THE BURDEN OF STRATEGY
Transatlantic Relations and the Future of NATO Enlargement

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Finally, I want to thank the superb students of course INAF-556 (U.S. Policy Toward European Enlargement) who enlivened my year at Georgetown and whose challenging questions and arguments made them the best possible sounding board for the ideas presented here.
New U.S. administrations sometimes believe they can open new chapters in foreign policy without regard to the policies and commitments undertaken by previous administrations. However, they soon find their policy options shackled by the inherited “history” of the issues that confront them—history they ignore at their peril.

The enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is one such issue. Should countries like Ukraine and Georgia be put on the path to NATO membership? A year ago, this was an issue for mid-level bureaucrats and security specialists. But in the aftermath of Russia’s recent invasion of Georgia, it has emerged as a major strategic question for the next U.S. president. The answer depends not only on one’s views of Russia but also relates to the very purpose of NATO. Is NATO a “hedge” against a resurgent Russia? Getting the answer right, I believe, will require a sound understanding of how the United States and its allies arrived at the current strategic crossroads. In short, it requires an understanding of the history of the enlargement process.

Jim DeHart, a career U.S. diplomat detailed to the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy during the 2007–2008 academic year, knows the history of this issue. In his fifteen-year Foreign Service career, he has focused largely on Europe and Eurasia. Assigned to NATO headquarters in Brussels from 2001 to 2004, Jim was a primary U.S. action officer for the alliance’s historic expansion from nineteen to twenty-six member states. Among his duties was ensuring that the aspirant governments undertook the political, economic, and military reforms required to join the alliance.

When Jim came to Georgetown, after a stint on the National Security Council staff, he decided to draw on his NATO experience to develop and teach a graduate-level course on U.S. policy toward enlargement. Seats for his class, hosted by the Masters in German and European Studies Program (MAGES), filled up fast. It did not hurt that Jim’s course coincided with a real-life NATO summit in Bucharest, where enlargement—especially the membership aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine—emerged as a headline issue. Given the enthusiasm surrounding Jim’s course, I was delighted when he proposed to adapt lessons from the classroom into an ISD publication.

Jim’s study details the modern history of NATO enlargement since the fall of the Berlin Wall, including the strategic, bureaucratic, and political considerations underlying allied deci-
sion-making. The study addresses the evolution of NATO’s enlargement tools and processes such as the Membership Action Plan (MAP)—a subject that may seem esoteric and arcane but is in fact crucial to understanding the policy options available to the next U.S. administration.

Jim suggests that the next administration essentially faces three choices: 1) accelerate NATO’s eastward expansion to bring in Georgia and Ukraine; 2) sustain NATO expansion but slow it down for Georgia and Ukraine; and 3) suspend NATO’s eastward expansion in order to achieve other foreign policy goals. At first glance this may look like the classic bureaucratic trick: make the first option too hot and the third too cold, so that the boss will choose the safe middle ground. But in fact, each of the three options presented here is compelling in its own way. I suspect that most readers, whatever their views, will find themselves occasionally nodding along to all three.

Presidential leadership is about making choices. The NATO enlargement “choice” will be consequential and should be taken with the benefit of a sound understanding of what three earlier administrations have done on this issue. Jim has given us such an understanding and framed the choices available to the next U.S. president.

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THE BURDEN OF STRATEGY

Transatlantic Relations and the Future of NATO Enlargement

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The recent war in Georgia leaves no doubt that we have reached a historic turning point on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement. The transatlantic consensus that sustained NATO expansion for more than a decade has begun to unravel. Whether this consensus can or should be renewed will depend on the next U.S. administration. Difficult choices lie ahead.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has enlarged three times since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and is currently undergoing a fourth expansion.

- Germany’s reunification in 1990 brought nearly seventeen million Germans into the alliance.
- In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland became NATO members.
- In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia joined the alliance.
- Albania and Croatia were invited at the April 2008 Bucharest summit to begin accession negotiations with NATO and are currently awaiting ratification by allied parliaments.

Since the mid-1990s, allied leaders have generally agreed that the countries of the former Warsaw Pact should have the opportunity to join the premier institutions of the West. Of course, there were disagreements over timing and on the readiness of specific countries. But once NATO enlargement was set in motion, it became virtually inevitable that NATO would one day include most, if not all, of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact.

This transatlantic consensus owed much to U.S. leadership but was also circumstantial. With the exception of the Baltic states, the countries seeking NATO membership in the 1990s had not been part of the Soviet Union nor
were they geographically contiguous with Russia. Moreover, they benefited from historical traditions of democratic governance, and their “Europeanness” was never in doubt.

Above all, however, it was Russia’s weakness that enabled the transatlantic community to sustain a consensus for expanding a Europe “whole, free, and at peace,” a phrase that has been used, with only slight variations, by three successive U.S. presidents. The quasi-democratic Russia of Boris Yeltsin relied heavily on western aid and needed good relations with the West as it struggled to rehabilitate itself from the ashes of the former Soviet Union. Although Moscow abhorred NATO enlargement, it lacked the means—and ultimately the will—to resist it.

Today, the Russia of the 1990s no longer exists, and NATO is increasingly divided on how to handle the more assertive, energy-rich nation that has replaced it. The rifts are glaring with respect to Georgia’s and Ukraine’s ambitions to join NATO. At their April 2008 summit, the NATO allies declared that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO” yet rejected their participation in the Membership Action Plan (MAP)—the very process designed to prepare aspirant nations for membership in the alliance. It was an awkward and seemingly contradictory compromise.

Among the allies, the lines are clearly drawn. Support for Georgia’s and Ukraine’s membership aspirations comes mainly from the United States and from NATO’s newest members hoping to shore up stability and democracy in their eastern neighborhoods. Older allies such as Germany and France, less fearful of and more eager to do business with Moscow, are generally content to see NATO expand no further than the rest of the Balkans.

Earlier this decade, NATO’s then secretary general, George Robertson, was fond of telling audiences that “this is not your grandfather’s NATO.” True enough. No longer were allied military planners thinking in terms of static defense against the Red Army. Russia was not an adversary but a partner, and the Fulda Gap belonged to a different century. With Europe seemingly evolving into a postmodern paradise where war was unthinkable, NATO was suddenly free to take its show on the road—to places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Darfur.

Naturally, NATO’s newest allies took it all with a grain of salt, quietly savoring their new protection from the Russians even as they dutifully deployed boots to faraway lands in support of NATO’s new roles and missions.

Today, with Russian troops dug into Georgia and flexing their muscles elsewhere in the former empire, “Grandpa’s NATO” is apparently making a comeback. But if NATO is obliged to repivot back to a posture of collective defense against a resurgent Russia, will it be able to sustain its new missions, particularly in Afghanistan, where it is already stretched thin? Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been dogged by questions concerning its relevance and purpose. Will it now suffer the opposite problem of having too many purposes?

The United States and its allies have barely begun to digest the implications of the latest war in the Caucasus, but already a few different narratives have emerged. For some, Russia’s aggression showed that NATO must do more to protect Georgia and other emerging democracies in the region. For others, it demonstrated the very real danger of NATO being sucked into conflict with Russia even with no vital allied interests at stake. “This war,” said Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, “has pushed Georgia further away . . . from Europe.”

One lesson is clear. The pockets of post-Soviet misery known as the “frozen” conflicts—South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria—shuttered off in the early 1990s to a succession of special envoys toiling in obscure diplomatic processes in grim corners of Eurasia, now have the proven potential to thaw quickly and with grave results.

Together with Kosovo, these not-so-frozen conflicts are reminders that the alliance Senator Richard Lugar once famously declared must go “out of area or out of business” finds itself, once again, with a fair amount of unfinished business “in area.”

NATO foreign ministers will return to the question of Georgia’s and Ukraine’s membership aspirations at their December 2008 meeting, where they are “authorized to decide” the
way forward on their MAP requests. Regardless of what is decided in December, a new era of NATO enlargement is upon us, and the debate is only beginning. The next U.S. administration faces difficult choices that will have a profound impact on the future map of Europe. The choices might be synthesized as follows:

1. **Accelerate NATO’s Eastward Expansion:** Achieve a consensus at NATO to welcome Ukraine and Georgia into MAP immediately; reaffirm that both will be NATO members; set a target date no later than 2014 for their accession provided they meet NATO’s standards; assert NATO’s special interest in the security of Georgia and Ukraine consistent with their status as future NATO members; press the European Union (EU) to grant candidate status to both; and significantly increase bilateral assistance to both.

2. **Sustain NATO’s Eastward Expansion Without Commitments:** Achieve a consensus at NATO to welcome Ukraine and Georgia into MAP on the basis that MAP participation does not guarantee future NATO membership nor any “creeping article 5” commitment; diminish expectations for Ukraine’s and Georgia’s rapid accession into NATO; press the European Union to upgrade relations with both countries; and increase bilateral assistance to both countries.

3. **Suspend NATO’s Eastward Expansion:** Achieve a consensus at NATO that the allies should support Georgia and Ukraine through programs other than MAP; focus on completing NATO enlargement in the Balkans, resolving frozen conflicts, bolstering cooperation with Russia, achieving a global partnership, and encouraging internal NATO reform; and press the European Union to take the lead in expanding eastward.

The path that the next U.S. administration chooses will, of course, depend on its broader foreign policy considerations, including the importance it assigns to spreading democracy and its calculations concerning the value of getting Russian cooperation on issues such as Iran and North Korea. It depends, as well, on what America and her allies want NATO to be—whether an instrument for expeditionary operations far beyond the European continent, a global club of democracies, or a continuing hedge against a Russia destined to remain on the wrong side of an East-West divide. Much will depend on the next administration’s analysis of Russian behavior. Was it inevitable that Russia, once it regained its strength, would seek to restore its lost empire? Or is the West partly to blame for provoking Russia through NATO enlargement and its cheerleading of the “color revolutions” in Russia’s neighborhood? Is it possible that a softer U.S. approach could pacify Russia and allow it to evolve into a more “normal” nation?

This study seeks to explain how the United States reached the present turning point on NATO expansion, what happened to the transatlantic consensus, and how that consensus might be restored. Part One of this study reviews the modern history of NATO enlargement and the evolution of NATO’s enlargement tools and processes. Part Two addresses the related issue of EU enlargement and the evolving politics of the transatlantic relationship. Part Three presents in greater detail the choices that face the next U.S. administration on NATO enlargement.

Restoring allied solidarity on the future of NATO enlargement is crucial to maintaining an effective transatlantic partnership. Time is short. NATO will hold its sixtieth anniversary summit early in 2009 in Strasbourg-Kehl, where France is expected to announce its reentry into the alliance’s integrated military command. The summit ought to be a celebration of transatlantic unity. To fulfill that promise, the next U.S. administration, together with its allies, must look anew at the issue of NATO enlargement and deliberate a new vision for this uncertain era. The aim of this study is to make at least a modest contribution to that essential debate.
I

A Brief History of NATO Enlargement

In considering the future of NATO enlargement, it is worth pausing to reflect on how far Europe has traveled in the relatively short period since the first 9/11—November 9, 1989, that is, if the date is reordered European style—when German citizens began hacking away at the Berlin Wall. The story of those tumultuous months is one of deft diplomacy by the administration of President George H.W. Bush. But it is also a lesson that even the most skillful U.S. foreign policy tends to be reactive. More often than not, grand designs are an illusion.

GERMANY REUNITES: NATO’S FIRST MODERN ENLARGEMENT

As 1989 drew to a close, the region once known as Eastern Europe was in dramatic transition. On the day the wall fell, Bulgaria’s president resigned after thirty-five years of communist rule. The following month, playwright-turned-dissident Václav Havel rode the “Velvet Revolution” to the presidency in Prague. On Christmas Day, Romania’s megalomaniacal dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, was summarily put to death. Meanwhile, Lithuania continued to agitate for independence as nationalism swept the Baltics. The scope and pace of the events took even the dissidents by surprise. Almost overnight, the Warsaw Pact ceased to be an effective military organization, and the United States found that its most basic security assumptions—of a Soviet threat and a divided continent—were gone.

For the West, the events were a source of elation but also unease. As former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd later recounted, this was a system “under which we’ve lived quite happily for forty years.” In Germany, momentum built quickly toward ending the division imposed after World War II. But what would be the status of a united Germany? Would it take its place in NATO, or would it be neutral? Would it continue to host U.S. troops, or would it be demilitarized? How long would the Red Army stay? What about the de facto frontier of the Oder and Neisse rivers between Germany and Poland—would it become a permanent border, or would it become a flashpoint? As the Bush administration pondered these questions against the backdrop of a U.S. public hungry for a “peace dividend,” events on the ground continued apace. Only months after the “almost accidental” breach of the wall, elections were held in East Germany and the pronunciation Christian Democratic Union won a surprising 48 percent of the vote. Mindful of generating more
problems for Gorbachev, the United States had done nothing to accelerate German reunification but now was in no position to slow it down.

The Russians were not the only ones spooked by the prospect of a united Germany. As George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft recount in their joint memoir, Margaret Thatcher “darkly predicted that Germany would be ‘the Japan of Europe,’ but worse than Japan . . . in the heart of a continent of countries, most of which she has attacked and occupied.” French President François Mitterrand was said to agree with Thatcher that the Germans were poised to “get in peace what Hitler couldn’t get in the war.”13 “We love Germany so much that we are glad there are two of them,” French Nobel Laureate François Mauriac once remarked.14 Such fears led to the conclusion that a united Germany had to be embedded firmly in NATO. A Germany outside the alliance, said NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner, “would not be tied to any safe structure,” and the “old Pandora’s box of competition and rivalry would be reopened.”15 The U.S. administration agreed, albeit with a different emphasis. “A Germany outside NATO would ‘gut’ the alliance,” wrote Scowcroft. “Without Germany and our bases there, our military presence in NATO, and in Europe, would be difficult if not impossible to maintain.”16 In time, the United States stepped up as the champion of German reunification within the alliance just as it had championed Germany’s rehabilitation as a key ally in the aftermath of World War II.

While Germany remained the focus, there were also questions concerning the role of NATO more broadly. The Warsaw Pact Treaty referred to a “general European treaty of collective security” as an explicit condition for its own demise. With the Warsaw Pact Treaty dissolved, the Soviets naturally felt that NATO too was no longer needed. But they were not alone. In Western policy and academic circles, interest surged in creating a new European order based on something other than opposing blocs. Scholars such as Charles Kupchan proposed that NATO be dismantled in favor of a transformed Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) led by a “concert” of the major powers,17 while German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher suggested publicly in January 1990 that NATO and the Warsaw Pact could be absorbed into a broader security system based on the CSCE and the European Community. Even Margaret Thatcher was ready to endorse the Russian idea of a CSCE summit to handle German reunification—a prospect that Brent Scowcroft found “alarming.”18

In the end, the United States supported a modest enhancement of the CSCE process while, for NATO, it proposed transformation, not diminution. At NATO’s July 1990 summit, Bush led allied leaders in declaring that they would “enhance the political component of our Alliance . . . never in any circumstance be the first to use force” and make “nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort.”19 These assurances, said Scowcroft, were intended “to help Moscow save face.”20 Together with a U.S.-Soviet trade deal, a muted U.S. response to Lithuania’s drive for independence, progress on arms control, and substantial aid from the Federal Republic of Germany, NATO’s assurances gave Gorbachev what he needed to overcome the resistance of hard-liners back home. By summer, Gorbachev was ready to acknowledge publicly that a united Germany in NATO was inevitable.

