

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 NATO summit in Prague on November 21-22, 2002. The report analyzes the key military and political issues that affect the current debate over seven prospective members named at Prague. 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. This report will be updated as needed. See also CRS Report RS21354, *The NATO Summit at Prague, 2002*, and CRS Report RL30168, *NATO Applicant States: A Status Report*.

Background

Congress is in the early stages of considering enlargement of NATO, an issue addressed at the 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. They created a Membership Action Plan (MAP), outlining structured goals for candidates, such as ending the danger of ethnic conflict, developing a democratic society with 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.¹

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

At Prague, on November 21, 2002, the current members' heads of state designated the three Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, as prospective members.

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 appear 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. 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.

There has been some sentiment that NATO should delay invitations to candidate states until democratic processes are firmly entrenched. For example, the recent Hungarian government of Victor Orban was criticized for an ethnic "status law" that some interpreted as cloaking Hungarian aspirations for territory from neighboring states having Hungarian minorities.³ Others reject such sentiments, noting that Orban was freely elected, and dismissing the status law as nothing more than a passing example of nationalist politics before a close election. Nonetheless, it is possible that the period between naming candidate states for accession negotiations at Prague in November 2002 and the moment when current NATO member governments decide whether to admit those candidates (such as the vote in the U.S. Senate), could see debates over whether each candidate continues to meet criteria for democracy, particularly if there is an election bringing in a government that member states view as extremist.

Another factor for consideration could prove to be a prospective member's efforts to persuade its people that NATO membership is desirable. In Slovenia, for example, the government supports enlargement, but public support for membership has fallen to under 50% as of November 2002. The Slovenian government is likely to hold a referendum on NATO members in February or March 2002. Some current member governments believe that the Slovenian government has made minimal efforts to convince its population of the value of NATO membership.

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 Jackson Diehl, "New NATO, Old Values," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2002, p. A19.

The essence of the current enlargement debate is over qualifications, with no apparent consensus. The seven candidates that received invitations at Prague have begun negotiations with NATO for membership; two candidates, Albania and Macedonia, did not receive invitations.⁴ 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, would be tantamount to excluding their entry.

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.⁵

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, proliferation, 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 prospective members might 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 prospective members that could relieve the U.S. burden.

Yet another view is that there is no clear dichotomy between collective defense (high-intensity conflict undertaken in response, for example, to the attacks of September 11, 2001) and collective security (peace operations and humanitarian assistance). In this view, countries contributing to peace operations assist in building stable societies and preventing “black holes,” such as Bosnia or Afghanistan, where terrorism may take root. Countries involved in peace operations, then, are contributing to the prevention of terrorism, and thereby to collective defense.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, are affecting the enlargement debate. A likely part of the enlargement debate will be how prospective members might contribute to the conflict against terrorism or act to stem the flow of weapons of mass destruction. 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. At a NATO ministerial

⁴ For a review of developments in 9 states seeking admission to NATO, see CRS Report RL30168, *NATO Applicant States: A Status Report*, updated Nov. 6, 2002, by Steven Woehrel, Julie Kim, and Carl Ek.

⁵ Confirmation hearing of Colin Powell, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1st sess., 107th Congress, Jan. 18, 2001.

meeting in Reykjavik in May 2002, the allies agreed that they must be able “to carry out the full range of... missions, ... to field forces wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives.”⁶

However, not all member states have sufficiently mobile or appropriately trained forces for the current tasks in Afghanistan, for example. Few allies besides the United States 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. It is possible that future aspects of the conflict against terrorism will require larger, more conventional forces, depending upon the location and terrain where terrorists base themselves, or if the government of a state should fall into the hands of terrorists.

As the terrorism conflict unfolds, current members may examine how prospective members might be able to contribute. Contributions 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. They 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 be increasingly underscored, given the post-September 11 importance of preventing money-laundering and combating a black economy.

Views of the Allies

The debate over enlargement is quite different in 2001 than it was in 1998. In 1998, several European allies strongly supported enlargement. Today, most member states couch discussion of enlargement in careful terms.

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 to permit NATO overflights to Hungary. A weakness of Slovenia's candidacy, already mentioned, is its population guarded support for NATO membership. Slovakia is a credible candidate in some NATO capitals, given the return in September 2002 elections of key elements of its reform government. Some northern European allies, such as 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' work to build stability in the region and to establish better relations with Russia. U.S. officials state that the Baltic states have made the most progress in meeting MAP requirements, although there is some criticism of how Latvia has handled sensitive documents.

Italy, Greece, and Turkey are strong supporters of Bulgaria's and Romania's entry. They contend that these two countries can contribute to stability in the Balkans, where Europe's greatest security needs lie. Critics counter that Romania and Bulgaria continue

⁶ *Communiqué*, NATO Ministerial, May 14, 2002.

to suffer from corruption in their governing structures, and that each must make stronger efforts to modernize its military. Bulgaria has also had a succession of governments that have followed an uncertain course towards political and economic reform.

The views of the Russian government play a role in the debate. Germany and several allies, such as France, had held the view until recently 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 has allayed concerns in Berlin and Paris over Russia's reaction.

It is possible that Putin 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. Officials from 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. Putin may also view the entry of Estonia and Latvia into NATO (and the EU, in 2004) as a means to protect Russian minorities in those countries, given NATO and EU strictures over the treatment of ethnic minorities.

Congressional Views

NATO enlargement is likely to be an important issue in the 108th Congress. Some individual Members have expressed their views, and relevant legislation has been introduced. In the 107th Congress, Rep. Shimkus and others 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. It passed by voice vote on October 7, 2002.

On October 24, 2001, legislation was introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate supporting further enlargement. 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. Then Senator Helms introduced an identical bill, S. 1572, simultaneously in the Senate; cosponsors included Senators Durbin, Lieberman, Lott, Lugar, and McCain. The bill recalled and approved legislation of the four previous Congresses that urged enlargement and provided funding for particular candidates. While the bill did not champion any particular candidate for entry at the Prague summit, it encouraged the continued efforts of the then 9 candidates, as well as Moldova and Ukraine. It designated 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 meets the requirements of NATO membership. The bill also authorized 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. The bill became law on June 10, 2002 (P.L. 107-187).

Representative Gallegly has introduced H.Res. 468, which describes NATO as key to U.S. interests in Europe and encourages a continued path of improving relations with Russia. It strongly urges invitations to membership for the 7 countries ultimately invited at Prague. It passed the house 358-9 on October 7, 2002.

On August 30, 2002, the Republican staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee submitted a report on enlargement to Senators Helms and Biden. The staff found that “most of the candidates... have serious problems with pervasive corruption....” The report evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the principal candidate states. A key finding of the report was:

As a general matter... those countries with strong assets to contribute militarily – both in the form of troops, weapons, or strategic location (specifically Romania and Bulgaria) – have more serious work remaining to develop and modernize their democratic institutions. While those with strong democratic institutions, market economies, and the rule of law do not add significantly to the overall military posture of the Alliance.⁷

Next Steps

In December 2002 NATO began accession negotiations with the 7 prospective members. In the negotiations, NATO will request that specific steps be taken, such as tightening of legislation handling classified information, stronger export controls on sensitive weapons technologies, or removal of specific intelligence or military officials with a checkered past. NATO officials expect accession negotiations to be completed in March 2003. At that point, formal documents will be sent to the 19 members states, each of which will follow its constitutional procedures to amend the North Atlantic Treaty to admit new members. All 19 members must agree on a prospective member’s qualifications for it to enter NATO. NATO hopes to admit the successful candidates in May 2004.

⁷ *Republican Staff Report on Enlargement*, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, August 30, 2002.