton that he would be pulling all former Soviet troops out of Poland. Troop withdrawals from various parts of the former Warsaw Pact, including former East Germany, had been on the agenda for a while; but talking about getting troops out and actually watching them leave were two different things. In fact, as Anthony Lake, the national security adviser, told Clinton, the motivation behind Germany’s copious aid to Russia and the newly independent states of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, which the State Department estimated to be “some two-thirds of the G-7 [Group of Seven] total \$75 billion pledged since 1990,” was “largely related to German unification and the scheduled August 31 [1994] departure of Russian forces from eastern Germany.”<sup>26</sup>

By itself, Yeltsin’s concession to Walesa would have drawn new attention to the question of when Poland might enter NATO, but the release that same month of an influential *Foreign Affairs* article amplified the discussion further. In it, Ronald Asmus, Richard Kugler, and Stephen Larrabee argued forcefully for a “new U.S.-European strategic bargain, one that extends NATO’s collective defense and security arrangements to those areas where the seeds for future conflict in Europe lie: the Atlantic alliance’s eastern and southern borders.”<sup>27</sup> In the face of these developments, the U.S. embassy in Moscow counseled caution. Ambassador Thomas Pickering warned Washington that “Yeltsin has made gestures to his hosts during previous visits abroad that were quickly walked back by his government.”<sup>28</sup>

---

24. State Department cable, 1993-Warsaw-12734, September 1, 1993, DS-OIPS. For coverage of this event at the time, see Jane Perlez, “Yeltsin ‘Understands’ Polish Bid for a Role in NATO,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/26/world/yeltsin-understands-polish-bid-for-a-role-in-nato.html>.

25. The author is grateful to Serhii Plokhii for the information about Ukrainian and Polish tensions at this time.

26. “Memorandum for the President,” from Anthony Lake, “Subject: Your Trip to Germany, July 10–12,” July 2, 1994, White House records, declassified by author’s appeal and made available on the Clinton Digital Library of the William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter CDL-CPL), <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us>.

27. Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, “Building a New NATO,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (September/October 1993), p. 28; and author phone interview with Robert Nurick, June 28, 2018. For background on the *Foreign Affairs* article and Asmus’s work at the RAND Corporation, see Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, pp. 32–34.

28. State Department cable, 1993-Moscow-26972, August 26, 1993. See also Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 95–96.

Pickering was right; in a letter to Clinton in September 1993, Yeltsin did walk back his concession to Walesa. He argued that, although Moscow was “sympathetic to the by no means nostalgic sentiments of the East Europeans toward past ‘cooperation’ within the framework of the Warsaw Pact,” NATO expansion was not the answer: “a truly pan-European security system” was. To buttress this claim, Yeltsin revived the dispute over what had been promised in 1990 in the midst of German unification. Although unable to point to a particular document prohibiting NATO expansion, he argued that enlargement would nonetheless violate “the spirit of the treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany,” because “its provisions . . . prohibit the deployment of foreign troops within the eastern lands of the Federal Republic of Germany, [which] precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the East.”<sup>29</sup>

Secretary of State Christopher and NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner discussed Yeltsin’s comments about the Final Settlement, also known as the two-plus-four accord, with German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and his aides in October 1993. One of Kinkel’s senior advisers, Dieter Kastrup, informed Christopher that “the Yeltsin letter’s reference to the ‘two-plus-four’ treaty was ‘formally’ wrong in relating it to NATO expansion but his position had political and psychological substance that we had to take seriously.” Wörner disagreed, arguing that the West should reject any relationship between that settlement and NATO’s expansion. Kinkel then asked Christopher if the U.S. government had made any decisions on expansion, to which the secretary of state responded not yet. Wörner pushed again, saying they were all missing a rare chance “to anchor some of these nations once and for all to the West.”<sup>30</sup> Wörner would die of cancer in 1994, however, so did not live to see expansion ultimately occur.<sup>31</sup>

Balancing these various concerns, the Clinton administration began exploring approaches that would phase in NATO expansion gradually. In September 1993, Eric Edelman, a senior foreign service officer, delivered an overview to Talbott, who, in addition to serving as the ambassador at large to the Newly Independent States (NIS, of the former Soviet Union), had been a close friend of Clinton since their days as Rhodes Scholars. As Thomas Donilon,

---

29. State Department cable, 1993-State-309943, October 9, 1993, doc. 4, in Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion.” Word of the letter leaked to the *New York Times*; see Roger Cohen, “Yeltsin Opposes Expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/02/world/yeltsin-opposes-expansion-of-nato-in-eastern-europe.html>. See also Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 24.

30. State Department cable, 1993-State-309312, October 8, 1993, DS-OIPS. The cable quotes Wörner directly.

31. The author thanks Michael Rühle for discussing Wörner’s views in an interview at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, March 22, 2017.

Secretary of State Christopher's chief of staff, put it, "'There's only one person in this building the President calls Sunday night to see how he's doing, and that person isn't Warren Christopher.'"<sup>32</sup> Thus, everyone involved in the debate on NATO expansion knew that Talbott's thinking mattered greatly. Edelman advised Talbott against supporting the notion that CEE states should join the European Union first "and get their security guarantee from Europeans without a transatlantic dimension. Very messy option which we should not encourage." He argued instead that the United States should implement NATO expansion in phases. In the first phase, potential members to the Alliance would have to become full participants in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, a forum for dialogue set up under President Bush; Edelman noted that "this crucial first step will strain out Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, etc." In the second phase, lasting one to two years, there should be individual agreements between would-be members and NATO, with some joint exercises. High-performing states could obtain, in the third phase, an associate membership status in NATO, lasting three to five years. Finally, in roughly seven to ten years, full membership in NATO with Article 5 guarantees would become an option for those who had succeeded in all phases. Edelman further added that "it might be useful to establish some groups. Group A might be the Visegrad countries [a short-hand reference for the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia]. Group B would include Russia/Belarus/Ukraine. Group C would be the Balkans/Baltics." He also proposed, as a side arrangement, to have "a separate NATO-Russian Charter developed which would help Yeltsin and Co. disarm critics at home."<sup>33</sup>

Also in September 1993, State Department Undersecretary Lynn Davis similarly argued for phased admission, with Article 5 guarantees coming later. Her thinking, she noted, was informed by the views of Germany's defense minister, Volker Rühle, who had established himself as a strong proponent of expansion with a speech in March 1993. Following Rühle, Davis expressed worry that "Germany is on the front-line of Central European instability and has neither the resources nor political inclination to handle these problems unilaterally."<sup>34</sup> Both officials felt that the defense of Berlin required adding Poland to NATO; as Vice Adm. Ulrich Weisser, one of Rühle's senior advisers had put it, it would

---

32. Quoted in James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 25.

33. "Phone Notes for Strobe on NATO Expansion," n.d. (but "Sept./Oct. 93" handwritten on document), DS-OIPS; and author interview with Eric Edelman, Washington, D.C., May 3, 2018.

34. Memo to the Secretary, from Dr. Davis, with attachment, "Strategy for NATO's Expansion and Transformation" (quotation in attachment), September 7, 1993, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4390816/Document-02-Strategy-for-NATO-s-Expansion-and.pdf>.

be much “easier to defend Germany in Poland than Germany in Germany.”<sup>35</sup> The Germans were not the only ones thinking this way. As Stephen Flanagan, a State Department official, had advised his superiors in 1992, the “Germans are unlikely to host 95% of our military presence in Europe for much longer. We need other real estate.” He worried that most “West European states either don’t feel threatened, are disinclined to host us, or would want too high a price for new bases.” The good news for the United States, however, was that old “Soviet caserns in Poland would be a bargain and we would be local heroes.” In short, if he were “asked to bet whether a given U.S. Army brigade would be more welcome in Germany or Poland in 1995,” he would “put money on the latter.”<sup>36</sup>

The question of CEE security gained new urgency in September and October 1993, when tensions between Yeltsin and Russian parliamentarians, both trying to disempower the other, boiled over into violence in the streets.<sup>37</sup> Yeltsin convinced army commanders that lethal force was necessary to keep order. On October 4, tanks fired at the White House, the seat of the parliament and symbol of Russian democracy. Although the crisis ended in domestic success for Yeltsin, in foreign policy terms it was a Pyrrhic victory. The events in Russia sent chills throughout Europe, particularly Germany, which, as mentioned earlier, still had former Soviet troops on its territory under an agreement that they could remain until 1994.<sup>38</sup> Onlookers in foreign capitals began to doubt whether Russia could reform peacefully (or at all), and Russophobe strategists saw their dim view of Moscow confirmed.

