# The Future of NATO Expansion

## *Four Case Studies*

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# Introduction

Michael Zantovsky, the chairman of the Czech Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Security Committee, announced in June 2001 that the planned modernization and professionalization of the Czech Army would take two election terms (i.e., eight years).[1] A month later his counterpart in the Chamber of Deputies (the legislature's lower house), Petr Necas, lamented that Prime Minister Miloš Zeman's cabinet had "done nothing" to promote military reform since the country's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[2] In March 2001 General Lajos Fodor, Chief of the Hungarian Defense Forces' (HDF) General Staff, revealed that the country's air force would be unable to meet NATO's requirements for pilot training "again this year."[3] His views were corroborated by a recent NATO report which proclaimed that the HDF would not be able to fully participate in the Alliance until the end of 2003.[4] NATO leaders have repeatedly castigated not only the Czech Republic and Hungary, but also Poland for the relatively modest sums they spend on defense despite their earlier pledges to reform their militaries in accordance with NATO criteria. They have every right to do so: Since 1999 these countries have been full members of the Alliance.

[1] CTK (Czech News Agency, Prague), 14 June 2001.
[2] CTK (Prague), 11 July 2001.
[3] *Népszabadság* (Budapest), 19 March 2001.
[4] See Péter Matyuc, "NATO-jelentés a honvédség hiányosságairól," *Népszabadság*, 6 April 2000.

The enlargement of NATO has been one of the most important events in post-Cold War international affairs, American foreign policy, and East European politics. In 1997, NATO invited the three East-Central European states in which democratization and market-oriented transitions had progressed the farthest – Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland – to join its ranks.[5] Two years later, the three states became members of the Alliance on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington, D.C. As the quotations above imply, Czech and Hungarian membership (Poland has performed considerably better) has given NATO few reasons to celebrate the decision to expand.

Still, NATO leaders have maintained that expansion is an on-going process that entails the integration of additional East European states. At its Prague Summit in November 2002, NATO invited seven countries – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – that are expected to become full members after the legislatures of the member states and the candidate countries ratify the Alliance's enlargement. In order to avoid the problems resulting from the first round of enlargement, it is important to understand the benefits and drawbacks of subsequent rounds. NATO has set numerous membership criteria and has assisted aspiring members in satisfying them. We must gauge their preparedness to assess the impact they will have on NATO's cohesion, capabilities, and future role. My purpose in this study is to do just that, focusing on four East European states invited to membership: Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

## MAIN ARGUMENTS

This study posits two basic arguments: first, that NATO's expansion to Eastern Europe should continue; and second, that states should fulfill the Alliance's membership criteria prior to becoming full members. Let me flesh out these arguments in a bit more detail.

[5] For an examination of the states in the first round of enlargement, see Andrew A. Michta, ed., *America's New Allies: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in NATO* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

I opposed the first round of enlargement on the grounds that it was unnecessary and expensive, not to mention potentially dangerous insofar as it threatened to provoke Russia. Nonetheless, once the process had started, I became a supporter of further enlargement. I argue that extending full NATO membership to the four states in my inquiry is desirable for four fundamental reasons. First, given its oft-repeated promises of an "open door policy" (meaning that qualified members would be allowed to join), NATO has a moral obligation to deliver on its pledge. Second, the status quo divides postcommunist states and could inadvertently serve to promote the cause of extremists who might create tensions between member and non-member states. Third, including these four states in NATO will create a security system that will increase the Alliance's deterrent potential and ensure rapid intervention capability in the traditional trouble spots of the Balkans. As such, it will be more useful in strategic terms than the first wave of enlargement in 1999. Finally, a second wave of enlargement that includes these four states will create a geographically contiguous NATO that links Hungary with members on its borders (Slovakia, Romania, and Slovenia) and Greece and Turkey with the rest of the Alliance through Bulgaria.

At the same time, I will argue that rushing the second wave of enlargement makes little sense. Admitting unprepared countries in 1999 was, on balance, a mistake. The experiences of the three new members have tempered much of the enthusiasm in NATO circles about the rapid expansion of the Alliance, and for good reasons. They, with the possible exception of Poland, have been free riders – consumers rather than providers of security. Both the Czech Republic and Hungary have been less than eager contributors to European security since becoming NATO members. Before joining, political elites in both states were quick to promise the kinds of military reforms that Brussels required. Once they had become members, however, their incentives to deliver on those promises had largely disappeared in large part because NATO does not have an expulsion mechanism in place. I believe that it is imperative that the states aspiring to NATO membership actually fulfill all stated requirements before being invited to join. Even more importantly, there is simply no need to rush the incorporation of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia into NATO because they face no serious challenges to their security. A more judicious approach

to enlargement will ease the integration of new members and will serve to safeguard alliance cohesion and capabilities.

