

CRS Report for Congress

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NATO Enlargement

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Summary

This report provides a brief summary of the last round of NATO enlargement, then sketches recent events culminating in the alliance's June 2001 endorsement of the admission of at least one new member at the NATO summit in Prague in 2002. The report analyzes the key military and political issues that affect the current debate over 9 candidate states. It then provides an overview of the positions of the allies and of Russia on enlargement, citing the important potential effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the United States. It concludes with a discussion of current legislation on enlargement before Congress.

Background

Congress is in the early stages of considering enlargement of NATO, an issue expected to be addressed at the next allied summit in Prague, in November 2002. During the last round of enlargement, the Senate voted 80-19 on April 30, 1998, in favor of admitting Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to NATO. (A two-thirds Senate majority is necessary to admit new states because enlargement is considered an amendment to the original North Atlantic Treaty.) Other members of the alliance followed suit, and the three countries became members in March 1999. It was the fourth time that NATO had admitted new states, with membership increasing from the original 12 to 19 today.

At the last NATO summit in April 1999, the allies underscored that they were open to further enlargement, but neither set a timetable nor guaranteed membership to any country. Instead, NATO created a Membership Action Plan (MAP), outlining a structured set of goals for prospective members, such as ending the danger of ethnic conflict, developing a democratic society with fully transparent political and economic processes and civilian control of the military, and pledging commitment to defense budgets to build military forces able to contribute to missions from collective defense to peacekeeping. NATO pledged to review the enlargement process in 2002.¹

¹ *Washington Summit Communiqué*, paragraph 7, NATO. April 24, 1999.

In June 2001, the North Atlantic Council stated that the 2002 Prague summit would yield an invitation to begin accession negotiations for membership to at least one candidate state. On June 15, President Bush said in Warsaw that “all of Europe’s new democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and all that lie between, should have the same chance for security and freedom, and the same chance to join the institutions of Europe, as Europe’s old democracies.” He did not name countries that the United States would support. In summer 2001, he also opened the door to possible Russian membership in the future. Russian President Putin has said that his country is not now interested in membership, but did not rule out future membership.

The Current Debate

In 1998, the congressional debate over NATO enlargement covered such issues as costs, mission, and qualifications of the candidates. The issue of costs has now seemingly been put to rest because entry of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary does not seem to have required extra U.S. funds. Most observers believe that the three countries have contributed to stability in Europe, and have made significant political contributions to the alliance in such matters as enhancing NATO’s understanding of central and eastern Europe, Russia, and the Balkans, given the history of the new members’ involvement with these regions. Militarily, their contribution is less apparent; each of the three contributes forces to the NATO-led peace operations in the Balkans, and is building forces to defend its borders. Poland, in particular, quickly made available to allies territory and facilities for training. Pentagon officials believe that Poland has made the greatest strides in restructuring and modernizing its military, and that the Czech Republic and Hungary have made considerably less progress.² It should be noted that a period of years is normally necessary to rebuild a military that has had an authoritarian tradition and convert it to one having civilian control, purge it of old-guard elements, reform its training, and purchase equipment compatible with a new set of allies.

The essence of the current enlargement debate is over qualifications, with no apparent consensus. The generally acknowledged serious candidates for entry in 2002 or somewhat later are Slovenia, Slovakia, the three Baltic states, and possibly Bulgaria.³ Each of these countries is small, with comparably small militaries potentially capable of specialized functions, such as transport or medical care, for example, but only minimally capable of building forces able to contribute to high-intensity conflict. In the view of some observers, to adhere to the letter of the military qualifications outlined in the 1999 summit communiqué, requiring new members to contribute to missions from peacekeeping to collective defense, is tantamount to excluding their entry.

² “NATO pushes Czechs on arms,” *International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 22, 2001, p. 5; and Jeffrey Simon, “Transforming the Armed Forces of Central and East Europe,” *Strategic Forum*, June 2000.