According to Secretary of State Christopher, the administration’s internal debate over NATO expansion assumed a new intensity in October 1993—presumably thanks to these events in Moscow—and necessitated a principals’ meeting on October 18, 1993.<sup>39</sup> Before the meeting, Christopher and Secretary

35. Quoted in Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 34. See also Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 31; and Angela Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 216–217.

36. Memo from Stephen Flanagan to Dennis Ross and Robert Zoellick, through Jim Holmes, “Developing Criteria for Future NATO Members: Now Is the Time,” May 1, 1992, OA/ID CF01526, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, College Station, Texas.

37. On this conflict, see Colton, *Yeltsin*, pp. 276–280.

38. Helmut Kohl, “Bericht zur Lage (hereafter BzL), 1./2. Oktober 1993” (Situation report, October 1–2, 1993), in Helmut Kohl, Günter Buchstab, and Hans-Otto Kleinmann, eds., *Berichte zur Lage, 1989–1998* (Situation reports, 1989–1998) (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2012), p. 496. See also n. 9 in *ibid.* On the status of the post-Cold War Russian military, see Serge Schmemmann, “Russia’s Military: A Shriveled and Volatile Legacy,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/28/world/russia-s-military-a-shriveled-and-volatile-legacy.html>.

39. Warren Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 129. For more detail on the lead-up to, and conduct of, this meeting, see Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, pp. 49–52.

of Defense Les Aspin met for lunch, with Lake in attendance, to try unsuccessfully to reconcile the key differences between the State and Defense Department positions “over whether NATO would commit at the January [1994] NATO Summit to expansion, or simply hold out the vague possibility.”<sup>40</sup>

Aspin (and Shalikashvili) had previously expressed opposition to swift expansion, not least because the enlargement debate “had to date focused on the interests of the Central and East Europeans, rather than on USG [United States government] interests,” a strategic blunder in their view.<sup>41</sup> The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) was unwavering: “OSD sees no requirement or advantage in offering membership at this time”; rather, the Pentagon’s preference was the PfP.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Pentagon had proposed PfP in part as a response to the ongoing, tragic disintegration of Yugoslavia, which was making the need for effective organizations focused on peacekeeping blindingly apparent. There was a natural fit: the Balkans crisis was a problem crying out for a solution, and a NATO-affiliated peacekeeping partnership was a solution in search of a problem. Asmus later argued that NATO enlargement would never, in fact, have happened “absent the U.S. and NATO’s all-out and eventually successful effort to stop the war raging in Bosnia.”<sup>43</sup>

By proposing PfP, Shalikashvili and his advisers squared a number of circles. They successfully produced road maps for addressing both the Balkans crisis and NATO expansion, thereby creating linkage between two desiderata: alliance enlargement in a functional sense (i.e., to include peacekeeping) and in a geographic sense (to former Warsaw Pact and Soviet republics).<sup>44</sup> The Partnership also had the benefit of avoiding the creation of a new front line

---

40. Memo to the Secretary from Robert L. Gallucci, through Dr. Davis, “Your October 6 Lunch Meeting with Secretary Aspin and Mr. Lake,” October 5, 1993, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. The author is grateful to Svetlana Savranskaya for a copy of this document.

41. Memo to Peter Tarnoff from Stephen Oxman, “Your Deputies’ Committee Meeting on the NATO Summit,” September 14, 1993, DS-OIPS.

42. “OSD Option for Principals’ Meeting, Partnership for Peace with General Link to Membership,” n.d. (but “10/18/93” handwritten on document), Department of Defense, State Department copy, DS-OIPS.

43. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 124. For more on the disintegration of Yugoslavia, see Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011); Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Modern Library, 1999); Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London: Penguin, 2002); and United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica” (New York: United Nations, November 15, 1999), <https://undocs.org/A/54/549>.

44. On Shalikashvili’s role, see Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, pp. 26–28. Other contributors to the development of the PfP concept included Charles Freeman, Robert Hunter, Clarence Juhl, Joseph Kruzal, Gen. James McCarthy, and Joseph Nye (this list is not comprehensive). The author is grateful for interviews with Joseph Nye, Cambridge, Massachusetts, September 26, 2016; Robert Hunter, by phone, July 2, 2018; and for comments from an anonymous reviewer.

across Europe; rather, it “would be open to the neutral and nonaligned nations as well as the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and Ukraine.” As a result, Europe would “be defined not by geographical boundaries but by a state’s affirmation of the principles of the agreement and its active participation in NATO’s Pfp.”<sup>45</sup> In a best-case scenario, Pfp held out the longer-term promise of becoming a “pan-European” security option, which many European leaders had sought after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>46</sup> The Partnership even managed to define a place for Ukraine in a European security system in a way that did not alienate Russia.<sup>47</sup> Finally, as an added benefit, Pfp could be portrayed as a stepping stone to full membership at some later date; thus, as Secretary of Defense Aspin put it, one of Pfp’s main accomplishments was to put NATO expansion at the end, rather than the beginning, of a long-term process.<sup>48</sup> Because of these many virtues, Madeleine Albright, at the time U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, praised Pfp to the president; in her view, it succeeded in achieving “three seemingly competing objectives: to revitalize NATO, to avoid antagonizing Russia by feeding nationalist tendencies, and to calm growing fears in Central and Eastern Europe.”<sup>49</sup>

As a result of these many merits, the Pfp won over converts inside the State Department. Just before the principals’ meeting, Talbott sent a forceful memo to his boss, Secretary of State Christopher, supporting the Pentagon’s position. He advised Christopher that “we should take the one new idea that seems to me to be almost universally acceptable, the Partnership for Peacekeeping, which truly is inclusive, and make that, rather than expanded NATO membership (which is at least implicitly exclusive) the centerpiece of our NATO position.” He particularly counseled against making “‘happy hints’” in private to CEE states while trying to reassure Russia publicly.<sup>50</sup>

---

45. “OSD Option for Principals’ Meeting, Partnership for Peace with General Link to Membership.”

46. Mary Elise Sarotte, “The Contest over NATO’s Future: The U.S., France, and the Concept of Pan-Europeanism after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989–1990,” in Shapiro and Tooze, *Charter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, pp. 212–287.

47. For more on Ukraine’s significance in the early post-Cold War period, see Serhii Plokhyy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

48. Aspin paraphrased in Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, pp. 34–35. See also Treisman, *The Return*, p. 317; and Sloan’s retroactive praise for Pfp in *Defense of the West*, pp. 113–114.

49. Madeleine Albright, “Memorandum for the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor, Subject: Pfp and Central and Eastern Europe,” January 26, 1994, DS-OIPS.

50. State Department cable, 1993-State-317538, October 19, 1993, DS-OIPS. For Talbott’s description of these events, see Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 99–101. On the evolution of Talbott’s thinking, see Keith Gessen, “The Quiet Americans behind the U.S.-Russia Imbroglio,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/magazine/the-quiet-americans-behind-the-us-russia-imbroglio.html>.

Talbott's memo convinced Christopher, who in turn helped to sway the principals' meeting. The resulting policy recommendation for the upcoming NATO summit was thus to launch PfP, while remaining vague on membership.<sup>51</sup> Lake, who strongly supported expansion, was reportedly annoyed at being on the losing end of the debate, the more so when, later that year, Zbigniew Brzezinski (President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser) told him that President Bush had gotten Germany into NATO, so Clinton should at least be able to achieve the same for Poland.<sup>52</sup>

On October 22, 1993, Christopher presented the idea of PfP to Yeltsin in person on a trip to Russia. Yeltsin asked for clarification that "all countries in CEE and the NIS would, therefore, be on an equal footing and there would be a partnership and not a membership." Christopher replied "Yes, that is the case, there would not even be an associate status." Yeltsin responded, "This is a brilliant idea, it is a stroke of genius." He added that "this served to dissipate all of the tension which we now have in Russia regarding East European states and their aspirations with regard to NATO." Yeltsin concluded, "It really is a great idea, really great." He asked Christopher to tell "Bill I am thrilled by this brilliant stroke."<sup>53</sup>

In contrast, the CEE states had significant reservations about the idea and had to be talked into supporting it. In an effort to assuage concerns expressed by the Visegrad countries, in late 1993 and early 1994 Clinton tasked Albright and Shalikashvili, among others, with traveling to and convincing the CEE countries that supporting PfP was in their interest. (Both Albright and Shalikashvili had been born in the region—she in Czechoslovakia, and he in Poland of Georgian parents.)<sup>54</sup> Albright and Shalikashvili tried to flatter President Walesa in "a mercurial 75-minute discussion," urging him "to display the political courage and savvy that made him famous to take the lead in accepting PfP." Walesa complained "that NATO had already missed two easy opportunities to expand NATO to the East: During the collapse of the Soviet

51. The significance of Talbott's intervention was leaked to the press a couple of months later. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Opposes Move to Rapidly Expand NATO Membership," *New York Times*, January 2, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/02/world/us-opposes-move-to-rapidly-expand-nato-membership.html>.

52. Brzezinski paraphrased in Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 56–57. See also Brzezinski's public critique of Pfp in Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March/April 1994), pp. 68–71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20045920>.

53. State Department cable, 1993-Secto-17027, October 25, 1993, DS-OIPS. See also Goldgeier, "Promises Made, Promises Broken?"; Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security*, p. 71; and Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, pp. 53–55.

54. State Department cable, 1993-Budape-11648, October 29, 1993, DS-OIPS. See also Republic of Poland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Letter to Warren Christopher, December 22, 1993, DS-OIPS; and Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 45–54.

Union in 1991 and ‘in the half hour after Yeltsin signed’ his declaration in August that he would not block Polish membership in NATO.” Now, each missed opportunity only fueled Russian opposition. Shalikhshvili countered that “PfP would establish unprecedented patterns and levels of military cooperation that would promote enhanced interoperability with NATO forces.” He mollified Walesa by saying that “the debate in NATO lately is less about whether to expand to the east, but when and how.”<sup>55</sup> The Poles grudgingly came around.<sup>56</sup>

NATO formally launched PfP with a press release from its summit on January 11, 1994. Clinton marked the occasion by attending that summit as part of his first trip to Europe as president.<sup>57</sup> Traveling to a subsequent CEE regional gathering in Prague afterward, he defended PfP to his fellow leaders Vaclav Havel, the Czech president, and Walesa: as Clinton put it, PfP “lets us begin right now joint training and exercising and the introduction of NATO troops” into Central and Eastern Europe, but does not does not “draw another line dividing Europe a few hundred miles east.” This point was particularly important to the U.S. president because “Ukraine especially does not want to be pushed back into Russia’s orbit.” Clinton expected that “of all countries in the world,” the CEE states “should understand the damage of dividing lines, of pushing former Soviet republics into Russia’s orbit and signaling to Russia that we have assumed a negative outcome to the debates over what kind of country it will be.”<sup>58</sup>

Christopher and Talbott were blunter in their meetings with the Visegrad foreign ministers. Both argued that “one of the best things about PfP was that it could go in either direction: it could lean forward to accept Russia if the ‘good bear’ emerges, but could also lead to a post-Cold War variant of containment to confront a post-Cold War variant of Russian expansionism.”<sup>59</sup> Havel and other CEE leaders were still not convinced. The Czech president echoed his colleagues by insisting that Clinton “must emphasize that PfP is a

---

55. State Department cable, 1994-Warsaw-00308, January 7, 1994, DS-OIPS. For a similar conversation between Albright and the Polish foreign minister, see State Department cable, 1994-Warsaw-00312, January 8, 1994. The author is grateful to Charles Gati, who took part in some of these consultations, for an interview in Washington, D.C., on October 11, 2018, and to an anonymous reviewer for comments on these events.

56. State Department cable, 1994-Warsaw-00350, January 10, 1994, DS-OIPS; and State Department cable, 1994-Warsaw-00393, January 10, 1994, DS-OIPS.

57. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 54–61.

58. “The President’s Meeting with Czech Leaders,” January 11, 1994, 5:30–7:00 p.m., DS-OIPS. For a similar meeting with Walesa and Polish leaders, see State Department cable, 1994-State-010751, January 12, 1994, DS-OIPS.

59. State Department cable, 1994-Secto-10020, January 16, 1994, DS-OIPS.

first step leading to full NATO membership.”<sup>60</sup> The pressure worked. At the press conference for the Prague summit, Clinton spoke the words he and the others had hoped to hear: “While the Partnership is not NATO membership, neither is it a permanent holding room. It changes the entire NATO dialogue so that now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how.”<sup>61</sup>

Ironically, all sides felt they had achieved victory. Supporters of PfP saw President Clinton’s press conference as an endorsement of PfP’s important role in the process of enlargement. The CEE leaders and opponents of PfP correctly realized, however, that his press statement had provided them with enormous leverage. Supporters of full-guarantee expansion began repeating the phrase “not whether but when” as a rallying cry at every opportunity, dropping the “how” that Clinton had added. As Lake remarked after the press conference in Prague: “Finally . . . we’ve got a Presidential marker,” and he and others knew that they could use that marker to further their views. Lake’s personal efforts to persuade Talbott of the need for full Article 5 expansion would form an important part of the ultimate success of that policy.<sup>62</sup>

Clinton’s press conference comments were less welcome in Moscow, however, where the president traveled next to see Yeltsin.<sup>63</sup> The two leaders were meeting, among other reasons, to sign the so-called Trilateral Accord, the result of U.S. efforts to broker an agreement that would lead to the transfer of nuclear weapons in Ukraine to Russia for elimination. In return, Ukraine would get “compensation for the economic value of the highly enriched uranium in the warheads . . . and assistance from the United States in dismantling the missiles, missile silos, bombers and nuclear infrastructure on its territory.”<sup>64</sup> Such compensation was vital, because in the mid-1990s Ukraine

---

60. “The President’s Meeting with Czech Leaders,” January 11, 1994.

61. “The President’s News Conference with Visegrad Leaders in Prague,” January 12, 1994, American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-with-visegrad-leaders-prague>.

62. Lake quoted in Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 66. Goldgeier made the rallying cry the title of his book on expansion, *Not Whether but When*. The author is grateful for phone interviews with Coit Blacker on September 26, 2018, and Victoria Nuland on July 9, 2018; and for a discussion with Blacker in Stanford, California on April 23, 2019.

63. For press coverage of Clinton’s trip, see R.W. Apple Jr., “Clinton in Europe: A Russian Tightrope,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/15/world/clinton-europe-russian-tightrope-president-does-not-fall-down-but-he-does-wobble.html>.

64. Steven Pifer, “The Trilateral Process: The United States, Ukraine, Russia, and Nuclear Weapons,” Arms Control Series Paper 6 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, May 2011), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-trilateral-process-the-united-states-ukraine-russia-and-nuclear-weapons>. For discussion of the Trilateral Accord, the author thanks Graham Allison for an

was, in the words of Talbott, “spiraling into chaos” and headed for the economic abyss.<sup>65</sup> The United States, Russia, and Britain also promised that they would assure—not guarantee, a meaningful distinction—the territorial integrity of Ukraine; those assurances were later made in written form in the so-called Budapest memorandum of December 1994.<sup>66</sup>

Yeltsin was ready to be done with the issue, as he was tired of dealing with Leonid Kravchuk, the Ukrainian leader. Previewing the signing ceremony, Yeltsin explained to Clinton that the Ukrainian would take part briefly, but after the signing “we will not pay any more attention to Kravchuk, who will leave.” (The Ukrainians would go on to complete the transfer of nuclear weapons, despite doubters’ claims they would not, in June 1996.) Turning to the question of NATO expansion, and sensing the ambiguity that Clinton’s recent press conference remarks had created, Yeltsin emphasized the significance of a phased approach to expansion, stressing that “Russia has to be the first country to join NATO. Then the others from Central and Eastern Europe can come in.” He noted, however, that “Russia is not yet ready to join NATO,” in part because it worried about the “potential Chinese reaction.”<sup>67</sup>

Once back in Washington, over a hearty lunch at Filomena Ristorante on January 31, 1994, Clinton discussed his Moscow trip with the visiting German chancellor, Helmut Kohl. The U.S. president asked Kohl whether he was worried about Ukraine. The chancellor responded, “I told Yeltsin that even any suspicion that Russia wanted to annex Ukraine would be catastrophic.” Clinton agreed, stating, “If Ukraine collapses, because of Russian influence or because of militant nationalists within Ukraine or any other reason, it would undermine the whole theory of NATO’s Partnership for Peace. Ukraine is the linchpin of the whole idea.” Indeed, “one reason why all the former Warsaw Pact states were willing to support the PFP was because they understood what we were saying about Ukraine.” Kohl agreed and indicated his own reasons for supporting PFP: “The wound that still bleeds is the Oder-Neisse [the rivers marking the border between Germany and Poland] for Germans who lived there. It is healing now and to the extent that the Poles grow closer to Europe,

---

interview in Cambridge, Massachusetts on October 12, 2016; and Steven Pifer for phone interviews on May 14, 2018, and September 4, 2018.

65. Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 79; and author phone interview with Strobe Talbott, June 11, 2018.

66. On the Trilateral Accord, see Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 167–170.

67. “President’s Dinner with President Yeltsin,” described in State Department cable, 1994-Moscow-01457, January 14, 1994, previously quoted in introduction to this article. On Ukraine meeting the deadline, see Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 170. See also “Text of Moscow Declaration by President Clinton and Russian President Yeltsin, Moscow, Russia, January 14, 1994” (Washington, D.C.: Federation of American Scientists, n.d.), <https://fas.org/nuke/control/detarget/docs/940114-321186.htm>; and the account of the Christopher-Kozyrev meeting in State Department cable, 1994-Secto-10019, January 16, 1994, DS-OIPS.

it helps.”<sup>68</sup> He told Clinton that he hoped the EU would expand to Poland and other CEE countries as well. As he remarked later, however, it had “become very clear” to him that “a significant number of the members of the EU do not, in truth, want to expand the union.” Most members “had gotten used to the fact that the EU was determined by its southerly members,” and they did not want that to change. Kohl was frustrated by such thinking among his European allies, and therefore all the happier that Clinton had come up with a workable and successful U.S. strategy toward Russia.<sup>69</sup>

### *The Third Ratchet: Full-Guarantee Expansion*

Despite this early success, why did the phased approach to expansion lose out by the end of 1994? Part of the answer is because of the way that, in the course of the year, two different concepts of the future of European security merged, and partly because of political developments both in the United States and abroad. These developments all strengthened the hand of Pff’s opponents.

On the conceptual front, the two views, while opposing in character, were converging on the policy of full-guarantee enlargement. The first view held that Washington could, by expanding NATO’s guarantees as far eastward as possible, move beyond containment to create a new era of stability and international cooperation. States across Eurasia would, as a result, feel more secure whether they were members or not, the argument ran, and hence be willing to accept developments that they would previously have feared (meaning Russia would accept NATO’s border moving closer to it). This belief formed the centerpiece of a major public address by Lake on September 21, 1993, in which he argued, “The successor to the doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement.”<sup>70</sup> Or, as Asmus put it, NATO could move beyond the Cold War to ensure a Europe ““whole, free and at peace.””<sup>71</sup> The second view held that Washington should, in contrast, seek to expand NATO as a way of moving containment beyond the Cold War, with a goal of defending against a potentially revanchist Moscow (although this motive should be kept out of the pub-

68. State Department cable, 1994-State-037335, February 12, 1994, DS-OIPS.

69. Kohl, BzL, April 11, 1994, in Kohl, Buchstab, and Kleinmann, *Berichte zur Lage, 1989–1998*, pp. 566–567.

70. Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, “From Containment to Enlargement,” remarks at School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., September 21, 1993, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>; and author interview with Anthony Lake, Washington, D.C., June 12, 2019. See also Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 74.

71. Ronald Asmus, “Europe’s Eastern Promise: Rethinking NATO and EU Enlargement,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (January/February 2008), p. 95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020270>. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 33.

lic eye).<sup>72</sup> As described in detail below, proponents of these two views were able to marginalize the Pfp. They did so to the despair of advocates of the phased approach, such as William Perry, who succeeded Aspin as secretary of defense in 1994. Perry argued in that year that what should be “‘front and center’” in U.S. thinking should be negotiations with Russia to diminish its still-vast nuclear arsenal, not enlargement.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately for Perry, political developments in 1994 did not favor his point of view. Moscow began making calls for conferring special status on Russia with regard to both Pfp and NATO.<sup>74</sup> In a way unacceptable to Washington, the Russians were apparently hoping to use their membership in Pfp to downgrade NATO as a whole.<sup>75</sup> Secretary of State Christopher found that he, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, and British Foreign Ministry Political Director Pauline Neville-Jones all shared the same concerns about this issue. Neville-Jones noted disapprovingly that Moscow “‘appeared to envisage CSCE as an overriding framework, embracing both NATO” and the former Soviet space. “‘They wanted to get a grip on our institutions, and equal standing for theirs.”<sup>76</sup>

As Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev had indeed signaled, in Russian eyes there needed to be more clarity about the “‘roles of NATO and CSCE,” to avoid “‘the impression of [NATO] making a ‘victorious march eastward.’”<sup>77</sup> Such statements proved to be a misstep, particularly coming as they did during the 1994 midterm congressional election campaign. The Republican Party’s “‘Contract with America” was part of that campaign calling for NATO expansion by 1999, thereby putting new pressure on Clinton.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Moscow’s actions exacerbated already high levels of tension over other contemporary issues, such as the 1994 arrest and conviction of Aldrich Ames, a Central Intelligence Agency officer turned Russian mole, and difficulties with

---

72. The author is grateful to Fredrik Logevall for a discussion on the topic of containment beyond the Cold War.

73. Quoted in Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 66. See also Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 12–13.

74. State Department cable, 1994-Moscow-06075, March 4, 1994, DS-OIPS.

75. See State Department cables, 1994-Moscow-009022, April 1, 1994; 1994-Moscow-009628, April 7, 1994; 1994-Secto-06026, April 30, 1994; and 1994-State-109220, April 26, 1994, all DS-OIPS.

76. State Department cable, 1994-Secto-10002, June 7, 1994, DS-OIPS. On similar Russian demands that NATO become a watered-down collective security organization, see Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 59.

77. State Department cable, 1994-USNATO-02458, June 22, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also State Department cable, 1994-USNATO-02433, June 21, 1994, DS-OIPS.

78. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 67. On the intersection between U.S. domestic politics and NATO expansion generally, see also Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*; Seth Johnston, *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance since 1950* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); and Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security*.

Moscow over the violence in former Yugoslavia. As a result, the Clinton administration came under fire for being, as the internal preparatory paperwork for a July 1994 U.S.-Russian summit put it, “unrealistically optimistic about Yeltsin’s ability to sustain reform and naive about Russia’s intentions in the ‘near abroad.’”<sup>79</sup>

In the midst of this criticism, Clinton left once again for Europe, with visits to cities including Berlin and Warsaw, where he spoke to the Polish parliament on July 7, 1994. Polish leaders again had an opportunity to press their case with the president, and once again their pleas made an impact. In his remarks to the parliament, Clinton noticeably downplayed PfP. As he put it, “The Partnership for Peace is only a beginning. Bringing new members into NATO, as I have said many times, is no longer a question of whether, but when and how.”<sup>80</sup>

In the wake of these remarks, Alexander Vershbow sensed an opportunity on the “how” front. He advised his boss, National Security Adviser Lake, that the phased approach needed rethinking. Vershbow argued against initially doing anything that would overtly “devalue PfP in the eyes of CEE and NIS countries” and recommended that formal consultations on expansion not start until late 1994 at the earliest. In those consultations, however, the United States should side with R  he and other Europeans in saying that “at the end of the day, Russia is not going to qualify for NATO membership, and that our goal should be an ‘alliance with the Alliance’ for Moscow.” However, “in public, we need to maintain ambiguity on this question and to avoid complicating Yeltsin’s domestic situation, and to allow time to develop an analogous model for NATO’s relationship with Ukraine.”<sup>81</sup> The latter concern was particularly important because a new president, Leonid Kuchma, had come to power in Ukraine and had made clear that the Ukrainian commitment to denuclearization “will not be an overriding priority for him.”<sup>82</sup>

---

79. “Meeting with Russian President Yeltsin: Overview,” no author or date, but part of preparatory files for summit from early July 1994, CDL-CPL.

80. William J. Clinton, “Address to the Polish Parliament in Warsaw,” July 7, 1994, American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-polish-parliament-warsaw>.

81. Email from Alexander R. Vershbow to W. Anthony Lake, “NATO Expansion,” July 15, 1994, 12:11 p.m., DS-OIPS.

82. “Telephone Call to Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma,” Tony Lake [preparatory briefing papers for the president’s call], July 21, 1994, 9:45 a.m., CDL-CPL. For more on U.S. thinking at this time, see James M. Goldgeier, “NATO Expansion: Anatomy of a Decision,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 83–102, [doi.org/10.1080/01636609809550295](https://doi.org/10.1080/01636609809550295); Daniel Hamilton and Kristina Spohr, eds., *Open Door: NATO and Euro-Atlantic Security After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Policy Institute, 2019); and Patrick Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment,” *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018), pp. 9–46, [doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00311](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00311).