The international organizations East European states want to join (European Union, NATO) or appease (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) have contributed substantially to democratic consolidation in the region – after all, they have the leverage to admit or exclude them. Clearly, it would be useful to determine the extent to which prospective membership specifically in NATO influences policies in aspiring states. Unfortunately, however, this is difficult to do because NATO is seeking many of the same policy adjustments in these countries that are being sought by other international organizations – most importantly the EU. Nevertheless, especially since the first round of enlargement – precisely because of the relatively poor performance of the first three new members with respect to their military affairs – NATO has become more keenly interested in military effectiveness, civil-military relations, defense expenditures, and a host of other issues that other organizations are not concerned with. Therefore, in these instances, a causal link between NATO and domestic policy change may be identified with some measure of confidence.

## CASE SELECTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

Why focus on these four countries and not others? After all, there were nine aspirants in NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP): Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia and the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The choice of the four countries is based only partly on the convenient fact that NATO turned them down in 1997. Romania, Slovakia, and especially Slovenia were already serious contenders at that time, though Bulgaria was not yet unambiguously committed to a policy in support of joining the Alliance. These four states also stand out as some of the least studied postcommunist countries. Bulgaria and Slovenia have been especially neglected in the last decade partly because they have not been perceived as pivotal states. Slovakia, on the other hand, has been the victim of diminishing scholarly attention after the 1993 break-up of federal Czechoslovakia. Of the four states in my project, only Romania can be said to have received adequate scholarly attention in the 1990s, due to its relatively

large physical size and population as well as its dismal failure to live up to its potential.

An evaluation of the remaining five MAP countries' preparedness for NATO enlargement is beyond the scope of this book. The three Baltic states are geographically contiguous with Russia which, in turn, has repeatedly expressed its resolute opposition to, and since 2001, reservations about their NATO membership. The Baltics shared much of their recent history with the Soviet Union – having been part of the USSR for fifty years (1941–1991) – and all of them are home to large ethnic Russian populations which further complicates their relationship with Moscow. These factors set the Baltic states apart from the other six MAP countries which neither share a border with Russia nor have any ethnic Russian minorities.

Albania and Macedonia, on the other hand, are handicapped by different factors. Political, economic, and military reforms have proceeded at a much slower pace in these two states than elsewhere in Eastern Europe – with the exception of Serbia and some of the former Soviet republics. Moreover, Albania and particularly Macedonia are integral parts of a fluid security puzzle. In 2001 Macedonia was involved in a serious armed conflict between government troops and ethnic Albanian rebels who, at the very least, demanded substantial changes in the institutional arrangements of the state. It is clear, however, that the ultimate wish of many Albanians in both northwestern Macedonia and Kosovo is secession and the possible unification with Albania proper even if it is rarely voiced publicly. NATO troops are deployed in both locations to maintain a fragile peace. The uncertain outcome of these conflicts makes it difficult to predict with any measure of confidence Albanian and Macedonian political and military-security trajectories – even in the near future. In sum, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia have not only advanced considerably farther in terms of postcommunist reform processes than Albania and Macedonia, but they have also not had to face the type of security problems confronting those two states.

This book draws on several years of field research in Eastern Europe and dozens of in-depth interviews with Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovak, and Slovene defense officials, military officers, academics, and politicians. I have also interviewed NATO officials and numerous representatives of NATO member states' governments. Furthermore, the book

benefits from a comprehensive reading of official documents, newspapers, and the scholarly literature published in the four states, Western Europe, and the United States.

## OUTLINE AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 weighs the strengths and weaknesses of the numerous arguments advancing and opposing the first and second rounds of NATO enlargement. It briefly examines the evolution of Russia's position toward NATO expansion and outlines the criteria the Alliance has set for prospective members.