On October 3, 1990—less than one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall—Germany became whole again, within an alliance whose core function remained collective defense. By maintaining NATO rather than embarking on a new experiment in pan-European security, the United States and its allies not only ensured their continued solidarity but also preserved the East-West character of relations with the Kremlin. Fashionable as it was to say that NATO had lost its raison d’être, the reality was that the allies still desired a U.S. presence in Europe, still feared a free-floating Germany, and still wanted a hedge against the Soviet Union. In other words, keeping “the U.S. in, Russia out, and Germany down” still had resonance in the post-Cold War world.

The expansion of the alliance eastward to include the territory of the former East Germany
stands as NATO’s first modern enlargement—albeit through the backdoor—and arguably the most significant diplomatic achievement of the Bush administration. By addressing Russia’s concerns and avoiding the appearance of “winners and losers,” the United States diminished Russian objections to the revision of Europe on NATO’s terms. The fundamental premise behind the successful U.S. approach—that it was important to secure at least tacit Russian consent to the new order—was a model that would carry over into the Clinton administration’s approach to NATO enlargement.

CENTRAL EUROPE LOOKS WEST: NATO’S SECOND MODERN ENLARGEMENT

Conventional wisdom has it that the United States and its allies have been successful in “anchoring” the former Warsaw Pact states to the West through NATO and EU enlargement. This is true but for one important nuance: It was the governments of Central and Eastern Europe that initiated the process by seeking a lifeline to the West. As Ronald Asmus writes in his authoritative, firsthand account of the Clinton years, NATO’s modern enlargement may well have ended at Germany’s eastern border if not for the insistence of the Central and East European leaders themselves.21

As inevitable as it might seem in retrospect that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe should someday have a home in NATO, few in 1990 were contemplating such a step. For the Bush administration, resolving the problem of Germany was challenge enough; further NATO expansion simply was not on the agenda. When U.S. Secretary of State James Baker assured Gorbachev that German reunification would not lead to an extension of NATO forces even “one inch to the east,”22 it seems likely he was referring solely to the territory of East Germany and that Gorbachev understood it that way. In June, Henry Kissinger proposed that Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland comprise a neutral belt of countries on the Austrian model,23 a plan that would have relegated them to the status of buffer zone. Nor did the Central Europeans initially see the point of trading membership in one security bloc for membership in another. That spring, the Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia Jiri Dienstbier proposed a CSCE-based “European Security Commission” to replace both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.24

The following year, however, Central and East European views began to change. The outbreak of ethnic fighting in Bosnia and a failed coup against Gorbachev in the summer of 1991 alarmed the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. As instability loomed and with the CSCE developing only modestly,25 this newly formed “Visegrád Group”26 took a greater interest in the kind of security guarantee that only NATO could provide. In late 1991, the playing field changed again, with the dramatic breakup of the Soviet Union. Suddenly, the Visegrád states no longer bordered the Russian empire—a tectonic geopolitical shift that gave them space to seek a home in western institutions. Meeting in Prague on May 6, 1992, the Visegrád leaders declared a new goal: full-fledged membership in NATO. However, with the U.S. presidential campaign in full swing—and focused on “the economy, stupid”—a serious response to the aspirations of the Central Europeans would have to wait for the next administration.

It was not until the spring of 1993 that Václav Havel, Lech Walesa, and Arpad Goncz—the presidents of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, respectively—would have the opportunity to make their case for NATO membership directly to the U.S. president. The meeting made an impact. Months later, Clinton would refer back to the strong and positive impression that the Central Europeans had made on him.”27 The opportunity to expand democracy, right the historic wrongs of Yalta, and modernize America’s most important alliance in the era of globalization clearly resonated with the president. For others, it was the flip side of Clinton’s vision that proved compelling—the darker prospect that the unfolding tragedy in Bosnia would be repeated elsewhere in the region.28
While the president was instinctively open to enlargement, most in the bureaucracy were opposed. In the era of the “peace dividend,” the U.S. Defense Department was looking to reduce, not increase, its commitments in Europe and to shift resources to Asia and the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, with NATO struggling to respond effectively to the turmoil in Bosnia, the State Department questioned how adding three weak states with their own ethnic issues would help an already frayed alliance heal its rifts. Above all was the fear that any expansion of NATO would fuel a backlash in Russia and set back the administration’s top priority of advancing Russian reform.

However, the Visegrád Group continued to push, both directly and indirectly. In August 1993, Polish President Walesa persuaded Russian President Yeltsin to sign a communiqué stating that Moscow had no objection to Poland joining NATO. Though vodka may have played a role, the declaration caused a sensation in western policy circles and prompted many to reconsider their assumptions.

Still, most in the U.S. government remained unconvinced about NATO expansion. Bureaucratic combat in the runup to NATO’s 1994 summit led the United States to dodge the enlargement issue and instead put forward “Partnership for Peace” as the centerpiece for the meeting. Yeltsin was elated, calling Partnership for Peace “Brilliant! Terrific!” The Central Europeans were less enthused. Senator Richard Lugar called it a “Policy for Postponement,” and indeed it was. Yet it was hardly the “multilateral mishmash” derided by Henry Kissinger. By creating a framework for Partner nations to train and exercise with allied forces, the Partnership for Peace gave aspirant nations the tools they needed to develop their militaries along western lines and to boost their NATO membership credentials. What began as a consolation prize would develop into one of NATO’s most effective programs, preparing numerous countries to enter the alliance and building defense cooperation with dozens of other states across Eurasia.

The United States Turns the Corner

If Yeltsin and U.S. enlargement skeptics thought Partnership for Peace had moved enlargement to the backburner, they were mistaken. Soon after the NATO summit, the Visegrád heads of state met with Clinton in Prague and were assured that enlargement was “no longer a question of whether but when and how.” The persistence of the Central Europeans was paying off. Within the U.S. government, discussion shifted toward a strategy for implementing the president’s apparent desire to enlarge NATO. Meeting that December in Brussels, allied foreign ministers agreed to “initiate a process of examination to determine how NATO will enlarge, the principles to guide this process and implications of membership.” So it was that by the end of 1994 the basic question—should NATO enlarge—already had been answered by the allies and within the U.S. administration.

Outside the administration, however, the debate was only beginning, and some of the most intense arguments were not over whether NATO should enlarge, but why. An odd coalition of Democrats and Republicans agreed on the overall objective of enlargement but not on the underlying philosophy or rationale. Attitudes toward Russia and the U.S.’ role in the world were defining factors and made for some strange bedfellows. For Clinton, NATO enlargement was not only about spreading democracy—it also was about strengthening a key multilateral institution and keeping the United States engaged overseas. Crucially, it also involved a “dual track” with Moscow, aimed at elevating NATO’s relationship with Russia as a corollary to enlargement. In contrast, the Republican majority in Congress, led by Newt Gingrich, supported NATO expansion as a capstone to the U.S.’ Cold War victory. The House Republicans had no patience for Clinton’s efforts with Russia, arguing in their 1994 Contract with America that the United States should expand freedom eastward without asking Moscow for permission. Kissinger deemed NATO enlargement as essential to fill the security vacuum in Central Europe and avoid a replay of the
geopolitics that had led to two world wars, but he abhorred the emotional arguments of Clinton and his “protest generation” that NATO enlargement was about “erasing dividing lines.” Senator Lugar was another key figure who supported NATO enlargement without necessarily agreeing with the Democrats on the reasons why.

Those opposed to enlargement occupied an equally large tent. They included such foreign policy pillars as Sam Nunn, Lee Hamilton, Brent Scowcroft, and Paul Nitze. Quite a few were internationalists and strong supporters of the alliance, including Senator John Warner, who feared that adding weak new members would dilute NATO and undermine its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the isolationist wing of the Republican Party saw NATO enlargement as a new set of burdens and questioned whether the United States should “go to war for Warsaw or Budapest.” But for most, Russia was the primary concern. In May 1995, Thomas L. Friedman predicted that NATO expansion would scuttle Russian ratification of the Start II arms reduction treaty signed in 1993. Thereafter, the New York Times became a relentless critic of the administration’s NATO strategy. A few months before the July 1997 NATO summit in Madrid, foreign policy icon George Kennan warned that expanding NATO would restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations, and thus be the “most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold-War era.” Rarely had a U.S. administration planning a major foreign policy initiative faced such strong and diverse public opposition.

By 1996, nearly a dozen Central and East European countries had expressed interest in joining NATO. The Visegrád Group countries were the clear frontrunners, despite concerns about potential ethnic disputes between Hungary and its neighbors, and weak democratic control of the Polish armed forces. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland had been the first to knock on NATO’s door and had never wavered in seeking to push it open. Slovakia, in contrast, had been knocked out of contention by Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar’s corrupt and autocratic leadership. As for the Baltic countries—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—they were something of a special case. The United States had never recognized their incorporation into the Soviet Union, and strongly supported their development as fully sovereign states. Yet their exposed position on the border with Russia and their sizable ethnic Russian minorities meant that their early admission into NATO was far more than the European market would bear.

**Allied Views on NATO Enlargement**

As it became clear that at least three nations—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—would receive invitations in Madrid, a number of previously tepid allies began to lobby actively for their own candidates. France came out in support of Romania, a country still recovering from the devastation wrought by Ceausescu but now with a reformist government and perceived as more Francophone than any of the Visegrád Group. Italy then declared its support for Slovenia, arguing that Slovenia’s inclusion would enhance the Balkans’ stability. French and Italian lobbying led to a groundswell of allied support for five invitations—a more ambitious expansion than the Clinton administration felt it could defend when it came time for U.S. Senate ratification. The administration was also mindful that adding Romania and Slovenia would reduce the likelihood of a followup round of enlargement in the near future to include the Baltic states.

The jockeying between allies led to one of the most contentious summit meetings in NATO’s history. The United States held firm to its position of invitations only to the Visegrád Group, leading to allegations of U.S. “hegemonic” behavior. The positions of the other allies are instructive: The United Kingdom, wary of diluting NATO’s military effectiveness, was content to support the more limited expansion favored by the United States. The French, valuing NATO less, saw little to lose by grandstanding against the United States. A number of European allies quietly agreed with the U.S. position but were unwilling to take a stand against France, their
fellow (and more powerful) EU member. In the end, Germany overcame its traditional reluctance to choose between Washington and Paris and helped forge a consensus in favor of the Visegrád Group. On July 9, 1997, NATO invited the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to begin accession talks to join the alliance.

Of all the explanations for allied behavior, perhaps none is as compelling as geography. Once enlargement became inevitable, the allies began to seek “geographic balance” with the aim of shoring up stability in their neighborhoods. Germany’s support for the Visegrád Group, and Italy’s support for Slovenia, illustrated the desire of the continental allies to surround themselves with stable democracies firmly integrated into western institutions. In negotiations for the Madrid summit communiqué, Denmark pressed hard for language favoring the Baltic nations in a future northern expansion—encountering stiff resistance from allies in the south.39 In the years after Madrid, geography would emerge again and again as a crucial determinant in NATO’s enlargement decisions.

When NATO heads of state and government gathered for their next summit in Washington in April 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were able to join them at the table as full members.40 The meeting marked a turning point for NATO, as the alliance rolled out a new strategic concept orienting NATO’s core mission of collective defense toward the new post-Cold War security environment, emphasizing threats beyond the Euro-Atlantic area.41 The accession of three former Warsaw Pact members also helped dispel some of the doubts about NATO’s relevance in the post-Cold War world. After all, how could the alliance be obsolete when so many countries were clamoring to get in? In the words of President Clinton, the leaders of the Visegrád countries had given him “the clearest example I know . . . that NATO is not dead.”42

The Membership Action Plan

The Intensified Dialogues were more or less forgotten after MAP was established in 1999 for the nine countries—Romania, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Macedonia, and Albania45—that had sought but failed to receive invitations in Madrid. MAP constituted a new framework for the allies to provide “advice, assistance and practical support” to guide the reform efforts of these continuing aspirants.46 It included chapters covering political, economic, defense, resource, security, and legal issues—essentially everything that made for a fully functioning country in accordance with western standards. MAP obligated aspirants to submit annual national programs

Creating a Process: NATO’s Third Modern Enlargement

The Clinton administration’s final NATO summit marked not only the expansion of the alliance from sixteen to nineteen members, it also institutionalized a process for further NATO enlargement based on the Membership Action Plan. Though MAP was an innovation, it owed an intellectual debt to the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement43 in which the alliance as a whole had given serious consideration for the first time to the purposes, principles, and implications of NATO expansion. The 1995 study noted that enlargement would proceed in strict accordance with article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty,44 and emphasized that enlargement would advance democratic reforms, foster habits of cooperation, promote good-neighborly relations, and increase transparency in defense planning. The study committed the allies to engage in dialogue with interested governments, which led, a few months later, to a decision by NATO foreign ministers to launch “intensified dialogues” with fifteen countries. NATO used these dialogues to explain what membership entailed and to learn more about the goals and reform plans of the aspirant nations. Among the countries that took part in the dialogues were Sweden and Finland, but for informational purposes only, as neither seriously contemplated joining NATO. Ukraine and Azerbaijan also signed up for Intensified Dialogues (a term now in upper case, befitting its new status as a formal NATO process) but subsequently opted not to pursue membership, at least for the time being.

The Membership Action Plan

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I. A Brief History of NATO Enlargement

outlining their reform plans and progress. In return, the allies provided candid—indeed, blunt—feedback on their reform efforts during high-level meetings that took place regularly in the spring and fall. MAP was accompanied by a political pledge that “the Alliance expects to extend further invitations in coming years” and that the new members—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—“will not be the last.”

Although the MAP document outlined general standards that aspirants would be expected to meet—peaceful resolution of disputes, adherence to the rule of law, respect for human rights, democratic control of the armed forces, sufficient and transparent defense budgeting, and the ability to safeguard classified information, to name just a few—it was up to the allies to identify specific issues within this framework. The United States, for example, asserted that all aspirants should devote at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product to spending on defense, triggering routine objections from the French that there was no such NATO benchmark. The United States alone raised Holocaust legacy issues such as property restitution and even used the sessions to press Romania to relax its moratorium on adoptions—two irritants that had the potential to undermine U.S. congressional support for the candidate countries. In fact, all allies had their pet issues. Germany devoted more attention than most to the importance of facilitating foreign investment—presumably with German companies in mind—while the French used NATO time to interrogate aspirants on their fealty to EU equities such as the European Security and Defense Policy.

Because of the wide range of issues discussed, aspirants learned to stock their delegations with multiple agencies, thereby lubricating (or, in some cases, creating) interagency coordination within their governments. Given the aspirants’ profound interest in securing NATO and EU membership, the allies found that they enjoyed a level of influence rarely seen in diplomatic interactions. Most allies made full use of the MAP process—none more so than the U.S. government, which scoured the annual national programs with the help of U.S. embassies in aspirant capitals and seldom pulled punches at the table. Aspirants, for their part, were acutely aware that the “examinations” administered by nineteen skeptical allies could make or break their NATO candidacies. The pressure to do well gave reformers much-needed leverage to overcome resistance back home to measures that were often painful in the short term. In short, MAP worked.

