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NATO ENLARGEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP
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In continuing our discussion on NATO enlargement and future membership, I will pose five sets of questions and highlight issues that NATO may need to consider in making decisions about the future size, composition, and role of the Alliance.

1. Is NATO Enlargement Still A Valuable Strategy?

Given the evolving role of NATO since the end of the Cold War, we need to ask and answer some blunt questions. For example, to what degree is the Alliance a vital global player, either politically or militarily, in resolving conflicts or in conducting essential combat operations as regional crises unfold? Has NATO essentially become a post-conflict peace keeping, state rebuilding, and resource protecting operation subordinate to U.S strategy or supplemental to the distinct national interests of individual members? This is not quite hard security and not exactly soft-security, where claims pre-eminence, but maybe “medium-soft security” or “chewy security.” Remember that NATO has several missions beyond Europe’s borders many of which have little to do with either traditional or even unconventional combat operations. Has this undermined NATO’s commitment to Article 5 in the perceptions of new members and candidates?

NATO’s changing role has important implications for the prospects of Alliance enlargement. Has the inclusion of ten new members from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) during the past decade invigorated and modernized the Alliance? Or has enlargement primarily contributed to transforming NATO from a mutual defense organization with a strong military core to an increasingly loose security body with diverse interests and multiple goals? Alternatively, has enlargement helped to prolong NATO’s lifespan and given it purpose by reforming and absorbing new allies rather than dissipating and eventually going out of business? And will potential new members contribute not only to NATO’s size but also to its capability and flexibility? Conversely, what added value is there for members and candidates to participate in diverse NATO missions?

What about NATO’s relations with the EU? Clearly the EU is not united in its vision of NATO’s future and therefore NATO is also disunited in its prescriptions regarding its own development and size. Furthermore, many NATO candidates have viewed NATO entry as a step toward EU membership, but what if the latter process is blocked? Will this constrain support for meeting NATO standards and qualifying for NATO accession among aspirants? And will Alliance enlargement become even more urgent to consolidate democratic reform in the absence of EU membership commitments? Beyond this, will the EU and NATO compete or complement each other in future security

challenges, whether hard, soft, or chewy? Ultimately, can Europe afford or want to afford both NATO's and the EU's evolving security instruments?

2. Is NATO Membership Still An Attractive Option in the Wider Europe? And What Are The Alternatives?

The remaining post-communist states in Eastern Europe have differing views of NATO and their prospective inclusion. Their positions can be categorized into four main groups: eager (Croatia, Albania, Macedonia, Georgia), interested (Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Kosovo), skeptical (Serbia, Ukraine, Armenia), or oppositionist (Belarus, Russia). For the smaller democratic countries with a pro-Western political and public consensus, NATO entry signifies a successful benchmark of national progress, irrespective of NATO's current global role and military effectiveness. This is unlikely to change, especially if open door promises continue to be issued by Alliance leaders.

However, if the NATO door narrows or closes or if "enlargement fatigue" were to become evident among the Allies, then what are the skeptics in particular likely to do and where can they turn? Some could remain neutral and seek to benefit from military modernization and inter-operability without formally joining NATO or undertaking any operational commitments. But how successful would this be in the long-term and would it help NATO to stabilize its neighborhood without prospects of enlargement, given that expansion has been one of NATO's most successful political strategies? Other countries could be drawn more closely into a Russian orbit, especially as Moscow seeks to develop the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) into a counterpart for NATO in the former Soviet space and is using various instruments to dissuade further Alliance expansion.

In addition, what would be the posture of potential candidates and recent members if U.S. political and military commitments to NATO were to diminish? Most of these countries have viewed the Alliance as an organization that ensures American engagement with and in Europe. Would their commitments to NATO also dissipate as a result? And would they concentrate their efforts on building stronger bilateral ties with the U.S. rather than investing in NATO?

3. What Are The Prospects For A NATO Southern Dimension?

The Southern Dimension is a probable next step for NATO in the coming years, with the planned invitation for three or maybe four Adriatic Charter countries (Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and possibly Montenegro) at the next Alliance summit in 2008. There is consensus and public support in each candidate state for membership, substantial progress has been made in the reform agenda, and three of these countries have worked alongside NATO forces in various parts of the world. The U.S. and other allies support

their membership, as a reward for their domestic efforts and international contributions. Adriatic Charter membership in NATO may spur the commitment and progress of the remaining West Balkan states (Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo) and Alliance leaders may seek to maintain the momentum to close the chapter on Yugoslavia and secure the entire Balkans for NATO and eventually for the EU. Nevertheless, post-status Kosovo may present a renewed regional problem where long-term stability is not yet fully guaranteed.

4. What Are The Prospects For A NATO Eastern Dimension?

The prospects for including Ukraine, Georgia, and other countries from the borders of Russia appear to be much slimmer, especially as Moscow is keenly intent to keep them outside NATO and within its orbit. In the case of Ukraine, Russian authorities continue to propagate the view within Ukraine that NATO inclusion would seriously damage relations with Russia. An early referendum on the NATO question may be held this year as the conflict between the President and Prime Minister intensifies and where support for the Alliance barely exceeds 20%. Many Ukrainians understandably fear such a prospect and do not see how the benefits of NATO membership will outweigh the costs. Moreover, the Ukrainian elite remains divided as to the country's security orientation whether in favor or in fear of Russia.

Both Moldova and Georgia are also unlikely to make rapid progress toward NATO entry as Russia keeps both countries off balance by supporting secessionist movements that undermine state integrity and institutional reform. The question we need to pose in the case of Moldova and Georgia may be the following: is NATO convinced enough and determined enough that eastern enlargement will promote and expand the zone of security that it will more directly assist Chisinau and Tbilisi in regaining its separated territories? Or will NATO design an Alliance equivalent of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) that will offer close links and assistance but without the prospect of actual membership? In effect, is NATO willing to confront Russia and not make compromises over the sovereign decisions of independent states that are seeking NATO accession?

5. Why Is Russia Still Opposed To NATO Enlargement?

This is an important question if we are thinking and planning for further eastern expansion of the Alliance and further NATO missions close to Russia's real borders or its imagined borders around the former Soviet Union. Does Moscow oppose enlargement primarily because it seeks to prevent: a. the modernization of neighboring armies; b. the integration of former satellites within western structures; c. the provision of NATO defense guarantees to nearby neighbors who will become more independent and emboldened; d. the increase of American forces at Russia's borders with a greater U.S.

political role in the ex-Soviet space; and e. the elimination of prospects for Russian domination in its neighbors' security that would deflate any new Russian imperium?

Opposition to NATO enlargement is also a domestic issue in that the Putin and post-Putin administrations may need to maintain a sense of threat to Russia among the public and among military and security structures in order to rebuild central control and instill loyalty to an assertive Russian state. NATO may have outlived one of its core purposes if there comes a time when Moscow genuinely welcomes its further enlargement. This would probably mean that one of NATO's major successes, encouraging and ensuring the construction of stable, democratic, and pro-Western state systems in a broader Europe, would no longer be valid.