

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 analyzes recent events. The report analyzes the key military and political issues that affect the current debate over seven prospective members named at NATO's Prague summit. 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 recent legislation on enlargement. 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 now 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 previous 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. Slovenia held a referendum on March 23, 2003; 66% of those voting, 66% supported NATO membership, despite popular opposition to the war in Iraq that approaches 80%. No other candidate state intends to hold a referendum on NATO membership.

The essence of the current enlargement debate is over qualifications, with no apparent consensus. Of an original nine candidates, two candidates, Albania and

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.

Macedonia, did not receive invitations at Prague.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 meeting in Reykjavik in May 2002, the allies agreed that they must be able “to carry out

⁴ For a review of developments in 9 states seeking admission to NATO, see CRS Report RL30168, *NATO Applicant States: A Status Report*, 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.

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 and Iraq, for example. Few allies besides the United States have special forces or mobile, large-formation combat forces with the potential to contribute meaningfully to such conflicts. At the same time, a number of allies have an intelligence capability, transport, medical units, and political influence that might assist in such conflicts.

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 necessarily military potential. They might also examine the level of internal security in the candidate countries and ability to control 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.

Since late 2002, the alliance has experienced sharp divisions over whether to use military force against Iraq should it fail to destroy stocks of weapons of mass destruction. In January 2003, Bush Administration officials applauded the decision of the 7 candidate states (and others) to sign a letter that, in general, endorsed the U.S. position on Iraq; the Administration at the same time criticized France, Germany, and Belgium for blocking NATO efforts to provide preliminary allied assistance to Turkey, in the event of an attack by Iraq. Some candidate state representatives complained that they had been bullied by the Administration into signing the letter. The failure to achieve consensus in the North Atlantic Council over how and whether to aid Turkey in the event of an attack by Iraq exposed serious divisions in the alliance.⁷ The Bush Administration describes a “coalition” of forces in the war against Iraq, but only Britain has sent sizable combat forces into the conflict. Of the candidate states, Slovenia alone has refused to join the coalition, although it has opened its airspace to U.S. and UK forces.

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. Slovakia is a credible candidate in some NATO capitals, given

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

⁷ “Lock horns,” *Financial Times*, Feb. 10, 2003; interviews of officials in allied governments.

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 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. Putin's softer rhetoric against NATO enlargement since the September 11 terrorist attacks has allayed concerns that his government would strongly oppose enlargement. 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. In the spring of 2003, both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee began hearings on enlargement. 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 Houses supporting further enlargement. Representative Bereuter introduced H.R. 3167, the Freedom Consolidation Act of 2001; Speaker Hastert and others cosponsored the bill. An identical Senate bill, S. 1572, with cosponsors including Senators Durbin, Lieberman, Lott, Lugar, and McCain, was also introduced. The bill recalled and approved legislation of the four previous Congresses that urged enlargement and provided funding for particular candidates. The bill 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.

In the 107th Congress, Representative Gallegly introduced H.Res. 468, which described NATO as key to U.S. interests in Europe and encourages a continued path of improving relations with Russia. It strongly urged invitations to membership for the 7 countries ultimately invited at Prague. It passed the House 358-9 on October 7, 2002.

War with Iraq could influence the enlargement debate. Some countries, such as Romania, are quietly indicating that they may send forces to fight with the United States; officials from Latvia, given its rapid recovery from years of Soviet occupation, may provide assistance and advice in returning civil society to a post-Hussein Iraq. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has stirred NATO waters by suggesting the presence of an “old” and “new” Europe, the former consisting of such countries as France and Germany, the latter consisting of recent new members and candidate states. Secretary Rumsfeld has suggested that the alliance’s future belongs to the United States and the “new” Europe, with the “old” Europe increasingly marginalized. European critics, some of them in the candidate states, oppose such a categorization, noting that Germany has the largest economy in Europe, and that only France, with Britain, has a military able to move its forces considerable distances for engagement in combat. These critics express concern that a divided NATO will not be effective in confronting threats that face each member state.⁸

Next Steps

In December 2002 NATO began accession negotiations with the 7 prospective members. In the negotiations, NATO requested 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. Accession negotiations were completed on March 26, 2003, and the candidate state governments signed protocols that will be sent to the 19 member 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. The Bush Administration would like for the Senate to vote on enlargement before that August 2003 recess. NATO hopes to admit the successful candidates in May 2004.

⁸ Interviews of officials in allied states, January-February 2003.