³ For a review of developments in 9 states seeking admission to NATO, see CRS Report RL30168, *NATO Applicant States: a status report*, updated Feb. 2, 2001, by Steven Woehrel, Julie Kim, and Carl Ek. On May 19, 2000, the “Vilnius 9” (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, and Albania) issued a statement that they should be admitted at the 2002 summit. Croatia has since joined the “Vilnius” group.

Many participants in the debate favor different standards that, in their view, reflect the current political situation in Europe, where Russia is no longer a military threat but ethnic conflict, nationalism, and terrorism are a danger. In such circumstances, they contend, political stability and a modernized military at least able to contribute to border defense and to peace operations are an appropriate standard. Secretary of State Powell seemed to suggest such a standard in his confirmation hearing when he stressed a need for candidates to modernize their militaries, and to strengthen their democratic structures.⁴

An opposing view is that NATO should first clearly define its mission, above all with an agreement on what types of out-of-area threats, such as terrorism or a disruption of the flow of oil, should be met with a possible military response. At that point, enlargement should be considered, with a determination about which candidate states could contribute to the mission. Some observers, also hesitant about enlargement, note that the United States flew over 60 percent of combat missions in the Kosovo conflict. They prefer candidate states that could relieve the U.S. burden.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, may also affect the enlargement debate. A likely part of the enlargement debate will be how candidate states might contribute to the conflict against terrorism. NATO seemed partially to settle one aspect of the debate over its mission shortly after the attacks when member states invoked Article V, the alliance's collective defense clause, to come to the aid of the United States in the conflict against terrorism. Previously, the European allies had resisted any statement that Article V should be invoked in an out-of-area action against terrorism. However, not all member states have sufficiently mobile or appropriately trained forces for the current military tasks in Afghanistan. For example, besides the United States, only Britain, France, and Italy have special forces with the potential to contribute meaningfully to the conflict. At the same time, a number of allies have an intelligence capability, transport, medical units, and political influence that might assist in the conflict. The United States has called upon Britain, France, Italy, Turkey, and Germany to provide forces at this point. If the scope and nature of the conflict should change, more countries might be asked to contribute forces or other military assistance.

As the terrorism conflict unfolds, current members may examine the means by which candidate states might be able to contribute. These means might include political influence and support, for example in the United Nations or with Russia or Muslim states, and not simply or necessarily military potential. It might also include the level of internal security in the candidate countries and their ability to control their borders, disrupt terrorist financial networks or apprehend terrorist suspects on their soil. Elements of the MAP that emphasize an end to corruption may also be increasingly underscored, given the post-September 11 importance of preventing money-laundering and combating a black economy. Current member states may also view as important the support for the conflict against terrorism and for NATO in general provided by candidate state governments and publics.

⁴ Confirmation hearing of Colin Powell, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1st sess., 107th Congress, Jan. 18, 2001.

Views of the Allies

The debate over enlargement is quite different in 2001 than it was in 1998. In 1998, Germany strongly supported enlargement; today, no major European ally backs a rapid move to admit more than a small number of new members. Most member states today couch discussion of enlargement in careful terms. Governments might state their support in principle for enlargement, or name states that are good candidates but offer no date for their entry; member governments then often note that they do not wish to name their own candidates for the Prague summit too early due to concern that candidate states might become complacent and curtail their efforts to fulfil MAP requirements.

Most member states agree that Slovenia is politically qualified for membership; in addition, Hungary urges Slovenia's membership, once NATO criteria for entry are met, for strategic reasons. Hungary is not contiguous with any other NATO state. Slovenia's entry into the alliance would provide Hungary with a land bridge to Italy, a clear advantage given neutral Austria's refusal during the Kosovo war, for example, to permit NATO overflights to Hungary. Slovakia is a credible candidate in some NATO capitals, as long as elections in 2002 do not turn out the current reform government and replace it with old-line anti-democratic leaders. Northern European allies, such as Denmark and Poland, strongly support membership for the Baltic states; they contend that the Baltic states have met OSCE and EU political guidelines for democracy, and cite the three countries to work to build stability in the region and to establish better relations with Russia.