NATO’s emphasis on “standards” rather than on a “fixed or rigid list of criteria” distinguished its enlargement process from that of the European Union. In fact, the nature of the two organizations made it inevitable that they would approach enlargement differently. NATO was significantly less integrated than the European Union. All allies were signatories to certain legal agreements, including the status of forces, but NATO membership entailed nothing as intrusive or comprehensive as the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. There were also important differences among the allies in how they approached defense—compulsory versus volunteer military service being one notable example—which precluded NATO from being too prescriptive in its guidance to aspirants. While some in the policy and academic communities treated enlargement as a quantifiable exercise, the allies preferred to take a “case-by-case” approach. Standards were important but, in the final analysis, inviting a country to join the alliance would be a political decision based on the strategic interests of the member nations.

MAP was the bureaucratic manifestation of a strategic goal: specifically, to project stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. By requiring that participants establish democratic control over their armed forces, settle disputes by peaceful means, respect human rights, resolve minority issues, cooperate on military matters, and share in the common defense, the MAP process did much to diminish the sources of possible conflict within and between states in the region.

Yet, paradoxically, as successful as MAP was in advancing NATO’s strategic goal of fostering a more stable Europe, the conversation it initiated was parochial, not strategic—focused on domestic developments within the aspirant nations rather than on the strategic implications
of a given aspirant’s accession to the alliance. In a MAP meeting with the Latvians, for example, the Latvian government’s treatment of its ethnic Russians was fair game, as was the problem of corruption, but a sober consideration of NATO’s ability to defend Latvia from military attack was not an appropriate subject for discussion. In this sense, MAP was reductive. The parameters of debate it established were too narrow to include a frank discussion among allies of strategic issues such as power projection to new regions and the added risks associated with defending certain countries.

This problem was exacerbated by the determination of the allies, particularly the United States, to put off decisions on membership invitations until the last possible moment. Of course, there were excellent reasons for the allies to take this approach. Any early declarations of support for specific candidates threatened to turn the process into a “beauty contest,” with allies airing their differences publicly and aspirants devoting their energies to lobbying rather than to reform. By keeping their cards close, the allies maintained as much pressure as possible for further reforms. But in doing so, the allies lost the opportunity to have a meaningful debate among themselves on the strategic pros and cons of each candidate.

Such strategic debates did take place—but quietly in capitals, rather than at NATO headquarters. Granted, these were not easy issues to discuss. The accession of the Baltic states would put NATO on Russia’s border for the first time, just thirty miles from St. Petersburg. Was it realistic to believe that NATO could defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, given their exposed positions? And how would the Russians respond to such an “inflammatory”53 move? Kissinger was concerned enough to propose that NATO work out an arrangement with the European Union to extend a territorial guarantee to the Baltic nations—without integrating them fully into NATO’s military command.

**Weighing the Candidates**

Thus, at first glance it was unclear that the strategic benefits of Baltic accession would outweigh the negatives. Romania and Bulgaria, however, were more straightforward cases. The two Black Sea countries were located far from Moscow—and close to areas of potential crisis and instability. Each provided a platform for NATO to project power into the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Indeed, the Department of Defense under Donald Rumsfeld was contemplating the establishment of forward operating sites in both countries as part of its global repositioning of U.S. military forces. Slovakia and Slovenia were also interesting from a strategic perspective, though less so than Romania or Bulgaria. The former would create contiguity in Central Europe, while the latter would provide a gateway to the Balkans.

To complicate matters, the strategic qualities of the aspirant nations had a remarkably inverse relationship with their adherence to NATO’s political and economic standards. Romania, a country of twenty-two million, may well have been the most strategically significant, but together with Bulgaria it was also the poorest of the aspirants and arguably the most corrupt. In contrast, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia were advancing economically and developing strong, democratic institutions that would send them to the front of the line for EU membership. Slovakia was somewhere in the middle. It boasted competent armed forces and healthier institutions than either Romania or Bulgaria, but its democratic trajectory was threatened by the possible political comeback of Vladimir Meciar. As for Albania and Macedonia, both lagged significantly on reform—too far behind for strategic considerations to come into play.

As the allies quietly contemplated the diverse group of aspirant nations, the United States suddenly shifted the debate. Speaking in Warsaw on June 15, 2001, President George W. Bush declared that “all of Europe’s new democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and all that lie between,54 should have the same chance . . . to join the institutions of Europe.” The president added that as the allies looked toward NATO’s Prague summit the following year, they “should not calculate how little we can get away with, but how much we can do to advance the cause
of freedom.” Up until this point, most in the alliance had anticipated three or four invitations in Prague. But the message from Bush was unmistakable: the President favored a more ambitious approach at his first NATO summit. Suddenly even a “big bang” enlargement of up to nine new members seemed possible. Naturally, the aspirants were delighted. Having organized themselves into the “Vilnius Group” the year before, they now intensified their joint efforts to advocate for the largest possible expansion in Prague.

For the United States, enlargement would be a big part of the November 2002 summit agenda—but not necessarily the centerpiece, as the new U.S. administration was also fixated on developing the alliance’s military capabilities. The Kosovo conflict in 1999 had exposed glaring deficiencies in the ability of most allies to fight effectively alongside the United States. To gain U.S. Senate ratification of any new enlargement round, the Bush administration would need to convince skeptics on the Hill that NATO would not be diminished as a military organization. The administration would need to pay close attention to congressional concerns, just as the Clinton administration had worked with Congress to shape NATO’s 1999 Strategic Concept and Membership Action Plan. With the hardly perennial of burden-sharing back on the Senate radar, the United States pressed allies and aspirants alike to devote resources to building “niche” capabilities so that they could make a meaningful contribution to the common defense. As the third MAP cycle got underway in early September 2001, capabilities promised to be front and center in discussions with aspirants—even before terrorists flew hijacked jetliners into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

**Enlargement after 9/11**

It has been said that “9/11 changed everything.” In the case of NATO enlargement, the terrorist attacks certainly had an impact. No longer could allied military planners think in terms of static defense against a conventional threat; the Fulda Gap belonged to another century. The launching of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan brought capabilities to the fore and gave aspirants a chance to showcase their commitment. Most of them quickly deployed troops to support the U.S.-led military coalition. Romania dispatched more than four hundred troops to Afghanistan. Even better, it managed to send them there without relying on the United States to transport them—a brilliant stroke at a time when the United States was lamenting the inability of most old allies to deploy their forces far afield. As the United States moved to a war footing against an enemy dispersed across the globe with no regard for national boundaries, it seemed to make sense to have as many allies as possible in the struggle. In the words of U.S. Ambassador to NATO R. Nicholas Burns, “In this new century, we should look at NATO enlargement not as how many countries we are obligated to defend, but rather how many countries we can count on to stand with us when the going gets tough.” Moreover, with Russia expressing solidarity with the United States and even acquiescing to the establishment of U.S. bases in Central Asia, it appeared that enlargement might proceed in a climate of warming East-West relations.

Across Europe, governments were thinking in new ways. For some, the concept of “neutrality” no longer made sense in the emerging age of Islamic extremism and other transnational threats. Thus, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland stepped up to become more active partners with NATO, though none went so far as to consider applying for membership. Croatia, however, declared its interest in joining the alliance and asked if it could participate in MAP. The response from the allies was mixed. Croatia was not cooperating yet fully with the International War Crimes Tribunal and had little chance of meeting other NATO standards in time for the Prague summit, just one year away. Moreover, to be considered together with the nine other aspirants—all of which were now in their third full MAP cycle—was seen as “jumping the queue.” The United States scrambled to identify an alternative to MAP. Buried deep in the files at the U.S. Mission to NATO were documents on the 1996 Intensified Dialogues. Croatia, it was
decided, should have one of those, just as the other aspirants had before joining MAP. Never mind that MAP had not existed when the other aspirants participated in their Intensified Dialogues—this was a way to defer Croatia’s candidacy to after the Prague summit, thus managing Croatia’s expectations while putting Croatia on a positive trajectory for the future.

*The Return of Intensified Dialogue*

Soon after the allies resolved the Croatia question they faced a similar dilemma with Ukraine. Early in 2002, President Leonid Kuchma’s government began sending quiet signals to allies, particularly the United States, that it was ready to abandon its “multivector” foreign policy and throw its lot with NATO and the West. Kuchma asked for MAP. The allies blanched. Most associated Kuchma with the grisly killing of journalist Heorgiy Gongadze, and some felt he was cynically playing NATO against Russian President Vladimir Putin. While acknowledging these concerns, the United States, along with Poland and Canada, argued that the alliance could not simply say no. Once again, Intensified Dialogue emerged as the solution. The United States suggested that Ukraine needed Intensified Dialogue rather than MAP in order to inform itself—and its public—on what it was getting into. Not all allies were immediately on board. The French and British argued that Intensified Dialogue for Ukraine would be a “slippery slope” to MAP, for which it was not ready. Overlooked was the fact that Ukraine had already participated at least nominally in the Intensified Dialogue process back in 1996. In any event, it came to naught. After reports surfaced in summer 2002 that Kuchma had personally approved the sale of Kolchuga early warning systems to Saddam’s Iraq, the United States abandoned its advocacy for Ukraine, and the emerging consensus for Intensified Dialogue unraveled. Ironically, Ukraine no longer qualified even for a process for which it had been approved a half-decade earlier.

NATO’s handling of Croatia and Ukraine in 2001 and 2002—an arcane bit of history to be sure—is worth recounting because of its influence on the evolution of NATO’s enlargement tools and processes. MAP, originally bestowed indiscriminately on every country then seeking NATO membership, had become a program for which countries implicitly had to qualify. Meanwhile, the lapsed process of Intensified Dialogue had been resurrected as a new layer short of MAP—in a sense, a road map to the road map. And, judging by Ukraine’s experience, even participation in Intensified Dialogue could not be assumed but was itself a prize.

But there was an even more important evolution in NATO’s enlargement process in the aftermath of the Prague summit—the growing perception that MAP constituted a guarantee of future membership in the alliance, even though NATO’s own literature said it was not so. The origin of this perception was the desire of the allies to give hope to those aspirants that did not receive invitations in Prague. Allies feared that rejection would be politically devastating for reformers and would undercut their efforts. At first, there was talk of creating some kind of “MAP-plus,” to affirm NATO’s intensified commitment to the aspirants. However, no one was able to explain what the “plus” would mean in practice, and the option was discarded. Instead, NATO leaders increasingly took pains to reassure the aspirants that membership was no longer a question of “if” but “when.” Human nature, perhaps, to console the inconsolable, but such reassurances prompted the allies to adjust their own attitudes toward MAP. If even the worst student was assured of graduating, perhaps the program needed to start with better students. The ensuing shift in allied thinking about MAP would later have significant implications for NATO’s handling of Georgia and Ukraine.

*The 2002 Prague Summit*

The final deliberations of the allies in the runup to the Prague summit took place against the backdrop of rising tensions with Iraq. Speaking to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on September 12, 2002, President Bush evoked the possibility of regime change if Saddam Hussein did not comply with UN Security Council
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resolutions. In October, the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the president to use military force. The gathering storm provided yet another opportunity for the aspirants to prove their mettle. Having deployed troops earlier to Afghanistan, most of the aspirants now sent small numbers of troops to Kuwait to guard against chemical or biological attack. In their capitals and in Brussels, they heralded the tough U.S. stance. Romania’s declarations of support for the United States were galling to the French ambassador, who tersely reminded Romanian MAP delegations that France—not the United States—had been the original champion of Romania’s accession to NATO. Yet all were well aware that at the Prague summit it was the United States that would wield the decisive vote—as it had in Madrid.

While most of the aspirants were thus exceedingly attentive to U.S. views, Slovenia was something of an exception. Long seen as aloof and even arrogant in its approach to MAP, Slovenia failed to convey the same fervent enthusiasm for NATO membership—and for the U.S. approach to Iraq—as the other aspirants. Public support for NATO had always been a problem, and the government continued to defy U.S. calls to spend at least 2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. After a U.S. delegation visited Ljubljana and other aspirant capitals for a final check of their readiness for NATO membership, the question arose of whether only six invitations should be issued—leaving Slovenia out—out of concern that the government in Ljubljana was simply not pro-Atlanticist enough.

In the end, President Bush decided in favor of seven candidates, including Slovenia. Had Bush not done so, the broader consensus at NATO might well have unraveled, leading to a summit as messy as Madrid’s. An enlargement of seven new members satisfied the desire of both northern and southern allies to surround themselves with stable democracies firmly integrating into western institutions. Seven was the number that provided geographic balance. All the allies understood implicitly that it was the right combination of countries to gain consensus—remarkably, without even the necessity of debate. In this case, bigger was easier than smaller. And for all of NATO’s insistence that geography was no longer so paramount in the post-9/11 era of transnational threats, geography clearly remained the crucial determinant in the way most allies approached enlargement.

For the U.S. administration, the decision in favor of seven had not been an easy one. In its internal deliberations, the administration had assessed every attribute and weighed every wart—from strategic considerations to straightforward assessments of progress on reform—mindful that it would have to defend each of the seven countries in the U.S. Senate. Meeting the standards was no guarantee of an invitation, but meeting the standards was essential to being taken seriously as a candidate—as the allies demonstrated by leaving Albania and Macedonia behind. Yet the standards were flexible. They had to be. A country of 1.5 million like Estonia did not lend itself to easy comparison with a country of twenty-two million like Romania. Nor was it a straightforward exercise to compare the efforts of the Baltic governments to build new militaries from scratch with Bulgaria’s very different challenge of downsizing a massive, obsolete, Soviet-era military establishment. And, of course, not everyone in the U.S. government thought the same things were important. What mattered more—the condition of an aspirant’s armed forces, or its treatment of minorities? The departments of State and Defense, not surprisingly, did not always agree. History and emotion also carried weight. The Baltic countries, for example, had special resonance for the United States, which had long viewed their incorporation into the Soviet Union as an historic injustice that should be undone.

Though much had changed in the previous few years, the Prague summit decisions reflected a high degree of policy continuity with the decisions taken in Madrid. Indeed, both enlargement rounds owed a debt to President George H.W. Bush’s original articulation of a “Europe whole, free, and at peace,” and ultimately benefited from sustained bipartisan political support. Yet
the basis for decisions in Prague differed from those in Madrid in important ways. In the runup to Madrid, the reform efforts of the Visegrád states were considered, but not with the same rigor that MAP would later afford. By the time the allies reached Prague, the goal of NATO enlargement had largely been reduced to the pursuit of democracy, stability, and prosperity across Central and Eastern Europe, manifested bureaucratically by the MAP process. Capabilities, too, came to the fore in a way that they had not in Madrid—the result not only of 9/11 but also of lessons learned from the 1998 Senate ratification debate and the 1999 Kosovo conflict. Beyond healing a divided Europe, aspirants would now be expected to help solve problems out of the area. They would not be joining “their grandfather’s NATO” though, in truth, grandpa’s NATO was precisely the organization many aspirants—notably the Baltic governments—were so eager to join. After 9/11, the United States had new ideas for the alliance. And, in the final analysis, perhaps nothing mattered more than the degree to which the aspirants shared the U.S.’ vision for NATO and the world.

On November 21, 2002, NATO invited Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia to begin accession talks to join the alliance. Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia remained in MAP. In the North Atlantic Council, the leaders of the invited governments were welcomed to speak. None was more eloquent than Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga. “Our people have been tested in the fires of history, they have been tempered by suffering and injustice,” she said. “They know that it is worth every effort to support it, to maintain it, to stand for it and to fight for it. We make a solemn pledge and a commitment here today, on this historic and solemn occasion that we will strive to our utmost to do our part to contribute not just to the strength of the Alliance but to do whatever needs to be done to create a world where justice and liberty are available to all.” Her words did not fail to stir—even among those disturbed by U.S. preparations for war against Saddam Hussein’s regime. And around the table, there was a sense that a new Europe was rising and that the politics of the transatlantic community had been changed forever.
The year 2003 was difficult for transatlantic relations. As the United States prepared to unleash “shock and awe” in Iraq, the French were busy rounding up votes in New York to block a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force. On the streets of Europe, hundreds of thousands marched to protest the looming war. In Paris, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder stood together with Russian President Vladimir Putin in an unsettling new coalition of the unwilling. The sense of transatlantic tension was captured in a new book by U.S. neoconservative scholar Robert Kagan entitled *Of Paradise and Power*. It argued that Americans and Europeans no longer occupied the same planet when it came to the use of military force; that Americans were from Mars and Europeans from Venus—a thesis that seemed confirmed when European readers took Kagan’s critique as a compliment. As the transatlantic divide deepened, it seemed the very idea of “the West”—the shared history, norms, and values that ran from Plato to NATO—was breaking down.

OF OLD AND NEW EUROPE

At a Pentagon press conference in the runup to Operation Iraqi Freedom, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld dismissed the views of France and Germany as the tired griping of “Old Europe.” Though the remark was neither diplomatic nor analytically precise (is Paris any older than Prague? Would France become “new” once Nicolas Sarkozy replaced Jacques Chirac?), the observation that Europe was itself divided was on the money. As Timothy Garton Ash put it, “The West did not split neatly into a European and an American half, like a well-cracked walnut.” On the contrary, European leaders were split among themselves, and many with their publics. A week after Rumsfeld’s press conference, as if on cue, the leaders of eight European countries issued a statement decrying Saddam’s “clear threat to world security.” It was followed by a similar statement from the Vilnius Group foreign ministers, calling on the UN Security Council “to take the necessary and appropriate action in response to Iraq’s continuing threat to international peace and security.” Although the signatories were naturally viewed as siding with the United States, it could also be said that they were siding with “the transatlantic bond,” which they viewed as “a guarantee of our freedom.” In any event, the statements did not go down well with Chirac, who (unwisely) likened the Vilnius Group governments to
misbehaving children who had “missed a good opportunity to be quiet.”

Chirac’s condescension suggested he did not appreciate fully the significant eastward shift in Europe’s center of gravity stemming from NATO and EU enlargement. Within a year, NATO allies would complete their parliamentary ratification procedures, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia would become full members of the alliance. Two months later, most of the same countries—together with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—would become members of the European Union as well. No one would mistake these countries for Eastern Europe anymore; they were the new center. Washington grew hopeful—and “Old Europe” concerned—that the Central Europeans would influence not only NATO but also the European Union in a more pro-American direction, away from projects like the independent military headquarters the “chocolate eaters” hoped to establish just down the road from Truman Hall, the residence of the U.S. ambassador to NATO in Brussels.

THE EUROPEAN UNION: WIDER, DEEPER, OR BOTH?

Considering the hard feelings on both sides of the Atlantic, it was perhaps inevitable that the EU’s efforts toward constitutional reform would be met with suspicion by many in the U.S. policy community. In October 2004, EU leaders approved a new constitutional treaty aimed at streamlining decision-making and giving Europe a more unified voice in world affairs—a quantum leap forward in Europe’s historic march toward unity that had begun with the six-nation European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. American detractors argued that the latest phase of the European project had profound and troubling implications for the U.S.’ position in Europe. Never mind that the United States had been one of the original champions of European integration after World War II, seeing it as an essential corollary to the Marshall Plan. Many now feared that a more integrated European Union would undermine NATO and rise as a global power in competition, not collaboration, with the United States. The United States, they argued, should recruit its (New Europe) friends in the European Union to hobble the new treaty or prevent its passage.

In the end, the U.S. critics need not have feared. In May 2005, French voters rejected the new constitution by 54 to 46 percent. A few days later, the constitution went down by an even wider margin in a Dutch referendum. The French result in particular was widely seen as a vote against EU enlargement rather than as a commentary on the constitutional text, and a demonstration that voters cannot always (or ever) be counted on to answer the questions put to them. But, in fact, it was the confluence of concerns about enlargement and integration that led to the referendum train wreck. As a result of the EU’s 2004 enlargement, the ubiquitous “Polish plumber” was now an EU citizen. And thanks to the integration of European laws and markets, the Polish plumber was now legally able to move to Paris, where he could wreak his (alleged) havoc on wages and social standards.

European politicians have long been divided into two camps—the “deepeners” who have sought to create something like a “United States of Europe,” versus the “wideners” who have supported EU expansion into Central and Eastern Europe while resisting transferring too much power to Brussels. Though in opposition to each other, the agendas of the two camps have tended to move in tandem. And naturally so—as enlargement has made the European Union more diverse, a closer political union has been required to keep the European Union governable. With concessions to one side typically matched by concessions to the other, the failure of one camp can drag down both camps. This dynamic was evident in the French referendum, when the government tried to convince voters to support the constitutional treaty by promising that all future EU enlargements—following the admission of Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia—would be subject to a national referendum. As a result of this unfortunate pledge, the future of EU enlargement has been cast into doubt along with the future of European integration.
At the center of French concerns was Turkey, a relatively undeveloped Muslim country of more than seventy million which, upon entry into the European Union, would immediately become the second-largest member (or even the first, if present population trends continue). Yet the fateful French promise also undermines nearer-term prospects for Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo—all candidate or potential candidate countries. “We are in an Indian summer of European Union enlargement,” wrote one observer in 2006. “Warm words of encouragement continue to flow from Brussels . . . but a freeze is coming.” Two years later, the freeze has not yet arrived, but neither have the conditions for EU enlargement improved. When the time comes, it is possible, even likely, that other EU members will follow the French lead and hold their own national referenda on the next batch of EU candidates. With European populations “tired of grand European projects,” these votes may be hard to win, particularly if the EU’s newest members continue to struggle. In February 2008, Romania and Bulgaria were given six months by the European Commission to correct serious deficiencies in their justice and interior policies or else face EU sanctions—further ammunition for EU enlargement skeptics.

Ominously for EU enlargement, European integration is again in crisis. In June 2008, Irish voters rejected the Lisbon Treaty, essentially a re-packaging of the key elements of the failed constitutional treaty. When Polish President Lech Kaczynski remarked that further efforts to approve the Lisbon Treaty were “pointless,” French President Sarkozy rejoined that there was “no question of continuing to enlarge Europe if we are incapable of equipping ourselves with institutions.” It was a telling barb: More than ever, EU expansion has become linked with the future of European integration. As a result, the United States, a long-time supporter of EU expansion because of its contribution to a Europe “whole, free, and at peace,” increasingly finds itself with an abiding interest in the success of European integration, too.

A STRONG EUROPEAN PARTNER

Yet there is also good reason for the United States to support European integration for its own sake and not merely as a corollary to EU enlargement. Henry Kissinger once lamented that when he wanted to call “Europe,” he could find no phone number to dial. Today, Europe has a number—or rather several numbers, including those of High Commissioner Javier Solana and the European Commission. This is positive, because on crucial issues of homeland security—aviation, judicial cooperation, and law enforcement matters—it helps to have a single partner with which to work. It is also difficult to see how EU countries will be able to address their growing overdependence on Russian energy unless members cede some authority to Brussels to forge a common approach. As Ronald Asmus has observed, NATO alone is insufficient to address the full range of challenges to the transatlantic community. The United States “needs a strong, self-confident European partner that can bring its political, economic, and military weight to bear in addressing threats to common interests in Europe and beyond.”

Those who feared, in 2005, that a stronger, more unified Europe would emerge as a counterweight to the United States made the same miscalculation as Jacques Chirac: they assumed that Paris and Berlin would maintain their privileged positions when, in fact, power within the European Union was becoming more diffused. The EU’s expansion to “New Europe” guaranteed a new pro-American current within the European Union and diminished, rather than justified, any need for the United States to undermine European unity through divide-and-conquer tactics. The Central and East Europeans, it is worth noting, see no need to choose between Europe and America or between NATO and the European Union. For these countries, membership in NATO and the European Union has always been two sides of the same coin—mutually reinforcing pathways in their efforts to rejoin the West. The newest members of NATO and the European Union may be strong Atlanticists, but they
A Strong European Partner

are also staunch Europeans. And they want unity, not discord.

The United States cannot determine the future of Europe, but it does have influence. The United States has often intervened directly on EU enlargement, for example, leaning on Brussels and Ankara at key milestones to keep Turkish accession on track. And it has influenced EU expansion indirectly by assisting reform in candidate countries—notably in the Balkans—thereby improving their EU membership credentials. With respect to European integration, the United States has a choice: It can encourage unity by empowering the European Commission and the new EU foreign minister through summit meetings and other high-level contacts; or it can discourage it by prioritizing bilateral relations with friendly member states. How the United States proceeds will naturally be influenced by how the European Union, as well as key member states, approaches relations with Washington.

Europe is a work in progress. It will continue to evolve, including in some ways unforeseen. How Europe is configured matters to the United States. Whether it continues to expand, matters. It matters because the process of NATO enlargement alone is not enough to complete the task of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Consider Serbia, the target of NATO air strikes only a decade ago. Today it is the prospect of membership in the European Union—not NATO—that is attractive enough to warrant a serious program of reform. As for Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union, early membership in the European Union rather than in NATO might be preferable to secure their westward integration without provoking a crisis with Moscow.80

As a practical matter, however, the West is not currently equipped to weigh the comparative advantages of further NATO and EU expansion, to make choices, and to implement them. At present, the EU’s enlargement agenda is limited to “the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey.”81 Ukraine and Georgia are not even on the agenda (let alone Moldova, Belarus, or Azerbaijan). Nor are they likely to be added at a time when the European Union is struggling to meet even its current commitments in the Balkans, and the prospects for Turkish accession seem increasingly remote. For the time being, the European Union seems content to hide behind ever-proliferating technocratic rules and requirements that reduce enlargement to an inexorable bureaucratic process and relieve it of the burden of venturing into strategic terrain.

As a result, EU and NATO enlargement, after proceeding nearly in parallel since the end of the Cold War, has begun to diverge—perhaps not in the Balkans, where NATO’s recent invitations to Albania and Croatia, and its near-invitation to Macedonia, should help maintain their momentum toward EU membership—but certainly in their treatment of Ukraine and Georgia. Does it matter? Yes, in the sense that the two tracks of NATO and EU membership are mutually reinforcing, with progress more likely to take place in tandem rather than separately. And yes, in the sense that the independent requirements of the two organizations ensure more balanced national reform programs. On the other hand, there may be legitimate reasons to encourage progress on one track but not the other—the impact on relations with Russia being one such consideration.

The reality, however, is that NATO and the European Union have made no particular effort to coordinate on enlargement—surprising if one considers the importance of the issue, though not surprising if one considers the weak state of NATO-EU cooperation overall. Such cooperation has been hamstrung by tensions between Turkey, a NATO but not an EU member, and Cyprus, an EU but not a NATO member. These tensions have made it difficult to identify substantive issues on which to work. Of course, there is something inherently absurd anyway about a table full of ambassadors representing organizations with virtually identical memberships gathered to cooperate with one another (or perhaps with themselves).82

The recent upswing in transatlantic relations provides grounds for optimism. Following the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Angela Merkel in Germany, Americans have
been markedly more relaxed about the prospect of a militarily more powerful European Union. It is now almost certain that France will announce its reentry into NATO’s integrated military command at the 2009 summit in Strasbourg-Kehl. Moreover, a new government in Cyprus has eased tensions with Turkey and raised hope that progress might be possible toward a settlement on that divided island. If French President Sarkozy is correct that NATO and the European Union are now poised to “march hand in hand” to address today’s global challenges, perhaps European enlargement will emerge as an issue on which meaningful NATO-EU cooperation can finally take place.
NATO’s April 2008 summit in Bucharest was supposed to be all about Afghanistan. After all, coalition efforts there had not been going well. The Taliban appeared to be making a comeback, and allied casualties were mounting. NATO’s International Security Assistance Force suffered from uneven contributions and weak rules of engagement that limited the effectiveness of some allied troops. In the runup to the summit, U.S. frustration spilled into the press, with recriminations of a “two-tiered Alliance” reminiscent of old arguments over burden-sharing.84

Yet, it was the issue of NATO enlargement, not Afghanistan, that provided most of the drama in Bucharest—notably, the public requests of Georgia and Ukraine to become official candidates for NATO membership by entering the MAP process. Within the alliance, the lines were clearly drawn. The United States and most of NATO’s newer members strongly supported MAP for Ukraine and Georgia, while several old allies—led by German Chancellor Angela Merkel—were intensely opposed. As Russian President Putin watched from the wings, the debate turned bitter, with accusations of German “appeasement” of Russia for the sake of good relations and gas.

What emerged was an awkward compromise. At the end of the North Atlantic Council meeting that ran two hours long, Germany and France consented to language stating that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO” yet still held firm against allowing either country into MAP. It was an ironic result. After lobbying against MAP on the grounds that it would be tantamount to a membership guarantee, the French and Germans opted to put the guarantee right up front. The language also had the unintended effect of highlighting NATO’s designs for Ukraine and Georgia rather than the sovereign goals of the aspirants themselves. In a subsequent visit to Tbilisi, Chancellor Merkel reaffirmed the language of the Bucharest Declaration, saying, “Georgia will become a member of NATO if it wants to—and it does want to.”86

While fudging on Ukraine and Georgia, the allies launched NATO’s fourth modern expansion by inviting Albania and Croatia to begin accession talks with the alliance. Macedonia was also slated to receive an invitation, but Greece refused to join the consensus because of its longstanding name dispute over “Macedonia” with the government in Skopje. As a result, the allies could agree only that an invitation to Macedonia “will be extended as soon as a mutually
acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached.” In other words, once Skopje and Athens come to agreement, accession talks can commence without any further high-level political decisions by the alliance. However, the Macedonians can hardly take comfort. So long as Greece is governed by a weak coalition heavily reliant on nationalist support, Athens will have little appetite for compromise. Macedonia thus faces the prospect of a protracted stalemate that also might corrode its progress toward EU accession.

For NATO, it was a sad spectacle: a single ally blocking, for parochial reasons, implementation of the alliance’s strategy to extend stability and security to one of the continent’s last troubled regions.

Some have argued that by inviting Albania and Croatia—and nearly Macedonia—to begin accession talks with the alliance, NATO lowered its standards. They may be right. Although Albania and Macedonia have made significant reform progress through nine years of MAP, they have not achieved the same level of democracy, stability, or good governance as the previous generation of NATO invitees. But to say that NATO lowered its standards is not necessarily to say it was the wrong decision. Proponents argued that the invitations were essential for cementing stability in Central Europe’s last troubled region and providing a security environment conducive to further reform. Accession to NATO should also hasten their progress toward EU membership, creating incentives for neighboring states—notably Serbia—to make similar transformations.

In short, with its invitations to Albania and Croatia, NATO placed strategic considerations above the narrow requirements of the MAP process. With the exception of Greece’s veto, Bucharest reflected a high degree of policy consensus among NATO and EU members toward enlargement in the Balkans. The allies are on track to complete their ratification procedures for Albania and Croatia in early 2009, which should allow them to sit at the table at NATO’s 2009 summit as full members. Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, both of which began Intensified Dialogues with NATO after Bucharest, could graduate to MAP as early as 2009. Serbia might then be ready to begin an Intensified Dialogue with the alliance that bombed it only a decade ago. There is little doubt that all the countries of the Balkans will have the option of joining NATO within a decade, while on the EU side these countries are also making inexorable progress toward the day of reckoning with enlargement-weary European publics. In the Balkans at least, the era of transatlantic solidarity that sustained NATO expansion for more than a decade continues to hold.

Outside the Balkans, however, transatlantic consensus has been replaced by strategic confusion. Americans and Europeans can rightly take pride in the ongoing expansion of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, but they will have to forgive the citizens of, say, Moldova, for delighting less in the phrase. Today there remains a band of countries situated uncomfortably between, or near, the boundaries of the West and Russia—countries more or less “European” in culture, history, and civilization yet with no immediate prospect of joining Europe’s modern institutions. NATO and EU expansion has certainly erased old dividing lines—but it has also created new ones. When nine additional countries joined the Schengen group in December 2007, it was suddenly possible to drive from Tallinn to Lisbon without ever passing a checkpoint. The cost of abolishing those internal restrictions, however, was a tightening of the EU’s external borders, leaving Belarusians and Ukrainians unhappily on the other side.

MAPPING NATO’S EAST

Less than two decades after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is only natural that our policy paradigms remain in flux. Just as the term “post-Cold-War world” merely told us what our era was not, the term “post-Soviet” has ceased to be a useful or constructive category for the countries to NATO’s east. Our mental map of “Europe” has changed dramatically in the years since the Cold War ended, and will undoubtedly change again. New paradigms are emerging, each with its own
Consider the term, “new Eastern Europe,” comprising Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Is it merely a geographic denotation, or does it convey that just as old Eastern Europe was successfully integrated into Europe’s mainstream we should expect the new one to do the same?

Sometimes agendas overlap. Ukraine may be part of new Eastern Europe, but it is also, apparently, the lynchpin of a “wider Black Sea” region that includes Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia as well. That such a thing as a Black Sea region (or, for that matter, a wider one) exists at all seems mainly in the eye of the beholder—or, rather, in the eyes of those who would like to see these countries oriented toward the West. Several years ago, Romania’s delegation to NATO routinely began inserting “Black Sea Region,” into every relevant document that passed its way. Over time, and with repetition, a new framework has emerged for the alliance to involve itself in Romania’s neighborhood.

The spirit of these new paradigms is undoubtedly different from that of “Eurasia”—the term routinely applied to the countries of the former Soviet Union, neither wholly in Europe nor wholly in Asia. It is a term perhaps synonymous with low expectations, given the number of poorly governed autocracies therein. And like the term “post-Soviet,” the term “Eurasia” does not differentiate. Yet, for the time being, the term lives on, including in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.

The democratic transformations in Ukraine and Georgia give new urgency to the question of whether Ukraine and Georgia belong not to Eurasia but to “Europe.” The issue is far from academic, not when the basic documents of NATO and the European Union stipulate that only “European” countries may be considered for membership. “Europe,” of course, is not just a matter of geography but also of history, religion, culture, and values. Such “civilizational” criteria have been invoked by the French to reject Turkey’s fitness for EU membership. Indeed, the French have pushed for a process to settle, once and for all, the boundaries of “Europe”—presumably well short of the Bosphorus Straits. Pushback by other EU members, however, has ensured that the argument over where Europe begins and ends is unlikely to be settled anytime soon.

From the perspective of the United States, there is no question that Georgia and Ukraine are firmly part of Europe. But for many European governments, the question is open, and current EU programs provide, at best, a partial answer. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), aimed at enhancing relations with the new “ring of friends” created by the EU’s 2004 expansion, put Georgia and Ukraine in the same category as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova and numerous countries of North Africa and the Middle East—even the Palestinian Authority. While the European Union has shown itself willing to back up the ENP with increased assistance levels, it has taken no concrete steps to upgrade relations with either Georgia or Ukraine in the aftermath of the Rose and Orange revolutions.

For now, the ENP remains the primary instrument for Brussels to interact with Ukraine and Georgia—an instrument that explicitly excludes a NATO membership perspective.

It stands to reason that if Georgia and Ukraine are “European” enough for NATO, they could hardly be otherwise for the European Union. Perhaps this explains why some EU members were so unsettled by the requests of Georgia and Ukraine to become formal candidates for NATO membership. By requesting MAP, Georgia and Ukraine effectively put NATO in the position of defining Europe’s borders on behalf of both organizations. NATO’s declaration that Georgia and Ukraine will one day join the alliance would seem to settle the matter of their European identities—for the European Union as well as for NATO. For Georgia and Ukraine, this is good news. They may not be in MAP, but their place on Europe’s map is now a little clearer.

It is worth pausing to consider why NATO should feel the need to treat Georgia and Ukraine in the same breath, together in paragraph 23 of the Bucharest summit declaration.
Not only will both “become members of NATO,” but also both can expect MAP as the “next step on their direct way to membership.” And both will undergo a “first assessment of progress” in December 2008. In drafting the language of the declaration, the allies seem to have been operating from the shared assumption that Ukraine and Georgia would have to sink or swim together. The option of welcoming only one of them into MAP seems not to have been considered seriously.

Why should the fortunes of two countries so different in their circumstances and development, and a fair distance from one another, be linked by NATO in this way? The obvious reason is that Ukraine and Georgia are at the same stage of the membership process—both participating in Intensified Dialogue. Neither stands out in its readiness to join MAP; both have strengths and weaknesses. One also could argue—as indeed some did in the runup to Bucharest—that promoting one without the other would constitute a green light for Russia to meddle in whichever of the two is left behind. It is worth noting, however, that unlike the previous generation of NATO aspirants from Central and Eastern Europe, Georgia and Ukraine have not presented themselves to NATO as a cohesive group along the lines of the “Visegrád Group,” the “Vilnius Ten,” or the “Adriatic Three.”

Although Ukraine and Georgia share a strategic context—both are former Soviet republics bordering Russia as well as important energy corridors for the West—there are also key strategic differences, beginning with Georgia’s precarious position at the unstable crossroads of Europe, Russia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Domestic politics and public attitudes toward NATO enlargement in each country could hardly be more different. Moreover, it safely can be assumed that Russia does not view the prospect of Georgia’s accession to NATO in precisely the same terms as it does Ukraine’s. Therefore, linkage would seem to make less sense than to examine each country individually—a task to which this paper now turns.

UKRAINE—A TALE OF (more than) TWO CIVILIZATIONS

NATO’s “Distinctive Partnership” with Ukraine is something of a paradox. The attention that the alliance gives Ukraine—measured in such things as summit meetings, military-to-military cooperation, and assistance programs—puts it in a class above other partner nations. Yet it is also a relationship in Russia’s shadow. In dealing with Kiev, the West has tended to keep at least one eye on Moscow—President George H.W. Bush’s 1991 Ukraine “Chicken Kiev” speech being one notorious example. Major steps forward in NATO’s relations with Ukraine have taken place in almost precise parallel with upgrades to the NATO-Russia relationship—and tended to be overshadowed by them. Even Zbigniew Brzezinski’s classic rationale for supporting Ukraine’s independence—as the key to turning Russia into a normal country by foreclosing its “imperial temptations”—implies that the reason we care about Ukraine’s trajectory is mainly because we care about Russia’s.

Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine’s president from July 1994 to January 2005, did not make it any easier for the alliance to take a consistent approach toward Ukraine. With his “multivector” foreign policy, Kuchma kept Ukraine bouncing back and forth between Russia and the West. The friendship treaty he signed with President Boris Yeltsin in 1997 formalized the stationing of Russia’s Black Sea fleet on Ukrainian territory—an arrangement that continues today and will need to be addressed if Ukraine becomes a truly credible candidate for NATO membership. When, in 2002, Kuchma asked for MAP, it appeared to the allies that what he wanted was not an instrument to facilitate genuine reform but an additional bargaining chip he could deploy against Putin.

With the Orange Revolution and the election of President Viktor Yushchenko, NATO’s relationship with Ukraine began to emerge from Russia’s shadow. For the first time, Ukraine abandoned its multivector foreign policy and established NATO and EU accession as its top foreign policy goal. While the European Union
remained stuck on ENP for Ukraine, NATO responded with an offer of Intensified Dialogue— the first time that NATO and Ukraine significantly upgraded their partnership without a corresponding move in NATO-Russia relations. Intensified Dialogue offered Ukraine’s leadership the opportunity to launch a public campaign on the benefits (and burdens) of NATO membership. However, the government failed to take full advantage of Intensified Dialogue, largely because of the political turmoil surrounding the March 2006 Ukrainian elections.

Ukraine’s first free and fair parliamentary elections did not speed up the country’s progress toward NATO and EU membership but slowed it down instead. Reform stalled amid efforts to form a new government, and feuding within the Orange camp further frustrated the public’s high expectations for rapid reform. Even so, in 2006 Ukraine became the first post-Soviet state to achieve the designation of “free,” according to Freedom House. Russia’s downgrading to “unfree” in the same year underscored that Ukraine was now on a very different trajectory from its neighbors in the commonwealth of independent states.

An additional achievement of Ukraine’s leadership was its development of a critical mass, though not a consensus, in favor of NATO membership. In January 2008, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Parliamentary Chairman Arseniy Yatsenyuk joined Yushchenko in a joint letter to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer asking that Ukraine be allowed to join MAP. The letter cited “deep and irreversible democratic changes” that “will enable Ukraine to fulfill all the necessary criteria for NATO membership.” Opposition party leader Viktor Yanukovich expressed outrage at the letter, claiming it had been “prepared in Washington, not in Kiev.” The resulting acrimony contributed to the gridlock that has prevailed ever since in Ukraine’s parliament.

Ukraine’s leadership has promised that at the end of the MAP process, the issue of NATO membership will be put to a referendum. Polling consistently shows that less than a quarter of Ukrainians believe their country should join NATO, while a majority currently opposes it. For the public, NATO is a collection of negative stereotypes—the organization that bombed Belgrade, a vehicle for U.S. military dominance, an irrelevant throwback to the Cold War. Such misperceptions are helped along by the Russian media. The European Union, in contrast, faces no such image problem. With the exception of the communists, all parties in Ukraine support the goal of EU membership because of the political and economic benefits they perceive it would bring.

Western analysts routinely cite the low level of public support for NATO membership as a principal hurdle for Ukraine in its pursuit of NATO membership. Others, however, point out that the polling numbers were not so different in places like Slovakia, Slovenia, and Croatia before (or even after) they entered MAP. Maybe so, but numbers alone do not tell the whole story. The issue is not just the breadth of opposition to NATO membership but also its depth. Today, Ukraine is a country divided: between Orthodox East and Catholic West; between the industrial oblasts of Kiev, Donetsk, and Dnepropetrovsk and the agrarian hinterland; between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian passport holders in the Crimea; and between the Party of Regions and the Orange camp that itself has fractured into two opposing blocs. One need not accept Samuel Huntington’s thesis of a “clash of civilizations” to recognize that resolving Ukraine’s divisions will take something more than a public information campaign.

Fundamentally, it is up to the people of Ukraine to resolve the issues of national identity and their place in the world. For now, the lack of a national consensus in favor of NATO membership—and the continuing fragmentation of Ukraine’s body politic—cast doubt not only on the ability of Ukraine to sustain Western-oriented reforms but also on its readiness to assume the most solemn obligation of NATO membership, that of collective defense. Entry into MAP, far from resolving these issues, would instead intensify them—precisely why MAP is needed, to test the sustainability of Ukraine’s NATO
commitment. There is no guarantee that Ukraine will succeed. Above all, success depends on strong and effective leadership within Ukraine. Moreover, it remains to be seen what lessons Ukrainians choose to draw from the recent events in Georgia—whether those events will catalyze support for a closer relationship with NATO or contribute to keeping Ukraine in Russia’s shadow.

GEORGIA—CHANGING THE PARADIGM

For all the security and defense assistance that Georgia has received from the United States and other allies in recent years, it is no more protected by NATO’s security umbrella than any other nonallied country in the Euro-Atlantic area—a point that was devastatingly clear when Russian troops entered Georgian territory in August 2008.  

Prior to Russia’s incursion, Georgia did not enjoy a privileged relationship with NATO comparable to that of Ukraine. However, at an emergency session of the North Atlantic Council on August 20, 2008, NATO foreign ministers agreed to establish a new NATO-Georgia Commission on a par with the NATO-Ukraine Commission.

Relations between Georgia and NATO had already been growing for some time—especially since Georgia’s 2003 Rose Revolution. At their 2004 summit in Istanbul, the allies agreed to shift the focus of NATO’s Partnership for Peace toward the strategically important regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Georgia was the first country to take advantage of the shift, developing an Individual Partnership Action Plan with the Alliance and offering to host a NATO liaison officer in Tbilisi. At NATO’s September 2006 foreign ministerial meeting in New York, the United States overcame opposition from France and Germany to offer Georgia Intensified Dialogue.

The offer was, in part, an acknowledgment of the impressive reform progress made by President Mikheil Saakashvili’s government. Strong economic growth, reduced corruption, and favorable investment policies earned Georgia the World Bank’s designation of “world’s leading economic reformer” in 2007. Not all of Georgia’s citizens, however, were feeling the benefits. Disenchantment with Saakashvili’s government led to wide-spread protests in the fall of 2007, which were met by a police crackdown, a state of emergency, and the muzzling of independent media, earning Saakashvili’s government a rare rebuke by the United States. Saakashvili then held a snap election on January 5, 2008, which he won in a flawed vote. While the May 21 parliamentary elections partially restored Georgia’s democratic credentials, the damage to its Bucharest MAP bid was done.

Unlike Ukraine, Georgia’s interest in joining NATO is not in doubt. In a referendum held alongside the presidential election on January 5, 2008, an overwhelming 77 percent of voters supported NATO membership. Georgia’s unrelenting pursuit of closer ties with the alliance led to severe political and economic pressure from Russia long before Russia’s August military invasion, including episodic closures of their common border, suspension of air and ground transport links, and embargoes against exports of Georgian wine and other goods.

Russian pressure was always most acute in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both enclaves have been beyond Tbilisi’s effective control since the full-scale wars of the early 1990s. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the United States was all too willing to let Yeltsin’s quasi-democratic Russia take the lead in the southern Caucasus, inserting itself first on the side of ethnic separatists and subsequently as a self-styled peacemaker. For more than a decade, Russian “peacekeepers” maintained what little control existed in both enclaves, while the decimated populations lived in economic ruin and post-Soviet misery. Large numbers of displaced persons from both regions—including 250,000 from Abkhazia alone—placed heavy economic, social, and political burdens on Georgia’s government.

