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NATO Enlargement: Pro and Con Arguments

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Summary

In March 1998, the Senate began debate on the Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty (Treaty Doc. 105-36) for the purpose of amending the Treaty to admit Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The U.S. Senate must give its advice and consent to revise the North Atlantic Treaty and admit new members. Key arguments favoring U.S. approval of enlargement include the need to bring stability in central Europe; building a strong transatlantic link with new European democracies; and extending collective defense to countries that remain concerned about a potential Russian threat. Key arguments against NATO expansion include the concern that it will exacerbate tensions with Russia; result in substantial costs and risks that the allies are unwilling to share and the American people are unwilling to shoulder alone; and dilute the mission, political likemindedness, and military effectiveness of the alliance.

Background

On July 8, 1997, NATO extended invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to begin negotiations to enter the alliance. The alliance commended Romania, Slovenia, and the Baltic states for progress towards democratic and economic reform, and pledged future enlargement, without promising invitations to specific countries.

In March 1998, the Senate began debate on admitting the 3 candidate states to the alliance. A two-thirds vote of Senators present in the chamber in favor of the Protocols (Treaty Doc. 105-36) naming the 3 countries is necessary for the Senate to give its advice and consent to amend the Treaty. Several conditions to the Resolution of Ratification have been proposed. One condition proposes that the 3 states first join the European Union before being eligible for NATO; another proposes a 3-year moratorium on further expansion from the date of the admission of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary; another asserts that collective defense, and not peace operations or humanitarian assistance, must remain the core function of the alliance.

Arguments Supporting Enlargement

- Europe is the home of many of the world's most important democracies and market economies; enlargement will promote stability in Europe by providing a secure environment for new members to further consolidate democracy and open markets. Enlargement will gradually end Cold-War divisions in Europe and bring new members into an integrated Euro-Atlantic community.
- The NATO-Russia Founding Act of May 1997 provides Moscow with "a voice but not a veto," and ensures that Russia will enjoy consultation on the key European security issues outside NATO territory.
- An alternative view is that Russia remains a potential threat, and that enlargement will secure for the alliance a significant presence in a strategically important area, thereby limiting Moscow's potential sphere of influence.
- The costs of enlargement to the alliance will be modest (\$1.3-1.5 billion over 10 years according to a NATO study) because there is little threat. In contrast, the NATO operation in Bosnia, for example, has thus far cost the United States alone over \$7 billion in the effort to secure stability. Failure to expand the alliance would leave central European states anxious over potential border and minority issues with neighboring countries.
- Enlargement will sustain U.S. leadership in Europe. While expansion of the European Union (EU) is important for encouraging stability, NATO enlargement will further secure the transatlantic link that many European states wish to preserve and extend into the 21st century.
- Collective defense remains the core of the alliance. Extending it to qualified new members will deter aggression in a traditionally unstable region.
- Enlargement will prevent the "renationalization" of defense in central Europe. Each new member need develop only that part of its military that serves overall alliance purposes, and will benefit from a NATO military infrastructure linking it to countries committed to collective defense.
- U.S. and western defense industries will benefit by securing markets for their armaments in the newly allied states.

Arguments Opposing Enlargement

- There is no threat to any current ally or candidate state, and no need therefore to expand NATO's collective defense commitments. Enlargement will create new dividing lines in Europe by putting Russia on guard against an alliance moving into its traditional areas of influence. Not inviting such countries as the Baltic states and Romania to join the alliance signals Moscow that they are isolated and subject to its influence.

- The key U.S. interest in Europe is ensuring Russia's continued democratization and integration into the community of nations. Enlargement will humiliate Moscow and create a "Weimar Russia," vulnerable to Russian nationalists hostile to the west who believe that the country's interests are being sacrificed by weak leadership.
- Russia is important to the success of NATO's "new missions." Enlargement will jeopardize the cooperation of Moscow that is necessary to forge successful coalitions for peace operations and crisis management.
- Russia is the only country that can destroy the United States. Russian nationalists view enlargement as a threat, and are certain to oppose the START II nuclear treaty and other arms control agreements, which are desirable for protecting U.S. interests.
- In the post-Cold-War era, securing European stability should be left to political institutions, such as the European Union, and not to military institutions, such as NATO. Central Europe's true needs are strong economic structures and democratic institutions, which are in the EU's realm and not NATO's.
- Partnership for Peace (PfP) is preferable to NATO enlargement because it is already accomplishing the tasks of ensuring civilian control of the military, transparent defense budgets, and training for NATO's "new missions."
- NATO enlargement will be expensive, and the allies show no willingness to share the costs. The Administration once estimated the costs to be \$27-35 billion over 12 years, but other estimates range as high as \$60-125 billion.
- Enlargement will dilute the alliance's effectiveness by complicating decision-making, and by admitting countries unable to contribute meaningfully to the alliance's core mission of collective defense.
- Bosnia demonstrates that the Europeans are not willing to bear the burden for ensuring security in their own backyard. If instability develops in central Europe, the United States will have to shoulder the financial and military costs of bringing peace.