Before the conflict against terrorism began, most European allies cited bringing stability to the Balkans, streamlining EU institutions, and further EU enlargement as the principal issues facing their governments, and not NATO enlargement. Russia's known opposition to NATO enlargement was an important factor in their considerations because many allies, such as Germany, believe that there can be no stability in Europe without stability in Russia. Germany and several allies, such as France, had held the view that NATO enlargement and the U.S. missile defense program had antagonized Moscow, and that a new round of enlargement would only contribute more tension to the Russia-NATO equation. Putin's softer rhetoric against NATO enlargement since the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the possibility that Washington and Moscow might reach an accommodation over the ABM Treaty and missile defense, appear to have moved Paris and Berlin closer to more assertive support for inviting several candidate states at the Prague summit.

In the broadest sense, the debate may eventually widen to address strategic issues. One element of this question, the military contribution that a prospective member can make, has been mentioned. Another element is whether states now having their security threatened should be considered. The argument was raised during the 1998 debate over enlargement: "NATO is bringing in states that are not threatened, and leaving to fend for themselves countries that are in the greatest need of security." Today, for example, Macedonia is under pressure from a restive ethnic Albanian minority within its borders and from rebel Albanian forces who until recently had fought for control of part of the Macedonian state. In the 1998 debate, the argument that states should join NATO that are in the greatest need of security failed, largely because their instability might have saddled the alliance with unwanted internal problems. The Senate and allied governments decided to choose countries that had demonstrated stability, had promised to make a military contribution to the alliance, and were not under threat from ethnic strife.

As already noted, Russian President Putin has softened his public opposition to enlargement since the terrorist attacks on the United States. It is possible that he now views a unified front against terrorism, in part due to Moscow's ongoing conflict in Chechnya, as more important than potential divisions with the allies over enlargement. The Duma and much of Russia's military and intelligence bureaucracy remain adamantly opposed to enlargement, which they view as a U.S.-led effort to move a military alliance closer to their territory. U.S. and officials from other allied states often counter such an argument by underscoring that enlargement's purpose in large part is to ensure stability in Europe, and that the addition of new member states provides stability, and therefore security, to Russia's west.

Congressional Views

The issue of NATO enlargement has not yet fully engaged the 107th Congress. Some individual Members, however, have expressed their views, and relevant legislation has recently been introduced. Senator Helms has strongly backed the entry of the Baltic states into the alliance, and a number of Members have endorsed Slovenia's qualifications for entry. Rep. Shimkus and others have introduced H.Con.Res. 116, which calls for NATO invitations to the Baltic states for membership at the 2002 summit, as long as they satisfy the alliance's qualifications.

On October 24, 2001, legislation was introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate supporting further enlargement, legislation that the Bush Administration has endorsed. Representative Bereuter introduced H.R. 3167, the Freedom Consolidation Act of 2001; Speaker Hastert, Reps. Bonior, Goss, Hyde, and Lantos, among others, cosponsored the bill. The bill received rapid consideration, and passed the House 372-46 on November 6. Senator Helms introduced an identical bill, S. 1572, simultaneously in the Senate; cosponsors included Senators Durbin, Lieberman, Lott, Lugar, and McCain. The bills recall and approve legislation of the four previous Congresses that urged enlargement and provided funding for particular candidates. The bills note the bipartisan support given to the last round of enlargement, citing statements by President George W. Bush and former President Clinton. While the bills do not champion any particular candidate for entry at the Prague summit, they encourage the continued efforts of the current 9 formal candidates, as well as Moldova and Ukraine. They designate Slovakia as eligible to receive U.S. assistance under section 203(a) of the NATO Participation Act of 1994 (title II of P.L. 103-447). This section gives the President authority to establish a program of assistance with a government if he finds that it is meeting the requirements of NATO membership. The bills also authorize a total of \$55.5 million made available for FY2002 under section 23 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2763) for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania.