

Standing at the Crossroads: NATO in the Twenty First Century

By James Seaman

The end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, and NATO's recent decision to expand, has brought new challenges to the organization. As NATO cannot remain stagnant without losing its will to act, the best policy is to include Russia as a member. Including Russia would alleviate Russia's view of the West as a potential aggressor, give NATO legitimacy in the volatile Balkans and display America's commitment to Russia's efforts to adopt democracy and capitalism. NATO expansion should include all major European players, of which Russia is one.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in 1949, born of east-west Cold War hostility and suspicion. NATO was a military alliance, designed to provide a unified western front against the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact encompassed most of Eastern Europe and included only Soviet-friendly communist regimes. With the Cold War passing into the archives of history, many have questioned the relevance of NATO. The organization is clearly at a crossroads in terms of what goals and policies, if any, to pursue in the twenty-first century. As NATO's strongest member, the United States plays a significant role in determining the fate of the alliance. While the most recent policy has been to support NATO expansion, this framework presents dangers, especially when one considers the fate of NATO's traditional enemy—the Russians. After considering various policy options, and always keeping a keen eye on history, it becomes apparent that the best choice for the United States is to support a continued policy of NATO expansion—one that will bring Russia into the alliance.

STATUS OF NATO

NATO's original treaty states that the organization's members will consult when the territorial integrity, independence, or security of any member is threatened (Henrikson 1995, 96-97). Essentially, NATO was to guard against European war and security threats in general, not specifically against the Soviet Union or any other particular threat. Throughout the Cold War, of course, all NATO's members assumed that the

primary threat to security in Europe was the Soviet Union. It is significant that NATO's original charter did not specify the Soviet threat, though, because this allows one to argue that the end of the Cold War did not automatically signify the end of NATO's original goals. Security in Europe is the goal, thus maintaining the NATO alliance even after the collapse of the Soviet threat means that NATO is pursuing its larger goal of European stability and security. Therefore, considering that NATO's original charter does not point to Eastern European and Russian communism as the reason for its existence, NATO's current expansion eastward is not as ironic as it might at first appear.

Currently, NATO is expanding its membership to include Eastern European nations. The end of the Cold War a decade ago left NATO facing a significant crossroads: to declare the Cold War won and its mission accomplished, to maintain the organization's status quo, or to expand and include former members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Only in recent years has it become evident that NATO does not wish to maintain the status quo. NATO has begun to expand, officially adding Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. This increases NATO's size to nineteen countries, and drastically changes the organization's composition, with the former enemies of Eastern Europe becoming official members of the alliance. Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) may be future candidates for NATO expansion.

NATO's current geographical expansion coincides with the expansion of roles for the organization. With the deployment of NATO peacekeeping troops into Bosnia in 1995, and the airstrikes against Serbia in the spring of 1999, NATO's mission has changed from deterring the Soviet Union to active participation in the dramatic events in the Balkans. This new role means an expansion for NATO in two ways. First, NATO has expanded beyond simply a defensive securi-

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ty alliance to become an organization apparently dedicated to peacekeeping. Secondly, the use of NATO troops in the former Yugoslavia means NATO has expanded the boundary of the area it considers part of its sphere.

Significantly, Russia sees NATO expansion as a threat. Russia considers the countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe to be within its sphere of influence. More importantly, the Russians view Eastern Europe as part of its security zone, protecting it from the West. Just as significantly, the Russians have traditionally seen the Serbs (currently at the heart of the Balkan conflict) as brothers, sharing a common Slavic and Christian Orthodox heritage. In October of 1996, the Russian Duma voted 307-0 in favor of a resolution warning that enlargement of NATO could trigger a serious crisis between Russia and the West (Kahl 1998, 23). In fact, Russia may find it has no choice but to rely on the leverage of its nuclear weapons to make up for its lack of conventional military capability.

The Russians may also feel threatened economically by NATO's expansion eastward. Russia currently finds itself in a position of economic weakness. Simultaneously, Moscow finds itself being isolated by the West (the United States in particular) as its old Cold War enemy seeks to expand NATO eastward without offering an invitation to the Russians. This has the potential to rally nationalist sentiments in Russia, sentiments that may appear increasingly anti-American. As NATO expands to include the countries to Russia's west, Russia may increasingly find itself with nowhere to turn but within, perhaps to be swallowed by a resurgence of communism and/or nationalism.

UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIANS

In understanding Russia's suspicion of NATO expansion, it is crucial to appreciate Russian history as a tragic story of invasion, violation, and exploitation from all sides: the east, the south, and particularly the west. In a 1931 speech, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin outlined the nature of Russia's historical abuse:

She was beaten by the Mongol Khans, she was beaten by the Turkish beys, she was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords, she was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian Gentry, she was beaten by the British and French capitalists, she was beaten by the Japanese barons (Adams 1986, 63).

Ten years after this speech, Russia was the victim of the largest invasion in military history, as Hitler sent 150 divisions and over three million men across the Russian border in Operation Barbarossa (Beavor, 1998, 12-13). And this was a mere generation after the Kaiser's troops had penetrated deep into Russian territory, causing immense death and destruction in the first World War. Nor can the United States be judged innocent by the jury of Russian history, as 1918 saw President Woodrow Wilson send American troops into Russian Siberia to fight with Czarist loyalists against the Red Army (Service 1997, 102). Twenty-seven million dead in World War II left

the Russians desperate to protect their flank against future invasion from the West. In this light, Stalin's insistence on Soviet-friendly regimes in Eastern Europe can be seen as more than crude Soviet aggression.

After two world wars, and a lengthy history of bloody invasion, Russia saw it as a necessity to create a buffer-zone out of the vast plain between itself and Germany to offer protection not only from the Germans, but also from a historically hostile West. While the United States and its Western European allies viewed NATO as a justified defensive alliance in the face of a potentially threatening Soviet Union, Russia saw the alliance as offensive aggression. To the Russians, NATO simply fit into a pattern of Western hostility (Hixson 1995, 30).

The crucial element in all of this history is that American intentions have been interpreted by the Russians differently from the Americans themselves. American ideology produces the American mindset through which these events are viewed. The Russian viewpoint is framed by the turbulent stream of Russian history. Therefore, it is practically inevitable that NATO expansion, in the manner in which it has thus far progressed, will be viewed suspiciously by Russia. Any American who struggles to understand the Russian opinion of NATO expansion should consider the likely American mood if the countries of South and Central America were to join into a defensive alliance, and not extend an invitation to the United States. Furthermore, to make this analogy legitimate, one would also have to imagine that the allied countries of Latin America were economically and militarily powerful, with a history of hostile behavior toward the United States. Indeed, with two huge oceans to the east and west, and with relatively weak military and/or economic entities to the north and south, it is very difficult for any American to understand the defensive attitude undertaken by the Russians.

Russia's sense of isolation is deepened by the rejection of Russian requests to be granted membership in NATO. In 1992-93, Russian representatives expressed readiness to join NATO. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev both spoke about entry into NATO as a long-term political goal (Meseznikov 1998, 99). Of course, these Russian overtures were not met with sincere consideration by the West. This rejection of Russia is based on the belief in many Western circles that Russia is too weak to oppose Western plans. This belief could prove especially dangerous, particularly if it leads to attempts to exploit Russia. The danger exists in the possibility of a resurgent Russia in the future. Under such circumstances as a Russian recovery, the United States and Western Europe may pay a heavy price for their current stance toward the Russians.

America's current policy of NATO expansion eastward without (at this point) the likely possibility of extending an invitation to Russia must be viewed as a potential danger. A sense of alienation and isolation could potentially cause an adverse reaction among Russian leaders and the Russian peo-

ple. The United States must realize the position it is in: a definite crossroads, with an opportunity to reach out to the Russians and recent and even centuries of hostility between Russia and the West as a whole. Unfortunately, America's current policy is to encroach on Russia's western protection zone. An opportunity exists to bring Russia into the community of Western nations. The current pattern of NATO expansion in the face of Russian reservations could deepen Russia's sense of being discriminated against and ignored. This pattern could certainly strengthen the position of Russian hypernationalists or other extremist groups who could rally sentiment against NATO expansion in order to discredit current Russian leadership and thereby hinder democratic changes in Russia (Kahl 1998, 22).

POLICY OPTIONS

If the current United States policy of supporting NATO's eastward expansion without the inclusion of Russia is a mistake, policy alternatives must be examined. One possibility is for the United States to support Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as new NATO members, but then cease the endorsement of further NATO expansion which would further threaten Russia's western borders. Clearly, NATO cannot reverse the acquisition of the three former Warsaw Pact nations it has already included in the alliance. Sending a message to the Russians that further expansion is not desired, though, might lessen Moscow's fears of further Western expansion and aggression. In the sense that halting further expansion of NATO might allow for a stronger friendship between Russia and the West, this policy option has distinct benefits.