Russian mischief in the separatist regions increased in the aftermath of Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008 and again following NATO’s April summit in Bucha-
rest. In mid-April, President Putin instructed Russian ministries to forge closer ties with their Abkhaz and South Ossetian counterparts, prompting concern that Russia was engaged in a “creeping annexation” of both regions. The same month, a Russian fighter plane shot down a Georgian unmanned aircraft in the skies above Abkhazia, while Moscow equipped its “peacekeepers” in Abkhazia with the unlikely peacekeeping tool of new howitzers. As war clouds gathered, tensions suddenly shifted to South Ossetia, leading to the events of August and Russia’s August 26 diplomatic recognition of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The fragility of Georgia’s democratic experiment aside, it is this regional separatism that has posed the greatest challenge to the country’s NATO ambitions. In the runup to the Bucharest summit, German Chancellor Merkel articulated what many allies were feeling: that a country unable to control large chunks of its own territory is unfit to join the alliance. In other words, so long as there are frozen conflicts on its soil, Georgia will not be a viable candidate for NATO membership. The problem with the paradigm is that resolution of these conflicts never has been entirely in Georgia’s hands. Since 1992, Russia has had the power to act as spoiler, through its incompatible roles as both a party to the conflict and a purported facilitator of negotiations. So long as Russia opposes NATO membership for Georgia, and as long as resolution of the conflicts is viewed as a condition for Georgia’s NATO membership, Russia would seem to have little incentive to work toward resolution.

Thus, until the incentive structure is changed, and the dysfunctional negotiating formats fixed, there is little likelihood that Georgia’s separatist conflicts can be solved, little chance of NATO membership for Georgia, and not much hope for lasting regional stability. The task looks that much more difficult following Russia’s incursion into Georgia and its imposition of “new facts on the ground.” For now, the conflict appears to have weakened Saakashvili’s hand and reduced the bargaining position of the West. But perhaps it is not too optimistic to imagine that the specter of continuing warfare in the Caucasus could provide the jolt needed to alter the current paradigm. This, too, will depend on the choices the next U.S. administration makes concerning the future of NATO enlargement.

RUSSIA—A CONTINUING STAKE IN EUROPE

Deliberations in the West concerning NATO enlargement have never been far removed from debates on Russia policy. The intense public debates of the Clinton era that preceded NATO’s invitations to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland hinged not on the democratic credentials of the candidates but mainly on the question of how enlargement would affect Russia’s reforms and its relations with the West. The unlikely coalition advocating NATO expansion included “neocontainment” conservatives who wanted to cement America’s Cold War victory over Moscow. While NATO’s new members dutifully supported the alliance’s transformation to meet twenty-first century threats, what they valued most was protection from Russia. Even as the Red Army lost its centrality to NATO’s modern roles and missions, Russia remained central to the issue of enlargement.

There is little doubt that Russia was a major factor in NATO’s Bucharest summit decision to keep Georgia and Ukraine out of MAP, notwithstanding the vigorous denials of Germany’s defensive chancellor. Yet it would have been more surprising had the allies not taken Russian views into account. The modern history of NATO enlargement is a history of close engagement with Russia. President George H.W. Bush was highly attentive to Gorbachev’s concerns regarding post-Cold War security arrangements and ultimately concluded that gestures on aid, trade, arms control, and NATO reform would diminish Moscow’s opposition to a united Germany within NATO. Underlying the successful diplomacy of the first Bush administration was the premise that Moscow had a legitimate interest in the emerging European order.

President Clinton’s approach to Russia and NATO enlargement also emphasized engagement. While making it clear that Russia could
not block NATO enlargement, the U.S. administration worked tirelessly to gain at least tacit consent from the Kremlin. Key to this effort was the development of a new NATO-Russia relationship to parallel NATO expansion. Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott instructed his team at the State Department to “think bilobally” and to give NATO-Russia relations the same energy and attention as NATO enlargement. This “dual track” approach led to the signing, on May 27, 1997, of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the creation of a new consultative mechanism called the Permanent Joint Council. Coming a mere five weeks before the Madrid summit, the new NATO-Russia relationship removed some of the sting of NATO’s accession invitations to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Also helpful, from Moscow’s perspective, was NATO’s carefully worded commitment to avoid “additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces” in NATO’s newest member states. The summit’s emphasis on “NATO adaptation” instead of “enlargement” gave the Russians yet more face-saving cover.

President George W. Bush and his allied counterparts turned to the same playbook to address Russian concerns in advance of NATO’s November 2002 Prague summit. As the allies contemplated a “big bang” enlargement to include the Baltic states, NATO and Russia resolved to upgrade their relationship to allow for “joint decisions” and “joint action” in areas of mutual interest. Subsequent negotiations led to the creation, in May 2002, of a new NATO-Russia Council to replace the Permanent Joint Council. In the NATO-Russia Council, Russia would be treated as an “equal partner”—though only on carefully screened topics. The significance of the new format—with meetings “at twenty” rather than “nineteen-plus-one”—understandably eluded many observers. NATO Secretary General George Robertson explained that the difference was “not a question of mathematics, but one of chemistry.” In any event, six months after the new forum was created, NATO invited seven more countries to begin accession talks with the alliance.

Thus, each time NATO has enlarged since the end of the Cold War, it has worked closely with the Kremlin to take its concerns into account and to adopt face-saving measures for Moscow. Bucharest was an exception—the first NATO summit in the modern era where invitations were issued without a corresponding gesture to Moscow, presumably because NATO membership for the Adriatic Three was not a sensitive issue for the Kremlin.

If and when NATO membership becomes a near-term prospect for Georgia and Ukraine, the question naturally arises of whether the United States should follow the example of previous U.S. administrations by pursuing a “dual track” approach with Russia as a corollary to NATO expansion. Given the strong feelings that NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine provokes among Russians—stronger even than the earlier “loss” of the Baltic states—a strategy to manage Russia’s reaction seems more important than ever. Yet the likelihood of such a strategy succeeding has never looked so bleak, particularly after the Russia-Georgia war. Today, it is probably far-fetched to think that Russia would be open to any kind of approach aimed at gaining its acquiescence to further NATO enlargement.

Moscow is not only opposed as a matter of policy to Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO, it is also undertaking active measures to prevent Ukraine’s and Georgia’s westward integration. Ukraine, with its deep historic and cultural ties to Russia, is an even more sensitive case than Georgia, as evidenced by Moscow’s tendency to treat Ukraine as a domestic rather than foreign policy matter. Ukraine’s future may well be an existential question for the Kremlin. Without dominating Ukraine—its industrial base, its human capital, and its energy routes—Russia can no longer aspire to empire. Moreover, a firmly democratic Ukraine prospering economically could become an irresistible model for Russia’s own development, eroding the autocracy and economic statism of the Russian elite.

Further complicating relations with Moscow is Russia’s new-found oil wealth, which gives Russia leverage over its neighbors and influence
in allied capitals—and a renewed swagger in its conduct of foreign affairs. Russia's domination of European energy supplies is having a corrosive effect on alliance solidarity. The rifts are especially evident between NATO's old and new members—colorfully illustrated by former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's budding career at Gazprom, building a pipeline to bypass the Baltic states and Poland. Not every trend, however, is cause for alarm. While Europe is dependent on Russian gas, Russia's economy is increasingly dependent on investment from EU member nations, which doubled from 2004 to seventeen billion euros in 2007. Moreover, Russia's looming demographic disaster, crumbling infrastructure, and geopolitical isolation belie its image as an energy superpower.

Today, there is no shortage of narratives to explain Russian behavior. The humiliations of the 1990s is one such narrative, but there are others, including Russia as the ultimate corporate state, fusing foreign and domestic policy seamlessly with commercial interests to enrich a corrupt national elite. The “Russia, Inc.” narrative posits an “ideologically barren” foreign policy in which Moscow can buy influence abroad but cannot otherwise inspire other governments to support its objectives. Not so, writes Robert Kagan. Putin's concept of “sovereign democracy” is more than a reaction to the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine. It constitutes a “guiding national philosophy” that correlates “power abroad and autocracy at home” and possesses an ideological appeal beyond the borders of Russia. Russian (and Chinese) leaders are not simply autocrats, argues Kagan. “They believe in autocracy.”

One need not believe in Kagan’s thesis to see that managing Russia’s reaction to any future eastward expansion by NATO will be a challenge of a different magnitude from the past. However, viewing the relationship through the prism of ideology—as a clash of irreconcilable value systems—may not be the best starting point if the goal is to find some sort of accommodation with Moscow. Casting Russia in the role of nineteenth century villain may well obscure the many important areas in which Russia and the West share common interests. If the confluence of Islamic extremist terrorism and weapons of mass destruction poses the gravest challenge to the security of both Russia and the United States, then a return to East-West rivalry seems a dangerous distraction from the real threats of the twenty-first century.

Equally self-defeating is the notion that Russia will improve its behavior if only NATO and the European Union would extend to Moscow the offer of full membership. Such wishful thinking disregards what Russia—even a hypothetical democratizing Russia—wants for itself. True, the quasi-democratic Russia of Boris Yeltsin did probe repeatedly into the possibility of joining NATO in the 1990s. But it is worth considering what plans the Russians had for NATO once they joined. After all, the gutting of the alliance and its replacement with some kind of pan-European security structure, perhaps akin to the nineteenth century Concert of Europe, has been a recurring theme in Russian diplomacy.

Russia has never been, and is unlikely in the foreseeable future to be, satisfied with equal membership in NATO or the European Union, in keeping with its status as a nuclear superpower and permanent member of the UN Security Council. Moscow’s embrace of NATO’s Partnership for Peace in the 1990s was a deviation reflecting Russia’s elation—premature, as it turned out—that NATO expansion had been taken off the table. Moscow subsequently reduced its participation in NATO’s partnership and insisted on a special relationship to restore its status as a partner “equal” to NATO. Today, ambassadorial meetings of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council typically find a Russian counselor, or even a first secretary, filling the chair—a signal that Russia is too important to be just “one of the group.” The same spirit pervades Russia’s relations with the European Union. Having opted out of the European Neighborhood Policy and other EU regional frameworks, Russia continues to base the foundation of its relations with Brussels on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1997.
Thus, it seems clear that any new NATO initiative aimed at diminishing Russian opposition to Georgian and Ukrainian accession is unlikely to be successful unless it takes into account Moscow’s desire to be treated as a partner “equal” to the entire alliance. But beyond appealing to Moscow’s nostalgic preoccupation with regaining superpower status, what might such an initiative look like? First, there is a practical question of how many upgrades any relationship can endure. Having already invented NATO-Russia relations with the Permanent Joint Council, and reinvented them with the NATO-Russia Council, yet another rejiggering of formats likely would be dismissed as bureaucratic smoke and mirrors. At any rate, the real issue—to paraphrase then NATO Secretary General George Robertson—is not the “mathematics” of the NATO-Russia relationship, but its “chemistry.” And, in recent years, the chemistry has not been good.

Improving the chemistry does not require new formats but rather new forms of cooperation. Advancing NATO-Russia relations to a qualitatively new level would require joint projects far more substantive and ambitious than those attempted thus far in the NATO-Russia Council. Both the United States and Russia would have to take risks. Missile defense, for example, could be transformed from a source of bilateral friction to an area of cooperation, perhaps connecting U.S. radar and interceptors in the Czech Republic and Poland to the Russian-leased radar site in Azerbaijan. Such cooperation would have the added benefit of underscoring that Czech and Polish membership in NATO enhance, rather than undermine, Russia’s own security. Other possibilities for expanded NATO-Russia cooperation include nonproliferation and counternarcotics activities.

Of course, now is hardly the time to contemplate ambitious new cooperation with Russia. Quite the opposite: In the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of into Georgia, allied foreign ministers reached the appropriate conclusion that NATO and Russia “cannot continue with business as usual.” It is far from certain that Russian actions in Georgia will allow for a restoration of the NATO-Russia Council in the near future, let alone the consideration of new initiatives aimed at improving the chemistry of NATO-Russia relations.

THREE CHOICES FOR THE NEXT U.S. ADMINISTRATION

The next U.S. administration faces difficult choices that will have a profound impact on the future map of Europe. While the allies continue to share a common view toward NATO expansion in the Balkans, there is no consensus on NATO’s eastern neighborhood. The long-term challenge, of course, concerns more than just Ukraine and Georgia. Azerbaijan could be the next country in the broader region to declare its interest in NATO membership, while Moldova, Armenia, and perhaps even Belarus could some day do the same. There is also the possibility that Finland or Sweden could seek NATO membership in the years ahead. But for now it is the requests of Georgia and Ukraine that have put the issue on the table and that require the immediate attention of the next U.S. administration.

The path that the next administration chooses will depend on its broader foreign policy considerations, including the importance it assigns to spreading democracy and its calculations concerning the value of Russian cooperation on issues such as Iran and North Korea. It depends, as well, on what America and her allies want NATO to be—whether an instrument for expeditionary operations far beyond the European continent, a global club of democracies, or a continuing hedge against a Russia forever destined to be on the wrong side of an East-West divide. An analysis of Russian behavior will surely play a role, as will the sovereign decisions of Russia’s neighbors who, no doubt, will draw their own conclusions from the events in Georgia and adjust their plans accordingly.

This study presents three broad policy options for the next U.S. administration in this new era of NATO enlargement. Each of the three options contains its own distinct analysis of the issue. While the three analyses differ from
one another, they are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. Rather, they offer three different ways of looking at the problem—three different perspectives, each valid in its own way.

**OPTION ONE**

**ACCELERATE NATO’S EASTWARD EXPANSION**

**Analysis:** The United States has an interest in seeing Ukraine and Georgia—and the other former Soviet states—develop into fully sovereign, stable, democratic, and prosperous nations. The further expansion of a Europe whole, free, and at peace would enhance U.S. influence and prestige throughout the broader region. The United States, having encouraged democratic transformations in NATO’s east, has a moral responsibility to continue supporting democracy. The remaining “gray zone” of weak, insecure states squeezed between East and West invites superpower rivalry and is inherently unstable. In the long term, eliminating the power vacuum in the new Eastern Europe and the wider Black Sea region might allow for a fully normal U.S.-Russia relationship. Ukraine’s successful integration into the West is essential to foreclose Russia’s imperial temptations and influence its development into a “normal” country. As Georgia and Ukraine move closer to NATO membership, the European Union would come under pressure to accord them official candidate status, thereby advancing reform and enabling a common EU energy strategy. Only by demonstrating determination and resolve can NATO bolster its newest members in Central and Eastern Europe and deter Russia from seeking to reassert its influence on its former satellites in NATO’s east.

**Implementation:** NATO should invite Georgia and Ukraine into MAP in December 2008 and reaffirm the Bucharest pledge that both will become members of the alliance. By setting a target date no later than 2014 for their accession as full members, NATO can leverage Russia’s interest in avoiding international opprobrium as it prepares to host the Sochi Olympics in 2014. To ensure that Georgia and Ukraine succeed in MAP, the allies should increase bilateral assistance significantly. The allies should undertake active efforts to sway public opinion in Ukraine but should not necessarily make NATO membership conditional on the support of a majority of the population. The allies should make clear that Georgia’s entry into NATO depends not on a final resolution of the separatist conflicts but on Georgia’s good faith diplomatic efforts rather than on the use of military force, consistent with NATO’s 1995 enlargement study. NATO could signal its special interest in the security and sovereignty of both Georgia and Ukraine, perhaps to include “creeping article 5” guarantees. To ensure that key European allies are fully committed, the United States should press the European Union to accord official candidate status to both Ukraine and Georgia.