Yeltsin was, of course, capable of complicating his domestic position all by himself. On August 31, 1994, he attended a Berlin ceremony marking the long-awaited completion of the withdrawal of all former Soviet forces from Germany; by then, a total of 546,200 troops had left.<sup>83</sup> The farewell ceremony marked a humiliating low point in Russian foreign policy.<sup>84</sup> The significance of the Soviet victory over the Nazis had been a central component of Soviet and Russian identity, politics, and life for decades. Now, it seemed, Moscow was having to beat an unworthy retreat. As Angela Stent has put it, "Homeless, unemployed officers symbolized the dramatic humiliation of the once great Soviet armed forces and were . . . a major source of support for right-wing groups."<sup>85</sup> Chancellor Kohl made somber remarks at the ceremony, noting how ten or even six years earlier the withdrawal would have been completely unthinkable. He spoke bluntly of the tragedy of World War II and the millions of deaths it had caused in the Soviet Union, all "in the name of Germany."<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, Yeltsin had started drinking heavily the night before and continued doing so throughout the morning of the ceremony. As a military band started playing, he seized the baton and started conducting. He then tried to prompt the audience to join him in singing the folk song "Kalinka Malinka." Some of his aides were so horrified by his behavior that they later wrote Yeltsin a joint plea that he address his dependency on "'the well-known Russian vice'" of alcohol.<sup>87</sup>

With less pathos, the former Western occupying powers had finalized the withdrawal of their troops from Berlin in early autumn 1994, although they remained among Germany's NATO allies, and approximately 100,000 U.S. troops would stay in the country.<sup>88</sup> To mark the final withdrawal of U.S. troops from Berlin, the Germans hosted a high-level conference in September 1994 called "New Traditions." Vice President Albert Gore delivered a speech via video because of an injury that kept him at home. In it, he stated: "I will remind you of President Clinton's prediction in Warsaw earlier this year:

---

83. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, p. 164. On the planning for this event, see State Department cable, 1994-Bonn-11493, May 13, 1994, DS-OIPS; and "Präsident Jelzin in Bonn," in *Auswärtiges Amt*, ed. (Foreign Office), *Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Dokumente von 1949 bis 1994* (Foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany: documents from 1949 to 1994) (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995), pp. 1058–1061.

84. Author interview with former Soviet diplomat Igor Maximychev, Moscow, March 21, 2016.

85. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, p. 163.

86. "Verabschiedung der russischen Streitkräfte aus Deutschland" (Farewell to Russian armed forces leaving Germany), in *Auswärtiges Amt, Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 1087.

87. Colton, *Yeltsin*, p. 312. See also Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, p. 164; and Treisman, *The Return*, p. 58.

88. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, p. 163.

‘Bringing new members into NATO is no longer a question of whether, but when and how.’” The vice president rightly emphasized that the “collapse of the Soviet Union did not in and of itself present us with a benign new world order ripe for the taking. Rather, it created a period of profound transition from which might emerge either the world we have struggled so hard to secure, or a world submerged in new nightmares.”<sup>89</sup>

Speaking immediately after Gore, German Defense Minister R  he undermined Pfp’s inclusive strategy: “Our policy must be absolutely clear that not all countries in Central and Eastern Europe are candidates for integration.” Although Hungary, Poland, and the Czech and Slovak Republics were worthy of consideration, R  he declared that Russia, in contrast, “cannot be integrated, neither into the European Union nor into NATO.”<sup>90</sup> R  he’s views received amplification in Washington from Richard Holbrooke, a former U.S. ambassador to Germany. Holbrooke and R  he had come to agree on the need for expansion as soon as possible. When Holbrooke returned to Washington to become an assistant secretary of state, he gained a new platform for broadcasting their shared views.<sup>91</sup> Holbrooke was also largely responsible for the text of Gore’s speech and for encouraging his friend R  he’s subsequent strong remarks.

On stage with R  he in Berlin, Defense Secretary Perry appeared shocked and tried to walk back some of what Gore and R  he had just said. Despite Perry’s discomfort, Holbrooke continued to press the issue in Washington, arguing that he should chair a new interagency working group (IWG) on NATO policy.<sup>92</sup> This IWG had emerged thanks to Talbott, who was starting to rethink his earlier preference for Pfp and had begun advising Christopher that an expanded NATO could help manage post-Cold War conflicts, such as the disintegration in Yugoslavia. Talbott wanted this initiative to be a quiet one, though, because it was a little too obvious “that NATO expansion will, when it occurs, by definition be punishment, or ‘neo-containment,’ of the bad Bear.”<sup>93</sup>

Holbrooke succeeded in taking over the IWG, and the preparatory papers for its first meeting, on September 22, 1994, displayed a new clarity and blunt-

89. “U.S.-German Relations and the Challenge of a New Europe: Vice President Gore, Speech via Satellite to the Conference on New Traditions, Berlin, Germany, September 9, 1994,” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, Vol. 5, No. 37 (September 12, 1994), pp. 597–599.

90. State Department cable, 1994-Berlin-02794, September 10, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, pp. 65–66.

91. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 69–71; and Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 47. On Holbrooke’s significance more generally, see George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

92. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, pp. 86–93.

93. Memorandum for the Secretary from Strobe Talbott, Subject: “The Future of European Security,” September 12, 1994, DS-OIPS.

ness. Gone were discussions of phased-in, partial associations. “The goal is to achieve NATO expansion,” the briefing papers stated flatly. The United States needed to develop “a sense of inevitability” about this policy and make it clear that, as with German unification, for “those opposed, the costs of obstructing the inevitable will be too high, therefore the task becomes one of making the objectionable palatable.” All talk of “compensation” was to be avoided; rather the United States should make others think this “is in their interest.” As ever, Ukraine would be a major issue: “Ukraine is an especially difficult proposition. Expansion will leave it wedged between an Alliance it can probably never enter, and Russia.” As a result, there was a need “to avoid giving Ukraine a pretext for keeping nuclear weapons,” so Washington had to bear in mind “the impact of [the] momentum of the expansion discussion on Ukraine’s progress on nuclear weapons dismantlement, and NPT [i.e., its plans to accede to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty].” Presumably, however, once the denuclearization process reached a satisfactory conclusion, that concern about a pretext would fall away. Russian objections were of secondary importance: “We should not be deterred by whether a rationale for expansion can be sold to the Russians or others. They won’t buy it now under any circumstances, and will try to block or delay.” Hence, the “goal is to give them something we can use, and which they can work with, when the time comes.”<sup>94</sup>

The IWG meeting itself almost resulted in a physical altercation. According to the accounts from the thirty-odd people in the room—some of whom spoke to the *Washington Post* soon thereafter—Holbrooke began the meeting by asserting that he was there to carry out the president’s decision to enlarge NATO. When some participants, most notably from the Pentagon, asked why the president had not informed them of that decision himself, Holbrooke cited the Prague press conference of January 1994, presidential comments in Europe in July, and the Gore New Traditions conference speech as proof that the policy had already been sufficiently propagated.<sup>95</sup> When Gen. Wesley Clark of the Joint Chiefs of Staff still objected, Holbrooke shot back, saying that “sounds like insubordination to me. We need to settle this right now. Either you are on the president’s program, or you are not.” Holbrooke’s outburst prompted Clark to reply that he had been serving his country in uniform for

---

94. “NATO Expansion: Concept and Strategy,” September 17, 1994, part of preparatory papers distributed for IWG meeting, DS-OIPS.

95. State Department cable, 1994-State-262133, September 28, 1994, DS-OIPS, appears to be a summary of this meeting. The author also conducted in-person and phone interviews with multiple participants in the meeting, including (but not limited to) Wesley Clark, by phone, June 14, 2018; Daniel Fried, by phone, June 14, 2018; and Alexander Vershbow, by phone, June 7, 2018.

decades and had never been accused of insubordination. Participants worried (or hoped) that the two men might come to blows; some intervened to get the discussion back on track. In a lengthy report on expansion drafted largely by Clark, the Defense Department fought back by showing the enormous cost and amount of work needed to integrate the CEE states into the alliance. At a briefing about the report, Pentagon representatives placed a four-foot stack of paper on the table in front of Holbrooke and his colleagues, listing the NATO standards that potential members would have to meet on everything from “helicopter launching pads to the circumference of gasoline nozzles.”<sup>96</sup>

At the same time that Holbrooke was barreling ahead, Washington and Moscow were in far-reaching talks on strategic weapons, which opponents of expansion worried would be put in jeopardy by NATO enlargement.<sup>97</sup> In September 1994, Perry provided an overview of the open issues to Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin during the latter’s visit to Washington with his defense minister, Pavel Grachev; it included no fewer than three major accords, START I, II, and III.<sup>98</sup> Clinton was also pressing Yeltsin on Russian biological weapons development, which Gorbachev had previously claimed to have discontinued.<sup>99</sup> Yeltsin admitted that “Gorbachev lied—or his military lied to him. Things were not stopped in 1988.” Yeltsin explained that, after he had come to power, he “ordered that all activity be stopped . . . [and] all the doors . . . locked and sealed.” But, “we had trouble finding jobs for people in the program.” Despite the need to work on these strategic issues, however, Clinton told Yeltsin that there “will be an expansion of NATO . . . we’re going to move forward on this.”<sup>100</sup> His statement showed that advocates of moving ahead more forcefully with enlargement were gaining ground.