NATO, however, cannot allow itself to become a stagnant organization. Like any organization, NATO needs solid goals and ideological commitments which will maintain the strength and will of its members. During the Cold War, NATO did not lack a mission because the perceived Soviet threat constantly forged a strong commitment from NATO's members. With the end of the Cold War, though, NATO was suddenly left with an ideological void. If communism and the Soviet threat no longer posed a significant challenge, what would be the purpose of NATO's existence? More specifically, NATO is a security alliance. Extinguishing NATO's primary security threat left the organization without a mission. In one sense, the collapse of communism and of the Soviet Union posed more of a threat to NATO's existence than the Red Army ever did. Without an ideological commitment and without a legitimate security challenge, NATO's members may lose their will to act. Thus the strength and legitimacy of the organization will erode, and NATO will either dissolve or exist as an impotent nominal organization. Maintaining the status quo does not give NATO the challenges it needs to forge renewed commitments from its members. Indeed, the viability of NATO, which currently depends on its systemic character, could be jeopardized unless the alliance expands (Henrikson 1995, 102).

The answer to this problem exists in the two forms of NATO expansion mentioned earlier. One form of expansion is institutional, with the addition of Eastern European nations into the alliance. The second form of expansion is an increase of NATO's military role in Europe—specifically the peacekeeping actions being undertaken in the Balkan region. The institutional expansion certainly provides a new challenge to NATO, as the organization becomes committed to helping democracy and capitalism succeed in Eastern Europe. In fact, the enlargement of NATO shows the United States' willingness to use the military alliance as a means for accomplishing the political objective of encouraging the preferred pattern of development in the countries of Eastern Europe. NATO is now seen not solely as a military alliance, but a political instrument used to promote liberal democracy. In fact, Dariusz Rosati, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in 1996 that Poland wanted to join NATO for reasons other than defensive security. Rosati suggested Poland sought NATO membership "because we support the beliefs of NATO—a democratic society, preservation of human rights, and a free market economy" (Kahl 1998, 13). Therefore, the institutional expansion of NATO allows for an ideological expansion that gives the member countries of NATO the new challenges needed to forge the will to act.

Clearly, the expansion of NATO gives the organization new challenges and ideological missions needed to keep the organization relevant. On the other hand, many have argued that searching for new roles to replace the Soviet threat is not constructive and that NATO *should* admit its usefulness has expired. It can be argued that NATO is the relic of a bygone, bipolar era, and the organization should therefore declare Cold War victory, and enter into retirement. Dissolving NATO would certainly be a solution to the problem of encroachment on Russia's western boundaries. Yet dissolving NATO would cause the United States to forfeit many of the benefits derived from membership in the organization.

Dissolving NATO would, first of all, cut one of the strongest ties between the United States and Western Europe. The fifty year-old military alliance has left no doubt that the Americans and Western Europeans are committed to one another. The dissolution of NATO would cease this major form of American and European cooperation and mutual commitment. The United States has always viewed Europe as a vital economic and security interest in the world. The existence of NATO guarantees that this economically and strategically significant continent is a strong ally of the United States. The close ties between the United States and Europe are almost taken for granted. The emergence of a strong European Union (EU) could lead to the creation of European interests separate from those of the United States. The EU could potentially develop as a power to rival, or even threaten, the United States both economically and militarily. The current trend in Western Europe is to turn inward economically. Since the introduction of the Single Market in 1986, Western European countries trade more than ever with each other but less with the rest of the world (Coker 1998, 6).

If the economic partnership between the United States and Europe continues to develop into a rivalry, the military unity that NATO provides will become significantly more important in holding together the U.S.-European link. An alliance as close as the one between Europe and the United States cannot be taken for granted. The United States must work to maintain a substantial friendship with the countries of Europe. An enduring commitment to NATO is one of the strongest ways to accomplish this.