**Considerations:** Accelerating Georgia’s and Ukraine’s full membership in the alliance is certain to aggravate relations further with Moscow, at least in the short term, and invite Russian countermeasures. NATO expansion in a climate of East-West tension would differ from previous enlargements in that it would increase the number of countries the United States is obligated to defend without necessarily advancing stable relations among states in the region. Containment of Russia would re-emerge as a key purpose of the alliance and could distract attention and resources away from out-of-area operations, including in Afghanistan, where NATO is already stretched thin. Extending an article 5 guarantee to Georgia and Ukraine would be politically controversial, and U.S. Senate ratification cannot be assured. Guaranteeing membership to Ukraine and Georgia reduces allied decision-making flexibility, undercuts the transformational power of MAP, and highlights the designs of the great powers ahead of the sovereign responsibilities of the aspirants. Such rhetoric may prove hollow if the Ukrainian leadership drops its NATO bid, if either aspirant stumbles on reform, or if the allies later reach the conclusion that it is not in their interest for these countries to join the alliance. The European Union is
too fatigued by its current enlargement agenda to consider granting candidate status to Georgia and Ukraine for the foreseeable future and would likely reject U.S. pressure to do so.

**OPTION TWO**

**SUSTAIN NATO’S EASTWARD EXPANSION WITHOUT COMMITMENTS**

**Analysis:** The United States has an interest in seeing Ukraine and Georgia—and the other countries of the former Soviet Union—develop into fully sovereign, stable, democratic, and prosperous nations. Their membership in NATO would expand U.S. prestige and influence in the region and reduce the “gray zone” between Russia and the West. However, the crucial test of any NATO expansion phase is whether it contributes to broader stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. An enlargement round that aggravates East-West relations and increases ethnic tensions in places like the Crimea, and the possibility of conflict between Russia and its neighbors, cannot be considered successful. MAP, with its power to transform, remains one of NATO’s most effective tools. MAP would facilitate the resolution of the separatist conflicts in Georgia by exposing Tbilisi’s tactics to greater allied scrutiny. MAP would help Ukraine’s leadership build the level of domestic support needed for Ukraine to sustain reform and undertake the solemn obligation of collective defense. Ukraine’s and Georgia’s participation in MAP eventually could soften Russian attitudes toward their accession—particularly if relations between Russia and its neighbors improve concurrently. Only the combined efforts of NATO and the European Union can transform effectively the new Eastern Europe and the wider Black Sea region.

**Implementation:** NATO foreign ministers should welcome Georgia and Ukraine into MAP in December 2008, removing the issue before the start of the next U.S. administration and avoiding the fanfare of a summit meeting. A clear statement by NATO that MAP does not guarantee membership would put the emphasis where it belongs—on the work that Georgia and Ukraine must undertake before they can join the alliance. The allies should emphasize the sovereign responsibilities of Georgia and Ukraine based on Helsinki principles and avoid rhetorical declarations about their future NATO membership, which some might interpret as representing a new “great game.” For Ukraine, the task must include establishing a national consensus on NATO membership that transcends political cycles. For Georgia, it must include a return to diplomacy to address the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the long-term goal of achieving good neighborly relations with Russia. Final resolution of the separatist conflicts should not be a precondition for Georgian accession to NATO. Georgia and Ukraine might be in MAP for a decade or more, though the two countries should be delinked and allowed to progress at different speeds. In the meantime, the United States and NATO could seek to rebuild relations with Russia to the extent possible and to make a major diplomatic push to resolve the conflicts in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria. Depending on Russia’s behavior in the future, an opportunity eventually might arise to transform the chemistry of NATO-Russia relations through ambitious new forms of cooperation. As Georgia and Ukraine move closer to accession, NATO should consider providing Moscow with assurances on force deployments surpassing those of previous enlargement rounds. The United States should press the European Union to upgrade relations with both Ukraine and Georgia, and the allies should increase bilateral assistance to both.

**Considerations:** Extending MAP to Georgia and Ukraine would likely increase tensions with Russia in the short term, even if accompanied by a statement that participation in MAP does not guarantee NATO membership. Too much emphasis on the caveats of MAP could be interpreted as a lack of allied resolve and an inadequate response to Russia’s growing assertiveness. While the governments of Georgia and Ukraine
would welcome an offer of MAP, their enthusiasm may diminish over time as they realize that NATO membership will take years to achieve. Ukraine’s participation in MAP will not be smooth under any circumstances. It could become the first NATO aspirant to join, exit, and rejoin MAP amid shifting political winds. The unrelenting cycles of MAP meetings and reviews, and inevitable speculation before each NATO summit meeting, would ensure that the issue of NATO enlargement remains a perennial irritant in East-West relations. Changing the chemistry with Russia will be difficult, particularly if Moscow perceives that its cooperation might be a precursor to further NATO expansion. There is no guarantee that Russia will take a more constructive approach to resolving the so-called frozen conflicts, nor is there any guarantee that Russia will eventually relax its opposition to Georgian and Ukrainian membership in the alliance.

OPTION THREE
SUSPEND NATO’S EASTWARD EXPANSION

Analysis: There is no realistic prospect that Russia will acquiesce to NATO membership for Georgia or Ukraine. Thus, NATO’s further expansion would not achieve the goal of spreading stability, as it has in the past. On the contrary, further eastward expansion could destabilize the Euro-Atlantic area by aggravating East-West relations. Preserving a cushion between Russia and the West, while not necessarily in the interests of Georgia and Ukraine, is nevertheless in the interest of the broader Euro-Atlantic community. The United States will no more be prepared to defend Georgia and Ukraine from aggression in the future than it is today. Suspending NATO’s eastward expansion would allow for a more constructive relationship with Russia, including a joint diplomatic push to resolve the so-called frozen conflicts. Avoiding further encirclement of Russia would defuse Russian nationalism and provide an environment more conducive to democratic reform. NATO cannot afford to return to a mission of containing Russia at a time when NATO is fully occupied in Afghanistan. NATO requires further internal reform to ensure it remains effective. In the next decade, all of the countries of the Balkans will likely join the alliance, bringing the number of allies to thirty-three—more than double the number at the end of the Cold War. The European Union is better suited than NATO to support democratic transformations in Ukraine and Georgia without provoking Russia.

Implementation: The United States should put its own global and regional security interests ahead of Ukraine’s and Georgia’s NATO membership aspirations. Instead of encouraging membership in MAP, NATO should upgrade its partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine with new assistance and support while suspending further discussion of MAP participation for these countries. NATO could then reaffirm that its twenty-first century mission is not to contain Russia but to address threats beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. In return, Russia should commit to respect the sovereignty of its neighbors and to stop interfering in their affairs. Cooperation with Russia on frozen conflict resolution, enhanced energy security for Europe, and broader U.S. policy priorities such as Iran and North Korea might then be possible. Such an approach might also allow the United States to leverage greater contributions from European allies to NATO’s mission in Afghanistan. NATO could create a security framework for Georgia and Ukraine along the lines of the European Neighborhood Policy, emphasizing regional cooperation and conflict resolution—perhaps in tandem with Russia. Alternatively, NATO could include Georgia and Ukraine as first-tier participants in a strengthened Global Partnership that shifts the focus away from Russia’s neighborhood. The United States could press the European Union to take the lead in NATO’s east by expanding assistance, visa benefits, trade relations, and an eventual membership perspective for both Georgia and Ukraine.

Considerations: A suspension of NATO’s eastward expansion would be interpreted by
many as a retreat by the alliance, an abandonment of Georgia and Ukraine, and a reward for Russia’s bullying tactics. The closure of NATO’s eastern door would weaken democratic reformers in Georgia and Ukraine and could lead to the fall of their prowestern governments. Reformers elsewhere in the region also might be weakened, and American prestige could suffer. Russia, rather than embarking on a new era of cooperation with NATO, might be emboldened to expand its coercion to the countries of the Baltic region and Central Europe and to exploit growing rifts within the alliance. Russia is unlikely to honor any new commitments it makes to the independence and sovereignty of its neighbors. The European Union is too fatigued by its current enlargement agenda to offer candidate status to Georgia and Ukraine. Indeed, a less robust approach by NATO would ease the pressure on the European Union to upgrade its own engagement with these countries.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study is that some variation of the second option—sustaining NATO’s eastward expansion while avoiding commitments—is the path most likely to elicit a consensus among NATO allies. Option One would be anathema to NATO’s older allies who want to preserve relations with Russia, while Option Three would provoke an outcry from NATO’s newest members, who insist on keeping NATO’s eastern door open. This is not to say, however, that the path most conducive to allied solidarity is necessarily the one that best serves U.S. interests. Depending on the next administration’s broader foreign policy objectives, a different choice may be appropriate. If so, strong U.S. leadership will be required to push the allies in a direction they currently are not inclined to go.

Amid the many uncertainties, it should be clear that the past accomplishments of NATO enlargement do not guarantee its future success. The strategic context has changed, and the old consensus is unraveling. The United States and its allies do not have the luxury of basing future membership decisions primarily on the question of whether a candidate country meets NATO standards. A more strategic discussion is needed, taking into account the implications of enlargement on European energy security, NATO power projection, so-called “frozen conflicts” resolution—and, yes, even relations with Russia. A sober consideration of Russian views and perceived self-interests cannot be denigrated as the automatic equivalent of granting Russia a veto. These and other strategic questions should be addressed more fully in MAP discussions with the aspirant states, in confidential deliberations among the allies, and perhaps as an area of strategic cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

In this era of globalization and transnational threats, it has become fashionable to denigrate geography as the preoccupation of a bygone era. On matters of NATO enlargement, however, geography persists. Each expansion round in the modern era has relied on the support of allies eager to improve their neighborhoods. Germany played a key role in the 1999 accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, while such allies as France, Italy, and Denmark ensured “geographic balance” in NATO’s 2004 expansion. Perhaps not surprisingly, once they had surrounded themselves with stable, westernizing democracies, some of the old allies no longer viewed further eastward expansion as such a pressing concern. The accession of Georgia and Ukraine, if it happens, will be driven by NATO’s newest members, who want what NATO’s older members have already achieved. And for the foreseeable future such accession will be opposed by Russia, a nation that is equally captive to geography and no less interested in the question of who lives next door.

Finding a way forward will require the full attention of the only NATO member possessing a genuinely global reach and perspective. To restore a transatlantic consensus concerning NATO expansion in this new era, the United States will have to lead. For the next U.S. administration, doing so will be both a burden and an opportunity.
Notes

1. A key distinction between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and other former Soviet republics is that the United States never recognized those three countries’ incorporation into the Soviet Union.
2. Kaliningrad, which borders Poland, is another exception. It is also easy to forget that Norway, a NATO ally, has shared a border with Russia for as long as the alliance has existed.
5. The Fulda Gap is a lowland area between Frankfurt and the former East German border, previously assessed by NATO as the most likely route for a Soviet military thrust. It figured prominently in many of NATO’s military exercise scenarios.
6. After visiting NATO in March 2003, columnist Thomas L. Friedman gushed: “At this new historical pivot point, we’re still dealing with a bipolar world, only the divide this time is no longer East versus West, but the World of Order versus the World of Disorder. But here’s the surprise: the key instrument through which the World of Order will try to deal with threats from the World of Disorder will still be NATO. Only in this new, expanded NATO, Russia will gradually replace France, and the region where the new NATO will direct its peacekeeping energies will shift from the East to the South. Yes, NATO will continue to be based in Europe, but its primary theaters of operation will be the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq and possibly the Arab-Israel frontier.” From “NATO’s New Front,” New York Times, March 30, 2003.
8. The Bucharest declaration states, somewhat contradictorily, that foreign ministers “have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia...” based on “a first assessment of progress” (italics mine). www.nato.int.
9. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty states that “...an armed attack against one or more of [the NATO allies] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all” and that the allies will take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.” www.nato.int.
11. One of the outcomes of the Yalta conference was the westward relocation of Poland’s eastern border with the Soviet Union. To offset Poland’s loss of territory, Poland’s western border was shifted west to the so-called Oder-Niesse line, resulting in the deportation of millions of Germans.
13. Ibid., p. 248.
Notes

15. Ibid., p. 242.
19. London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, North Atlantic Council, London, July 5–6, 1990 (www.nato.int). In A World Transformed, former President Bush reports that he negotiated much of the language directly with his allied counterparts, cutting out the bureaucrats. This helps explain why portions of the 1990 declaration contain simpler, less bureaucratic prose than the typical NATO communiqué nibbled to death by experts.
22. Ibid., p. 5.
24. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 11.
25. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which began with a gathering of thirty-five eastern, western and nonaligned countries in Helsinki in 1973, would not become a full-fledged organization until 1994, when it was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).
26. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland formed this regional cooperation group in late 1990, named after the Hungarian city in which they first met. Following Czechoslovakia’s “velvet divorce” on January 1, 1993, the group consisted of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.
27. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 25.
28. See especially Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, “Building a New NATO,” Foreign Affairs (September/October 1993). This influential piece began with the pessimistic statement: “Three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe is headed toward crisis” and proceeded to predict much doom and gloom if NATO failed to modernize and enlarge. Asmus, Kugler, and Larrabee all worked at the RAND Corporation in the early 1990s, making it the epicenter of strategic thinking on NATO enlargement.
31. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 58.
32. As Ronald Asmus points out, “The decision to enlarge NATO was ambiguous and opaque . . . the Administration never held a second top-level Principals Committee meeting to make a final decision to move forward on NATO enlargement. Nor did Clinton receive or sign the kind of official action memorandum that normally accompanies a major foreign policy decision in the U.S. Government’s interagency process.” Opening NATO’s Door, p. 59.
34. Kissinger, Does America Need a Foreign Policy, p. 42.
35. In one of the RAND Corporation’s early studies, Ronald Asmus, Stephen Larrabee, and Richard Kugler noted that depending on the administration’s rationale for NATO enlargement—for example, projecting stability in Eastern Europe versus hedging against a resurgent Russia—there would be different implementation requirements with respect to time lines and such considerations as NATO’s force posture. See “NATO Expansion: the Next Steps,” Survival 37, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 7–33.
38. In the words of one of NATO enlargement’s key architects: “A decade ago, some European allies pressured the United States to embrace a bigger first wave of enlargement including Romania and Slovenia . . . whose inclusion could have buried any chance of eventually bringing the Baltic states into the alliance.” Ronald D. Asmus, “A Better Way to Grow NATO,” Washington Post, January 28, 2008.
39. In the end, the allies agreed to acknowledge in the Madrid communiqué the progress achieved by “aspiring members” in the Baltic region—after first citing “positive developments in democracy and the rule of law” in Romania and Slovenia.
40. All NATO allies ratified the accession protocols well in advance of the summit. The U.S. Senate ratified NATO’s enlargement on April 30, 1998, by a vote of 80–19.
42. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 25.
43. See www.nato.int (September 1995).
44. Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty states that “the parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the
security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.” www.nato.int.

45. This ordering of the countries, by the way, matches the order in which they were mentioned in the Washington summit communiqué—an approximate indication of how allies ranked these countries in their readiness for NATO membership.


48. To take another example, the United Kingdom often hammered on Albanian delegations to step up efforts against organized criminal networks, reflecting a frustration, perhaps, with the number of posh cars disappearing from London’s streets.

49. See the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement, paragraph 7 (www.nato.int).

50. The 

51. See, for example, Thomas S. Szayna’s NATO Enlargement 2000–2015 (the RAND Corporation: Project Airforce, 2001), p. 51. Among Szayna’s arguments was the rather arbitrary assertion that “as a general principle, any new NATO member should be at least comparable to the NATO country having the lowest GDP [gross domestic product] per capita.”