After the Yeltsin visit, Vershbow provided Lake with thoughts on what he and his fellow members of the so-called pro-expansion troika of National Security Council (NSC) policymakers—himself, Daniel Fried, and Nicholas Burns—felt should happen next. In their opinion, even Holbrooke was not

---

96. All quotations in this paragraph are from Michael Dobbs, “Wider Alliance Would Increase U.S. Commitments,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 1995. Further information from Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 73–75; author interview with Clark; and author interview with Thomas Culora, by phone, October 19, 2018.

97. The two leaders discussed arms control during their meeting in Washington on September 27, 1994. See Memcon, “11:00am-1:00pm, Oval Office and Patio,” CDL-CPL.

98. See the memcon of a subsequent Clinton-Yeltsin conversation, “Expanded Session on Security Issues with President Yeltsin of the Russian Federation,” September 27, 1994, 4:35–5:35 p.m., CDL-CPL.

99. For more on this topic, see David E. Hoffman, *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), pp. 13, 101–126.

100. Memcon, “Second Clinton/Yeltsin One-on-One 1pm-2:30pm,” September 28, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also State Department cable, 1994-State-266647, October 1, 1994, DS-OIPS.

moving quickly enough, because his “much heralded IWG is off to a slow and acrimonious start.” The troika rejected the idea of a phased approach; instead, new members should “acquire all the rights and responsibilities of current members (full Article 5 guarantee) and would commit to eventual full integration in NATO’s military structures.” At most, there would be “flexibility on operational issues such as stationing of foreign forces.” Although NATO should coordinate with the EU, it should not wait for EU expansion; and, importantly, the “‘insurance policy’/‘strategic hedge’ rationale (i.e., neo-containment of Russia) will be kept in the background only, rarely articulated.” In public, the “possibility of membership in the long term for a democratic Russia should not be ruled out explicitly (pace Volker Rühle).” The three noted that their strong pro-expansion stance had provoked opposition even within the NSC, in part because it would undermine efforts to build Pfp. After removing the complaints about Holbrooke and adding a sentence about the importance of possible “NATO membership for Ukraine and [the] Baltic States,” Lake, apparently unconcerned about that opposition, passed a lightly edited version of the memo under his own name to Clinton, who read it on October 13, 1994, and noted “looks good” by hand.<sup>101</sup>

This changing U.S. attitude toward expansion had an unexpected impact when hints of it appeared in a communiqué from the semi-annual meeting of NATO’s foreign and defense ministers (a group known as the North Atlantic Council, or NAC). As Perry later described it, such meetings were “usually routine affairs,” at which anything important was sorted out privately among key members, leaving the meeting to issue a prewritten communiqué with “fictional spontaneity.”<sup>102</sup> Mostly, this particular NAC communiqué praised the success of Pfp, which now boasted twenty-three members; had offices at the “Partnership Coordination Cell” in Mons, Belgium; and had run three successful exercises in the fall of 1994. The communiqué also contained wording, however, that came to Yeltsin’s attention and displeased him: “We expect and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to our East.”<sup>103</sup> His foreign minister, Kozyrev, known as someone inclined to

101. Memorandum for Anthony Lake from Alexander Vershbow, Subject: “NATO Expansion,” October 4, 1994; and Memorandum for the President from Anthony Lake, Subject: “NATO Expansion,” stamped “The President has seen 94 OCT 13,” both CDL-CPL. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 92; author interviews with Nicholas Burns, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 19, 2016, and December 19, 2017; author interview with Fried; author interview with Vershbow; and Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, pp. 88–91.

102. Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 30.

103. Final Communiqué, NATO M-NAC-2(94)116, issued at the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, December 1, 1994, <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c941201a.htm>; and Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, pp. 30–31. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 69.

work with the West, was expected at that time to approve preliminary agreements leading to Russian PFP membership, but suddenly indicated that he could no longer do so.<sup>104</sup> It was an inauspicious sign, with worse to come at the Budapest summit, which proved to be a debacle.

There, more than fifty heads of state and of government gathered on December 5, 1994, to rename the CSCE the “Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe” (or OSCE), hoping that it would have a more prominent future as an organization rather than as merely a conference. These hopes were to be dashed, however, because as Hill has written, one of the sadder stories of the past decades was “the rapid development and then equally rapid atrophy of the once ambitious OSCE.”<sup>105</sup> It proved to be one of many disappointments emerging from the December 1994 summit; another was the Budapest Memorandum, a written version of the assurances on territorial integrity promised to Ukraine at the time of the Trilateral Statement signing. Sensing the problems to come, the Ukrainians confided to U.S. embassy officials in Kiev on the eve of the summit that they had “no illusions that the Russians would live up to the agreements they signed.” Rather, the government of Ukraine (GOU) was hoping “to get agreements that will make it possible for the GOU to appeal for assistance in international fora when the Russians violate the agreements.”<sup>106</sup> In 2014, however, when Russians in unmarked uniforms moved into Crimea, it would become apparent that such assistance would not be forthcoming. Additionally, the overall negative tone of the summit marked a conceptual turning point, as it was the most confrontational of any major post-Cold War gathering to that date.<sup>107</sup>

Without advance warning, Yeltsin decided to vent his frustrations publicly at the Budapest summit with Clinton in attendance. The Russian president accused the United States, in the interest of NATO expansion, of risking a “cold peace” to follow the Cold War.<sup>108</sup> On the flight back from Budapest to Washington, Talbott recalled that the president “was furious at his foreign-policy team for dragging him across the Atlantic to serve as a punching bag for Yeltsin.” There was worse to come. About a week after the Budapest summit,

104. State Department cable, 1994-USNATO-04586, December 2, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 93–94.

105. Hill, *No Place for Russia*, p. 8. See also Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “Budapest Summit Marks Change from CSCE to OSCE” (Vienna: OSCE, December 5, 1994), [https://www.osce.org/event/summit\\_1994](https://www.osce.org/event/summit_1994); and Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 94–96.

106. State Department cable, 1994-Kiev-10648, December 5, 1994, DS-OIPS.

107. Author interviews with Burns, December 19, 2016, and December 19, 2017.

108. Dean E. Murphy, “Broader NATO May Bring ‘Cold Peace,’ Yeltsin Warns,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-12-06-mn-5629-story.html>; and Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 31.

Russian forces invaded the rebellious region of Chechnya, further sending chills down the spines of the leaders of the CEE states and starting a protracted, bloody conflict.<sup>109</sup>

Trying to assess what had gone wrong, Talbott guessed that Kozyrev had been goading Yeltsin into making a strong stand at the Budapest summit after the NAC communiqué, but that Kozyrev had succeeded in raising Yeltsin's anxieties beyond what he had intended and was unable to calm Yeltsin down.<sup>110</sup> The U.S. embassy in Moscow described Yeltsin's attitude as that "of a businessman who has just learned that his partner has taken out a new insurance policy in case their venture fails." Yeltsin and his advisers had apparently assumed that, with PFP still in nascent form, progress toward expansion would be on hold.<sup>111</sup> According to Talbott, Kozyrev thought that West Europeans agreed with him, because they "were doing quite a bit of bad-mouthing of our position, saying to the Russians, 'Your problem is not with us—it's with the Americans; they're the ones pushing expansion.'" As a result, "Andrei saw a chance to conduct a splitting maneuver" and the result was the Budapest debacle.<sup>112</sup>

After the summit, Vice President Gore flew to Moscow to try to repair the damage and assure Yeltsin that nothing of significance with regard to enlargement would happen in 1995—that is, during the lead-up to what would be Yeltsin's re-election campaign in 1996. Clinton also wrote to Yeltsin to reinforce what Gore was saying: "NATO will not expand in 1995 and there will be no negotiations in 1995 on admitting new states to NATO." Rather, there would be only internal study, and that would "proceed in parallel" with the development of relations with Russia.<sup>113</sup> Gore had armed himself with a metaphor that he hoped would appeal to the pride of his Russian hosts: the idea that maneuvering both the U.S.-Russian relationship and the NATO expansion process forward simultaneously resembled the docking procedures used to align spacecraft with a space station.<sup>114</sup> Gore's metaphor and Clinton's efforts succeeded in patching up relations somewhat, but the damage had been done.

---

109. Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, pp. 141–149.

110. Memo from Talbott to Christopher, Subject: "The Vice President's Trip to Russia," December 9, 1994, DS-OIPS.

111. State Department cable, 1994-Moscow-36374, December 16, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 85.

112. Memo from Talbott to Christopher, Subject: "The Vice President's Trip to Russia," December 9, 1994.

113. Letter from Clinton to Yeltsin, White House Situation Room, Nodis 9500177, January 6, 1995, DS-OIPS.

114. State Department cable, 1994-Moscow-36923, December 23, 1994, DS-OIPS. See also similar remarks in "Record of the Main Content of the Conversation between I.P. Rybkin and Vice President Gore of the United States A. Gore," Moscow, December 14, 1994, doc. 14, in Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion."

Analyzing Gore's visit for Secretary of State Christopher afterward, Talbott expressed doubts about the wisdom of the vice president's mollifying approach, which *prima facie* was one that Talbott would have supported earlier. Now, however, Talbott was unsure of its merits. "Our current position is based on the proposition that an expanded NATO will not be directed at Russia," but do "we really, or at least entirely, believe this? Certainly the Poles and Czechs don't."<sup>115</sup>

The Budapest debacle and its sequel also concerned Perry, but for different reasons. He could not understand why the NAC communiqué had been released and allowed to cause so much damage when, as far as Perry could tell, Clinton "had not yet made a final decision on NATO expansion." Perry's opponents, in contrast, thought that the secretary of defense was willfully closing his eyes to the post-midterm election reality that the push for expansion was going to become more aggressive; nevertheless, Perry requested a top-level meeting to hear directly from the president what U.S. policy was. On December 21, 1994, Perry joined Gore, Christopher, Lake, Talbott, and Samuel Berger (Lake's deputy) in the president's personal study at the White House for what proved to be a critical discussion.<sup>116</sup>

Gore, recently returned from his visit to Yeltsin, noted that one of the causes of the Budapest debacle was that the "Euros spun up [the] Russians" about U.S. moves, thereby increasing Yeltsin's anxiety. But just for their internal discussion, Gore noted that the "truth is: we have conflicting impulses" with regard to the CEE states and the Russians.<sup>117</sup> The hard fact was that Washington could not prioritize both at the same time. Ultimately, according to Perry, Clinton and Gore "felt that right was on the side of the eastern European countries that wanted to enter NATO soon, that deferring expansion until later in the decade was not feasible, and that the Russians could be convinced that expansion was not directed against them."<sup>118</sup> The group settled on a four-to-five-year time frame, although, as Christopher added, "I can't see any of us saying this in public."<sup>119</sup> Upset by Clinton's decision, Perry considered resigning.<sup>120</sup>

115. Memo from Talbott to Christopher, Subject: "The Vice President's Trip to Russia," December 9, 1994.

116. Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 31.

117. Quoted in "Mtg./Pres. on NATO + Russia—12/21/94," handwritten notes, DS-OIPS. In a conversation between the author and Nicholas Burns on November 5, 2018, Burns confirmed that he was the notetaker. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 96–98, where Asmus treats this meeting as a catch-up session, informing Perry of what had already become U.S. policy. The evidence suggests, however, that the policy was more of an open issue at the time than Asmus's account conveys.

118. Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 32.

119. "Mtg./Pres. on NATO + Russia—12/21/94."

120. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, pp. 128–129, gives the date of the meeting as 1996, but, from context, the meeting was actually in 1994; and the date of Perry's earlier discussion of this

Instead, he told his team that it was now clear that expansion “would go forward on a brisk schedule”; and, as a result, it would be an “uphill struggle” to keep U.S.-Russian cooperation on track.<sup>121</sup>

The shift in U.S. thinking unsurprisingly contributed to more tensions with Moscow, as evidenced by Talbott’s subsequent negotiations. Kozyrev tried to convince Talbott that a better idea would be to transform NATO into “a collective security organization rather than a vehicle for containment” by amending the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>122</sup> Talbott rejected the idea, saying “no way are we going to entertain the possibility of redefining NATO in any way that compromises its basic mission.”<sup>123</sup> Put bluntly, “We’re not in the business of having to ‘compensate’ Russia or buy it off. Russia is not doing us a favor by allowing NATO to expand.”<sup>124</sup>

Talbott’s views had evolved considerably from the time in October 1993 when he had supported the phased approach. Also, in February 1994, he had been promoted to deputy secretary. In the course of his confirmation hearings, he had been criticized by Republicans for being too concerned about Russia, and the criticism seemed to have rankled him, especially after the Republicans’ 1994 midterm election victory.<sup>125</sup> By early 1995, he had become much more strident in his assertions, as shown by a critique of Gore’s docking metaphor that he had sent to Christopher (and is worth quoting at length). Talbott did not like the docking concept because it wrongly implied that both the United States and Russia had to move and maneuver; in fact, “it’s Russia that must move toward us, toward our way of doing things.” He admitted that, for some Americans, “not to mention a lot of Russians (and other non-Americans), this may be an obnoxious confirmation of our doctrine of ‘exceptionalism.’” His response? “Well, tough. That’s us; that’s the U.S. We are exceptional.” At the end of the Cold War, “we and the Soviet Union didn’t meet each other halfway, and we and Russia aren’t going to do so either.” So, “Russia is either coming our

---

meeting in his coauthored biography with Carter is also 1994 (see Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 31), so “1996” is presumably a typo.

121. Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 32. See also Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 95; and Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 146. Talbott’s interpretation of the meeting differs from Perry’s; Talbott suggests that the main result of the meeting was to continue to support Pfp. Talbott’s recollection on what was essentially the short-term strategy, however, is not inconsistent with what is suggested by Perry and the sources from the time as the long-term strategy, namely, that the overall goal was to move forward with full Article 5 expansion, just quietly in the first instance.

122. “Mamedov-ST 1-on-1, Brussels, Jan 10, 1500–1800,” n.d. (year not given, but, from context, January 10, 1995), DS-OIPS.

123. “January 11, 1995, Chris,” Talbott to Christopher, DS-OIPS. See also Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 107.

124. “Memorandum for the Secretary,” from Strobe Talbott, Subject: “Preparing for Geneva,” January 12, 1995, DS-OIPS.

125. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 64–65; and Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 92.

way, or it's not, in which case it's going to founder, as the USSR did." Talbott then offered what he thought was a better metaphor: that of the United States as a lighthouse, showing the way toward "democratic elections, free press, pluralism, open markets, civil society, rule of law, independent judiciary, checks and balances, respect for minority rights, civilian control of the military." As a result, U.S. strategy should be "intended to make sure that the rickety, leaky, oversized, cannon-laden Good Ship Russia, with its stinking bilge, its erratic, autocratic captain, and its semi-mutinuous crew . . . has a clearly visible point on the horizon to steer by."<sup>126</sup> At the very latest, when Talbott later in 1995 went public (in less colorful terms) with some of these ideas in a widely circulated *New York Review of Books* contribution called "Why NATO Should Grow," everyone knew that something profound had shifted. Michael McFaul, a future U.S. ambassador to Russia, recalled that article as the moment when what was already true internally became publicly known: there was no going back.<sup>127</sup>

With Talbott now on the side of Lake, the troika, and Holbrooke, among others, momentum was clearly on the side of a more direct route to NATO expansion. By Christmas 1994, a leaked cable from the German ambassador to NATO alerted the world that the United States was abandoning its Russia-first strategy.<sup>128</sup> In January 1995, Clinton gave a speech in Cleveland in which he indicated that expansion was inevitable.<sup>129</sup> Also in January, the State Department sent the U.S. mission to NATO a text "which the U.S. believes should emerge from the alliance's internal deliberations on enlargement." It declared that there "will be no second-tier security guarantees."<sup>130</sup> Washington also put out a strategy for an upcoming "NATO Study/Presentation on Expansion."<sup>131</sup> As Holbrooke was able to advise Warsaw, 1994 was "the year in which NATO committed to expansion, and that Poland would be a likely beneficiary of that decision."<sup>132</sup> Senator Sam Nunn pushed back, saying in a speech that the "security of NATO, Russia's neighbors, and the countries of Eastern Europe will not be enhanced if the Russian military finger moves closer to the nuclear trig-

126. Untitled memo from Strobe Talbott to Warren Christopher, March 24, 1995, DS-OIPS. On this document, see also Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 111–112.