NATO should also be recognized as a beneficial organization for its European members. For example, conflicts between Germany and France, Turkey and Greece, as well as Britain and Iceland have all been solved by commitment to one another as NATO allies (Henrikson 1995, 101). In fact, American commitment to NATO is in large part responsible for the forging of common European interests. Before the Cold War, Western Europe was never unified to the degree it has been under NATO. France and Germany, for example, were traditional enemies. NATO was a major reason for putting German and French nationalism aside and forging a mutual commitment between the two countries. Therefore, it can be said that NATO has done much more than simply deter the Soviet Union. By assuring the American-European partnership, by subverting traditional ties of European nationalism, and by forging a commitment to democracy and stability in the eastern half of the continent, NATO has proven to be an organization of substantial significance. To dissolve NATO would be to endanger far too many positive aspects of the alliance.

INCLUDING THE RUSSIANS

NATO's expansion eastward is viewed as a threat by Russia, but halting expansion would leave the organization void of crucial challenges and ideological commitments. Further, dissolving the alliance would cause a forfeiture of the numerous benefits, both to the United States and to Europe, of NATO membership. Only one viable policy option remains: to include Russia in future NATO expansion. This position is certainly controversial, and the process of including Moscow would require convincing many critics that such a move would be worthwhile. Therefore, it is necessary to refute the points of opposition to Russian inclusion in NATO and to understand how Russian membership in the organization would be beneficial to all parties involved.

One of the major arguments against further NATO expansion is the cost of upgrading the military and intelligence capabilities of new NATO members. In February 1997, the Clinton Administration released a study suggesting that the inclusion of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in the alliance would cost between \$27 billion and \$35 billion from 1997 to 2007. The United States' share of the expansion was suggested to cost between \$150 million and \$200 million per year for the ten years following the expansion

(Goldgeier 1999, 132). It is important to compare the cost of NATO expansion to the cost of defending new NATO members against a renewed, resurgent Russia. Ivan Eland prepared a Congressional Budget Office estimate in 1996 that included the possibility of a militarily resurgent Russia. According to these numbers, NATO expansion would likely cost \$70 billion in the decade following enlargement (Goldgeier 1999, 132). Therefore, while expanding NATO institutionally to include a new member will require a hefty price-tag, this cost is dwarfed by what it will take for NATO to defend its Eastern European members against a future attack from a potentially strengthened and hostile Russia that is excluded from NATO. Consider the cost (in both dollars and lives) it took for America to wage the Cold War. Such a thought is sobering, and it makes a partnership with Russia much more attractive than the potential of a future confrontation with Moscow.

Another argument against the expansion of NATO to include Russia is the notion that, institutionally, NATO will suffer the same fate as the United Nations. The UN is seen by many as a bloated bureaucracy that includes too many diverse interests to operate effectively. The argument is that continued NATO expansion, particularly the inclusion of Russia, will cause NATO to become just as ineffective as the UN. However, one can begin by examining the history of NATO expansion, realizing that past expansion has benefited the organization. The additions of Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1982 have made the alliance stronger, not weaker. Much of the inefficiency in the UN derives from the gridlock of differing political interests. While its members have been concerned with political interests, NATO has always been primarily a military alliance, not a political organization. By its nature, NATO has not been prone to the level of stagnation and bureaucratic inefficiency plaguing the UN. However, the shifting of goals to include the encouragement of democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe has introduced new roles for NATO. The key will be for NATO to adapt. Just as the organization adapted to include additional countries in the past, it must now grow into new changes.

Working in NATO's favor is the fact that commitment to democracy and capitalism are a litmus test for potential NATO members. The pattern is to encourage political and economic homogeneity among members. The UN does not expect its members to meet such rigid qualifications, and thus the organization is racked by discord. For a country like Russia, where the United States has sought for a decade to promote democracy and capitalism, it only makes sense to offer NATO membership as an inducement. Many have raised the question of whether Russia is committed to democracy and capitalism. Perhaps we should ask whether the United States has been fully committed to democracy and capitalism in Russia.

Beyond the examples of past NATO expansion, looking to other examples of European security organizations expand-