In order to ensure an optimal level of comparability, Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 examine the four cases (Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, respectively) according to an identical analytical framework. All of these chapters are divided into four parts. Part I of each chapter analyzes postcommunist domestic politics, including the main political institutions and personalities, electoral results, and governmental changes, particularly those with a bearing on NATO enlargement. The focus then shifts to a brief discussion of economic performance, with particular attention to the European Union accession process. The mechanisms of EU integration are important because they provide yet another measure of the progress of the individual states. Finally, I examine the various challenges to the country's security and the evolution of its military doctrine.

Part II of the empirical chapters evaluates the state's relations with its neighbors, NATO members, and Russia. It also explores campaigns for NATO membership, including levels of public and elite support for NATO operations, the various political forces' views on joining the Alliance, and participation in regional organizations and NATO programs.

Part III concentrates on civil–military relations. It begins by scrutinizing the depoliticization of the armed forces and proceeds to analyze the institutional arrangements of civilian control of the military. Here I am concerned with the role of and the relations between the president, the government, the defense minister, the chief of the general staff, and the legislature and its committees in ensuring balanced civilian oversight of the armed forces. I then identify the deficiencies in civil–military relations – in particular, shortcomings pertaining to the

balanced and democratic civilian control of the armed forces – that need to be remedied prior to joining NATO.

Part IV is divided into three sections. The first examines military reform processes, the strengths and weaknesses of their design and implementation, and the degree to which they fulfill NATO criteria. The second focuses on the conditions of armed forces personnel, concentrating on the prestige of the profession; the training, morale, and living standards of the officer corps; and changes in the conscription system. The last section briefly analyzes the state of the armed forces as indicated by changes in its manpower, equipment maintenance and acquisition, and the condition of the country's defense industry.

## WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND IS NOT ABOUT

In order to prevent undue expectations I want to lay out clearly what this book is and is not about. The focus of this study is the second round of NATO's enlargement involving four newly invited states: Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. I will summarize the arguments opposing and supporting the first round and prospective second round of NATO expansion. I am interested in arguments germane to the first round only insofar as they form the intellectual and political background for the second round.

My objective here is to ascertain the extent to which the second-round invitees are prepared for membership in the Alliance, using NATO's membership criteria as a guide. The book evaluates the four states' readiness for NATO membership from a comparative perspective and using the case study method. In concert with the widely recognized notion that the decision to enlarge NATO – in the first round, at any rate – was based on political rather than military-security criteria, this book is as much if not more concerned with the four states' domestic and foreign policies, economic performance, and civil–military relations as it is with their military reform processes and weapon acquisition programs.

This study does not provide a detailed analysis of how NATO member states reach the decision to enlarge or not to enlarge the Alliance; nor does it present an in-depth analysis of NATO's internal policies or duplicate the studies already published about how the U.S. government

arrived at its decision to expand in 1997.[6] I will, however, summarize the polemics concerning initial NATO enlargement because they remain germane for the subsequent expansion process. This book has also little to say about the wars in the former Yugoslavia and NATO's role therein. This, too, is a topic that has received ample scholarly and journalistic attention and I will discuss it only to the extent that it bears directly on the issues I do want to examine closely.

Finally, this book makes no pretention of building or testing theory.[7] My ambition here is no more and no less than to examine the competing arguments favoring and opposing NATO's enlargement and to assess the credentials of the four invitees for membership in the Alliance. This study, then, is first and foremost a comparative analysis of the postcommunist records of four East European states from the perspective of NATO expansion.

[6] See, for instance, Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997: Blessings of Liberty* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); and George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999).

[7] For a sample of relevant studies, see Charles L. Glaser, "Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe," *International Security*, 18:1 (Summer 1993): 5–50; John J. Mearsheimer, "False Promises of International Institutions," *International Security*, 19:3 (Winter 1994): 5–49; Robert B. McCalla, "NATO's Persistence After the Cold War," *International Organization*, 50:3 (Summer 1996): 445–475; John Gerald Ruggie, "Consolidating the European Pillar: The Key to NATO's Future," *Washington Quarterly*, 20:1 (Winter 1997): 109–125; Charles Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of Stable Multipolarity," *International Security*, 23:2 (Fall 1998): 40–79; *idem*., ed., *Atlantic Security: Contending Visions* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998); Dan Reiter, "NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy," *International Security*, 25:4 (Spring 2001): 41–67; and the contributions to Robert W. Rauchhaus, ed., *Explaining NATO Enlargement* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).