127. Talbott, "Why NATO Should Grow," *New York Review of Books*, August 10, 1995, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/08/10/why-nato-should-grow>; and author interview with Michael McFaul, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 16, 2018.

128. Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security*, p. 92; and Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 70.

129. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 102.

130. State Department cable, 1995-State-008688, January 12, 1995, DS-OIPS.

131. State Department cable, 1995-USNATO-00287, January 25, 1995, DS-OIPS.

132. State Department cable, 1995-Warsaw-01304, January 30, 1995, DS-OIPS.

ger.”<sup>133</sup> Despite Nunn’s concerns, on February 16, 1995, Congress passed the NATO Expansion Act of 1995, thus formalizing congressional support.<sup>134</sup>

The story of NATO expansion does not, of course, end there. Many debates were still to come—over the exact number of states to be admitted (three or five, if Slovakia or Romania were included), over how to secure Senate ratification, over whether there would be subsequent rounds of enlargement and how many, and over the actual cost. By early 1995, however, the outline of expansion as it subsequently occurred was in place.<sup>135</sup> To paraphrase Asmus, 1994 was the year that Washington decided how to expand NATO. In the immediate aftermath of that decision, Washington and Moscow would find temporary ways to patch over their differences, and Russia would half-heartedly join a diminished PfP and later receive the consolation prize of a nonbinding accord called the NATO-Russia Founding Act to allow it to save face, but the spirit of cooperative agreement would not match that of the announcement of PfP.

### Conclusion

Why did the Clinton administration decide twenty-five years ago to enlarge the Atlantic alliance in the way that it did? The decision emerged from a “ratcheting down” process with three key developments: one under President Bush in 1990, preserving NATO’s dominance in the face of post-Cold War alternatives; and two under President Clinton, initially employing a phased approach embodied in PfP, but switching, ultimately, to a full Article 5 mode of enlargement. This full-guarantee mode was in some ways the easiest and most obvious solution, as it did not require the development of a new institution or new forms of alliance membership in the way that PfP did, but it was also more likely to cause friction with Russia.

The evidence presented above shows that multiple historical factors combined to produce the success of the supporters of full-guarantee enlargement. At first, advocates of PfP gained the upper hand by drawing both on the desire for a peacekeeping organization to aid in the Balkans, which could in turn put new life into the alliance; and, more significantly, on worry about the potential impact on U.S.-Russian bilateral arms control implied by immediate full Article 5 expansion. By the end of 1994, however, opponents of this phased ap-

---

133. Quoted in Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997*, p. 81.

134. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 83.

135. For in-depth accounts of the post-1995 debates, see Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*; and Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*.

proach had triumphed, thanks largely to (1) missteps by Russia, which was allowing corruption to derail internal reforms; trying unsuccessfully to use the PfP and OSCE to dilute or weaken NATO; and conducting an unsuccessful conflict in Chechnya, raising fears of future such conflicts elsewhere; (2) pressure from CEE states for quicker NATO enlargement; and above all (3) success by the Republicans in the 1994 midterm elections on the basis of a platform that endorsed swifter expansion. Two major geopolitical transitions under way in 1994 additionally helped the opponents of a phased approach: (1) the final withdrawal of all remaining former Soviet troops from Germany, which removed a potential brake on enlargement; and (2) a promising start to the transfer of nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia. Before that transfer began, the need to provide some form of security partnership to Ukraine had been a top concern of policymakers; and, as Clinton himself noted, that need helped PfP, since Ukraine could readily be in the Partnership but would have a hard time becoming a full NATO member on economic, geographic, and other grounds. After the Ukrainian government agreed to give up former Soviet nuclear weapons, however, that need was less pressing. Finally, interacting with the other five factors was President Clinton's increasing sympathy to the appeals of CEE leaders, which inclined him toward those aides pushing for full Article 5 expansion, and his personal optimism that Russia would eventually tolerate enlargement.

What were the consequences of this sequence of events? In the wake of the Republican Party's 1994 midterm election victory, CEE states were set on the road to Article 5 guarantees sooner than they would have been under PfP; but they also became the new front line in Europe. Already in October 1997, Senator Joseph Biden wondered aloud whether "continuing the Partnership for Peace, which turned out to be much more robust and much more successful than I think anyone thought it would be at the outset, may arguably have been a better way to go." In other words, "to continue that process and beef it up before you move to expansion, if you move to expansion, would have been better."<sup>136</sup> Others have echoed Biden's views. Angela Stent noted in 1999 that PfP was an "infinitely flexible program" that could at once be both an alternative to immediate NATO membership and a path to it.<sup>137</sup> Finally, Ashton Carter and William Perry have argued that, in light of what was at stake, it would have been better to defer admission of new members, which could have been "accomplished in time by the workings of the Partnership for Peace, enhanced by ad hoc joint operations such as in

---

136. Quoted in Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 169.

137. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, p. 215.

Bosnia.”<sup>138</sup> In Perry’s view, arms control—most notably, START II, which would have eliminated two-thirds of the U.S. and Russian arsenals, but never went into effect—ended up being “a casualty of NATO expansion” and of fighting between the Kremlin and the Duma.<sup>139</sup> START III suffered a similar fate, not even progressing to a signing. Looking back in 2015, Perry concluded: “The downsides of early NATO membership for Eastern European nations were even worse than I had feared.”<sup>140</sup>

Put differently, the ultimate challenge in post-Cold War Europe was to find a way to integrate Russia as a constructive component, rather than as a confrontational challenger. Speculating on counterfactuals is always risky, particularly if they involve Moscow; as the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin’s friend Prince Pyotr Andreyevich Vyazemsky once remarked, “If you want a foreigner to make a fool of himself, just ask him to make a judgment about Russia.”<sup>141</sup> With this caution in mind, however, the evidence suggests that PfP, which Moscow eventually joined, would have had a better chance of allowing the West to sustain cooperation with Russia while enlarging the alliance. Moreover, the third ratchet marginalized PfP at a critical moment in the Russian domestic political debate, as elites in Moscow shifted their priorities away from democratization and toward preservation of great power status as the country’s highest goal. That shift was happening independently of U.S. decisionmaking on the future of NATO, but the transition in U.S. policy toward full-guarantee enlargement helped intensify it.<sup>142</sup> As Arne Westad has argued, it is “clear that the West should have dealt with post-Cold War Russia better than it did,” not least because “Russia would under all circumstances remain a crucial state in any international system because of its sheer size.”<sup>143</sup>

Retracing the narrative of NATO enlargement with the benefit of both hindsight and new evidence thus reveals the need for a reframing of the discussion about expansion. Too often the debate over enlargement devolves into binary, Manichean fights over whether it was good or bad. By shifting the focus to implementation, it becomes apparent that there was a spectrum of enlargement possibilities, and that alternate strategies on that spectrum may have worked

138. Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 29; author interview with Ashton Carter, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 20, 2017; and author interview with William Perry, Stanford, California, June 8, 2017.

139. Quoted in Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 29.

140. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, p. 152.

141. Quoted in Rodric Braithwaite, *Across the Moscow River: The World Turned Upside Down* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), p. ix.

142. The author is grateful to Vladislav Zubok for this point.

143. Westad, *The Cold War*, p. 623.

better. Therefore, rather than asking yet again whether enlargement was right or wrong, it is more illuminating to ask whether the chosen strategy of enlargement—the “how”—suited the goal of maximizing long-term security gains for the United States and its allies. Viewed from twenty-five years on, with U.S.-Russian confrontation on the rise, democracy crumbling in Hungary and Poland, and U.S. tanks returning to Europe, there is room for doubt. Given that the window of opportunity for changes is now firmly shut, however, NATO must make the best of the status quo; for the foreseeable future, confrontation with Russia is once again the order of the day.

To conclude, there were various Cold War precedents for expanding NATO, and further post-Cold War options emerged in the early 1990s. These alternatives are now largely forgotten. As President Clinton consistently emphasized at the time, however, what mattered was not only the “when” but also the “how” of enlargement. Full-guarantee expansion emerged as the “how” in the wake of the Republican Party’s 1994 midterm election victory and as the result of aggressive maneuvering by its proponents. The evidence regarding this development and its legacy show that the answer to the seemingly subordinate question of how the United States implements its strategy can matter as much as whether and when it does so.