52. As stated in the 1999 Washington summit communiqué, “The Alliance expects to extend further invitations in coming years to nations willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve the overall political and strategic interests of the Alliance and that the inclusion would enhance overall European security and stability.” (Italics mine.) www.nato.int.

53. In his 2002 book, Does America Need a Foreign Policy? (New York: Simon & Schuster), Henry Kissinger argued that “[A]dvancing the NATO integrated command close to key centers of Russia might mortgage the possibilities of relating Russia to the emerging world order as a constructive member.” See p. 62.

54. No doubt, Albania and Macedonia, as well as Slovenia, would have liked to hear the U.S. president also mention the Adriatic Sea. But to do so would have raised undue expectations, not to mention spoiling the speech-friendly alliteration of “Baltic” and “Black.”

55. The Vilnius Group, modeled on the successful Visegrad Group to advance the NATO and EU aspirations of its members, was created in May 2000 and was composed of Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Croatia joined later.

56. The U.S. administration was particularly mindful of expected opposition by Senator John Warner. During the April 1998 Senate enlargement debate, he put forward an amendment that would have required a “pause” in further NATO enlargement. It was defeated 59–41. Indeed, it was the Clinton administration’s sense that it had come perilously close to losing the Senate enlargement debate that motivated it to lead the allies in creating the MAP process.

57. In his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two days before the 1999 NATO Summit, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Marc Grossman pointed to an earlier amendment by the U.S. Senate that established criteria for NATO’s new Strategic Concept and assured the committee that the State Department had adopted the Senate’s criteria as “our own.”

58. See, for example, President Bush’s use of the phrase in his September 23, 2004, Washington press conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi, or Vice President Cheney’s remarks at McChord Air Force Base in Tacoma, Washington, on December 22, 2003.


60. Gongadze’s headless corpse was found in November 2000 after his disappearance on September 30. An audiotape implicating Kuchma in the crime subsequently made its way to the Ukrainian parliament. See, for example, Taras Kuzio, “Is Ukraine Part of Europe’s Future?” Washington Quarterly (Summer 2006): p. 92.


62. In March 2003, Slovenia became the first and only aspirant to hold a public referendum on NATO membership, which passed with a surprising 66 percent in favor.

63. U.S. Ambassador to NATO R. Nicholas Burns led the delegation, which included representatives from the State Department, the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Security Council staff. Dubbed the “Aspirathon,” the five-day journey included stops in nine countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The U.S. team did not visit Croatia, as its candidacy was not formally under review for the Prague summit.

65. Said Rumsfeld: “Now you’re thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. I think that’s old Europe. If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the east. And there are a lot of new members. And if you just take the list of all the members of NATO and all of those who have been invited in recently—what is it? Twenty-six, something like that? You’re right. Germany has been a problem, and France has been a problem.”


68. The statement was issued on February 5, 2003, by the foreign ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

69. See the “letter of eight.” “Europe and America Must Stand,” Times (London).


72. As the so-called Old Europe governments of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg—also known as the “Axis of Weasels”—were colorfully, if childishly, dubbed at the peak of transatlantic tensions.

73. According to Esther Brimmer, The European Union: A Guide for Americans (Delegation of the European Commission to the United States, 2004) major innovations in the 2004 draft constitution included abolishing the EU’s rotating European Council presidency and instead appointing a single individual to serve as president of the Council for up to five years; creating the post of foreign minister and a foreign service; increasing the powers of the European Parliament; and simplifying EU voting procedures.

74. See, for example, Jeffrey L. Cimbalo, “Saving NATO from Europe,” Foreign Affairs 83, iss. 6 (November/December 2004); and Conrad Black, “Europe’s Dream Disturbed,” National Interest iss. 81 (Fall 2005).

75. For a superb discussion of this linkage, see Gideon Rachman, “The Death of Enlargement,” Washington Quarterly (Summer 2006): p. 53.


77. Ibid.


82. Not surprisingly, NATO-EU meetings are often incredibly stultifying, even by the standards of Brussels.

83. See, for example, U.S. Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland’s speech to the Presse Club and the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Paris, France (February 22, 2008), in which she explained she had come to Paris “to say that one of the most important things French leaders can do for global security is to strengthen and build the capacities of the EU.” Perhaps Nuland’s speech signals that the U.S. government is ready to overcome its traditional schizophrenic toward a militarily more powerful European Union—often complaining in the past about the lack of burden-sharing by European allies while remaining deeply suspicious of EU efforts to lead—for example, with Operation Althea in Bosnia.

84. On February 6, 2008, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, “I worry a great deal about the Alliance evolving into a two-tiered Alliance in which you have some allies willing to fight and die to protect people’s security and others who are not.” Reuters.


86. Agence France Presse, August 17, 2008. Subsequently, in a September 4, 2008, visit to Thilisi, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney reaffirmed the U.S.’ commitment to Georgia’s “eventual membership in the Alliance.”

87. As Ronald D. Asmus told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 11, 2008, “I am worried about how performance has become less and less of a factor in our deliberations. I am not yet convinced the Adriatic 3—Albania, Croatia and
Macedonia—are qualified for membership.”

88. Bruce P. Jackson argued along these lines in his testimony on “NATO Enlargement and Effectiveness” before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., March 11, 2008.

89. The Schengen Group now includes most member states of the European Union. Within the Schengen zone, there are no systematic border controls among participating states.


92. Among the fifty countries handled by the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. EUR’s organizational chart sheds no light on which of these countries belongs to “Eurasia.” When, in 2006, responsibility for the five Central Asian states was transferred from EUR to the newly enlarged Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, EUR retained “Eurasian” in its name.

93. See, for example, article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. www.nato.int.

94. President Sarkozy’s original proposal for a “Wise Man” group to study the future of Europe, including its boundaries, was subsequently watered down by other EU members to a “Reflection Group” that will study a wide range of challenges facing the European Union in the years ahead. The Reflection Group will not present its report to the European Council until 2010.

95. For example, in a speech in Tbilisi, Georgia, on November 1, 2007, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried stated that Georgians “are part of the Euro-Atlantic community” and “have the right to be treated as Europeans.”

96. In the words of former EU Commission President Romano Prodi. For an excellent discussion of the European Neighborhood Policy, see Carl Hartzell, “Developing the European Union’s Role in its Eastern Neighborhood: Managing Expectations and Setting a Common Agenda,” in Next Steps in Forging a Euroatlantic Strategy.

97. Taras Kuzio points out that “the main mechanism of the ENP is the Action Plan, individually tailored to each neighbor. Ukraine’s 2005 version effectively placed Ukraine on the same level as northern African states and Israel, which are not part of Europe and therefore have no right to join the EU, and Russia, which has never declared its intention to seek EU membership.” “Is Ukraine Part of Europe’s Future?” Washington Quarterly 29 (2006): p. 90.

98. Perhaps the Georgia-Ukraine linkage also has something to do with NATO’s propensity to bundle countries into groups. NATO parlance includes not only the fifty-member Partnership for Peace but also subgroups within Partnership for Peace such as the “Caucasus and Central Asia,” the “West European neutrals” and, of course, the “Balkans.” The distinctions are reflected in NATO’s documents and also in programs tailored for specific regions. Some NATO partner countries—notably the five “Stans” of Central Asia—have chafed at being lumped together. And indeed, such mental maps are not without consequence. Consider Moldova. Neither part of the Caucasus nor part of the Balkans, Moldova has fallen through the cracks of NATO’s traditional groupings. Does this help explain why it has received less attention from NATO than perhaps any other country of the former Soviet bloc?

99. The “Adriatic Three” are Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia.


101. The NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed on May 27, 1997, creating the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC). Less than two months later, NATO and Ukraine signed the “Distinctive Partnership,” leading to the creation of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Following the creation of the new NATO-Russia Council on May 28, 2002 (which replaced the PJC), the new NATO-Ukraine Action Plan was adopted at the Prague summit on November 22, 2002.

102. See, for example, Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Putin’s Choice,” Washington Quarterly (Spring 2008). Also see Brzezinski’s “The Premature Partnership,” Foreign Affairs 72, no. 2 (March-April 1994).

103. A NATO-Ukraine Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues was formally agreed to at the April 21, 2005, NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania.


105. See Kuzio, “Is Ukraine Part of Europe’s Future?”


107. According to Huntington, “[t]he most significant dividing line in Europe . . . may well be the eastern boundary of Western Christianity in the year 1500. This line runs along what are now the boundaries between Finland and Russia and between
the Baltic states and Russia, (and) cuts through Belarus and Ukraine separating the more Catholic western Ukraine from Orthodox eastern Ukraine. . . .” Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” Foreign Affairs (Summer 1993).

108. NATO’s Partnership for Peace Framework Document dated January 10, 1994, commits NATO only to “consult” with any partner nation perceiving “a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security.” www.nato.int.

109. According to NATO’s Web site, the new NATO-Georgia Commission will be “a consultation mechanism similar to the NATO-Ukraine Commission. This new political body will follow up the decisions taken at the Bucharest summit and oversee the NATO-Georgia relationship.” www.nato.int.


113. The official Web site of the Federal Republic of Germany states that “relations with Russia did not influence this decision in any way” and quotes Chancellor Merkel: “This is a decision taken solely by NATO and the applicant countries. No other parties have anything to say.” www.bundesregierung.de/nn.

114. Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. xxxi.

115. Included in the text of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the full passage reads: “NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.” www.nato.int.


118. Europeans might also be forgiven for asking whether their reliance on Russia for energy is really more worrisome than, say, America’s reliance on Saudi Arabia.

119. See, for example, the op-ed by former Putin advisor Andrei Illarionov entitled “Russia, Inc.,” New York Times, February 4, 2006; Dmitri Trenin, “Russia Redefines Itself and its Relations with the West,” Washington Quarterly (Spring 2007); and Clifford G. Gaddy and Andrew C. Kuchins, “Putin’s Plan,” Washington Quarterly (Spring 2008).

120. Brzezinski, “Putin’s Choice.”


123. Russia’s overtures to the United States and NATO are well documented by Ronald D. Asmus in Opening NATO’s Door. In December 1993, Yeltsin shocked NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner when he said that he considered the prospect of Russia joining NATO to be a “realistic” one (Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 48). A few weeks later, Yeltsin told President Clinton that if NATO were to enlarge, Russia had to be the first country to join (Idid., 66). During negotiations in 1995 toward a new NATO-Russia framework, senior Russian officials insisted that it be made explicit that NATO’s door would be open to Russia’s eventual membership (Asmus, Opening NATO’s Door, p. 109).

124. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, established on May 30, 1997, brings together the fifty NATO and partner countries for dialogue and consultation on political and security-related issues.

125. At the June 27, 2008, EU-Russia summit in Khanty-Mansiysk, the European Union and Russia agreed to negotiate a new EU-Russia agreement to replace the 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. In the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war, these plans may be on hold.

126. Statement by NATO foreign ministers following their emergency session in Brussels on August 19, 2008.

127. In a September 14, 2008, op-ed, Washington Post columnist Jim Hoagland asserted that a “spirited debate” was taking place within the U.S. administration concerning the possibility of bringing Finland and Sweden into the alliance as part of a “northern flank initiative” in response to Russia’s aggression in Georgia. In fact, the idea of Swedish/Finnish membership in NATO is one that has surfaced episodically through the years. It is unclear whether
the Swedes and the Finns are any more interested now than they have been in the past. In the event that Sweden and/or Finland were to seek NATO membership, the question would arise of whether they would be required to pass through MAP before joining—perhaps not, since they already meet more NATO standards than some current allies. Were Sweden and Finland to join NATO, their accession would be more akin to the entry of Greece and Turkey into NATO in 1952—as a strategic response to Moscow—than to the enlargement rounds of the 1990s. See Jim Hoagland, “A Baltic Response to the Bear,” Washington Post, September 14, 2008.

128. According to chapter 1, paragraph six, of the 1995 NATO Enlargement Study, “States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance.” Additionally, according to chapter 5 of the study, “Prospective members will have to have demonstrated a commitment to and respect for OSCE norms and principles, including the resolution of ethnic disputes, external territorial disputes including irredentist claims or internal jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, as referred to also in paragraph 6 of Chapter 1.” http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9502.htm.

129. Namely, the Helsinki principle that nations have the sovereign right to choose their own security arrangements.

130. See Ivo Daalder, “Global NATO,” Foreign Affairs 85, iss. 5 (September/October 2006): pp. 105–13. Rather than necessarily open NATO membership “to any democratic state in the world that is willing and able to contribute to the fulfillment of NATO’s new responsibilities,” as Daalder advocates, NATO could establish a more ambitious Global Partnership building on the arrangements that NATO has already established with troop-contributing countries such as Korea, Japan, and Australia.
About the Author

James P. DeHart began his career with the U.S. Department of State in 1992, as a Presidential Management Intern in the Bureau for Refugee Programs. After joining the Foreign Service in 1993, he served overseas in Istanbul, Turkey; Melbourne, Australia; and the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Brussels, Belgium. He has served in Washington, D.C., in the twenty-four-hour Operations Center; on the Greece and Turkey desks; as special assistant to the under secretary for Political Affairs; and as deputy director for Caucasus and Central Asian Affairs. Most recently, he served as director for Central Asia on the National Security Council staff at the White House, before being detailed to the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD) as a Dean and Virginia Rusk Fellow. Jim is currently studying Dari at the Foreign Service Institute in preparation for his assignment to the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team in Panjshir, Afghanistan. He is married to Lisa DeHart and has two children, Maria and Stephanie.


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THE BURDEN OF STRATEGY

Transatlantic Relations and the Future of NATO Enlargement

James P. DeHart

Should the United States seek to convince nervous European Allies that Ukraine and Georgia belong closer to NATO, even at the expense of deteriorating relations with Russia? Adjunct professor Jim DeHart explores this question and more in The Burden of Strategy: Transatlantic Relations and the Future of NATO Enlargement, the latest report by Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.

DeHart says the recent war in Georgia leaves no doubt that the United States and its NATO Allies have reached a historic turning point on NATO enlargement. “The transatlantic consensus that sustained NATO expansion for more than a decade has begun to unravel. The next U.S. administration faces difficult choices that will have a profound impact on the future map of Europe.”

The study details the modern history of NATO enlargement since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and addresses the evolution of NATO’s enlargement tools and processes such as the Membership Action Plan (MAP)—crucial to understanding the policy options available to the next U.S. administration.

DeHart suggests the next administration essentially faces three choices:

1) accelerate NATO’s eastward expansion to bring in Georgia and Ukraine;

2) sustain NATO expansion but slow it down for Georgia and Ukraine; and

3) suspend NATO’s eastward expansion in order to achieve other foreign policy goals.

“Presidential leadership is about making choices,” says ISD Director-emeritus Casimir Yost. “The NATO enlargement choice will be consequential and should be taken with the benefit of a sound understanding of what three earlier administrations have done on this issue. Jim has given us such an understanding and framed the choices available to the next U.S. president.”

Jim DeHart, a career U.S. Foreign Service Officer, was detailed to the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy during the 2007–2008 academic year. He continues to teach a graduate-level course on “U.S. Policy Toward European Enlargement,” hosted by Georgetown University’s Masters in German and European Studies Program (MAGES).