ing to include their former enemies is not as far-fetched as it seems. In fact, the Quadruple Alliance, used to defeat Napoleonic France, soon invited France into the alliance and became the basis of the Concert of Europe which would maintain relative peace on the continent for ninety-nine years (Henrikson 1995, 101). By inviting its former enemy into the fold, this nineteenth-century alliance kept peace in Europe because it included the interests of every major power on the continent. The development of the Quadruple Alliance into the Concert of Europe serves as the perfect precedent for how NATO can invite Russia to become part of its alliance.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Russia in NATO will give the organization more legitimacy in dealing with the ongoing crises of the Balkan region. As mentioned earlier, NATO has expanded its role to include peacekeeping missions in the Balkans. The Balkans have also proven to be the most volatile region on the continent. The combination of these two elements suggests that NATO will see more action in the former Yugoslavia. This is an area where Russia can provide NATO with capabilities currently beyond its means. Since the Russians share a common Slavic and Christian Orthodox heritage, the Serbs are much more likely to negotiate with Russia than with a NATO void of Russian influence and interest. NATO must bring the capabilities of its organization in line with the challenges of the external environment it faces (Jackson & Dutkiewicz 1998, 3). In reference to the Balkans, updating its capabilities by including Russia is the most legitimate and potentially successful way for NATO to deal peacefully with the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, if NATO plans to expand its roles to include action in the Balkans, it must recognize that this puts the organization in conflict with the Russian sphere of influence. NATO has little choice then, but to realize that its action in the Balkans equates to a shared interest with the Russians. It is impossible for NATO to expand its defined interests into Eastern Europe and the Balkans and not recognize the Russians. The easiest and best way to diffuse the potential conflict between Russia and NATO over spheres of influence is for NATO to include Russia in its alliance. To ignore Russian interests in Eastern Europe and the Balkans is particularly short-sighted for the United States, as these areas are literally next door to Russia, while the United States is thousands of miles away.

As questions arise over how best to keep NATO from becoming as awkward and bureaucratically inefficient as the UN, questions also arise about NATO conflicting with the jurisdiction of the UN. However, the UN should view NATO as a positive contributor to world stability, as NATO has allowed the UN to focus on conflicts and issues outside of Europe. As mentioned earlier, NATO has resolved conflicts between its own members—most significantly France and Germany. By taking care of its own problems, NATO has successfully reduced the potential burden on the UN. Furthermore, NATO has proven more successful than the

UN in acting to halt the chaos occurring in the Balkan region. The conflict in Bosnia is the perfect example, as the UN repeatedly proved unable to act with the will needed to stop the fighting and provide relief to the war-torn region. The deployment of NATO forces in 1995 accomplished what the UN could not. Only NATO possesses command of the military forces, communications structures, strategy and intelligence to effectively act in a crisis (Jackson & Dutkiewicz 1998, 3). It can be argued that NATO has done more in its history to contribute to international peace and stability than has the United Nations (Henrikson 1995, 96).

Along with accomplishing its goals in the Balkans more successfully than the UN, NATO reserves the right to intervene where its interests are threatened. Article Four of NATO's 1949 Washington Treaty clearly implies that alliance members are expected to use their partnership as a means for coordinated action in other parts of the world (Henrikson 1995, 96). Clearly, NATO members can seek to protect their collective interests in any part of the world where those interests are threatened. This provides the legal justification for NATO involvement in the Balkans. Because NATO is not defined strictly as a regional organization, it does not fall under the UN's jurisdiction to regulate regional organizations as defined in Chapter VIII, Article 53 of the UN Charter (Henrikson 1995, 97).

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing NATO's current status, and American support of that status, and after examining alternative policy options for the United States, one can conclude that expanding NATO to include Russia is the best choice for United States policy makers. Current NATO expansion is viewed as a threat by the Russians and this becomes a potential danger when one realizes that Russia will not remain in its current position of weakness forever. Not expanding NATO will lead to a shortage of challenges and the lack of an ideological mission for the alliance. Committing itself to democracy in Eastern Europe, as well as peace in the Balkans, replaces the void left for NATO when the Soviet Union collapsed. Dissolving NATO will rob the United States and the other member nations of the alliance of the benefits they derive from membership in the organization. Only by expanding NATO to include Russia can the United States and the other members of NATO eliminate the cost of arming Eastern Europe against a potentially threatening Russia in the future. Only by expanding NATO to include Russia can the alliance gain the legitimacy needed to diffuse conflicts in the Balkans. Finally, history shows that European alliances have the potential to expand and operate successfully while including the interests of all major powers on the continent, suggesting that NATO does not have to become as inefficient as the UN.

Expanding NATO to include its former enemy will require the support of the nations of Western Europe, not just the United States. As the strongest NATO member, howev-

er, the United States must take the lead in advocating an expanded NATO. Allowing Russia to join NATO will be a significant step toward thwarting major European conflict in the twenty-first century and moving the continent beyond the bloodshed that defined twentieth century European history.

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