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Reassuring NATO

Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Western Alliance

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Executive Summary

During the first forty years of its existence, NATO exerted a powerful influence on its Soviet and East European adversaries. Even if it is unlikely that NATO actually fulfilled its primary task of deterring Soviet attack, which the Kremlin never seriously contemplated, it influenced Moscow's unwilling allies by providing them with an attractive model of partnership, subversive of Soviet control. Such a model has been conspicuously missing in a region where the historical experiences with alliances have been discouraging.

While the Soviet Union resisted any attempts to reform its relationship with its clients by applying the Western model, it belatedly created the Warsaw Pact as the ostensible counterpart of NATO in 1955, as part of Khrushchev's unsuccessful attempt to make the West agree to a radical transformation of Europe's security system to Soviet advantage. Having by the 1970s succeeded in persuading NATO to accept the Warsaw Pact as its legitimate counterpart, Soviet leaders subsequently sought to use the changing balance between the two alliances to pursue their own political ascendancy.

Unable to attain this goal because of the Soviet Union's growing systemic weaknesses, by the 1980s Moscow found itself on the defensive before an ascendant NATO, bolstered by the Reagan administration's military buildup. In response, the Gorbachev leadership attempted to shore up the Warsaw Pact by initiating its reform toward a real partnership along the Western model. By providing the pressure to convince Moscow of the necessity of such an attempt, which eventually caused it to tolerate the disintegration of its Eastern European empire and of the Soviet Union itself, NATO significantly contributed to ensuring the peaceful outcome of the Cold War.

Despite initial confusion about the possible merits of preserving the Warsaw Pact in a different form and the uncertainty about the future of NATO, the newly independent Eastern European states handled well by themselves the potential threats to their security resulting from the

disintegration of the Soviet state. Yet despite the unprecedented security they achieved as a result, the fallacy of a "security vacuum" in their region gained wide credence in the West. By 1994, the Clinton administration, in search of a foreign policy success, began to champion NATO's enlargement without adequately addressing its likely consequences for the alliance's cohesion and effectiveness.

Instead, Washington responded to the East Europeans' pressure for admission by trying to reconcile Russia with the enlargement, which its government was in no position to prevent because of its overwhelming preoccupation with internal problems and the catastrophic collapse of its armed forces. Nor was the widely articulated Russian opposition to NATO's plans shared by the largely indifferent mass of the country's population. Washington's bid for Russia's acquiescence nevertheless enabled Moscow to negotiate the May 1997 Founding Treaty which gave it an opportunity to influence the inner workings of the Western alliance against the wishes of its members even without a formal right to veto its decisions.

As distinguished from the political elites, the popular support for NATO membership in different countries of Eastern Europe and their people's willingness to make the necessary sacrifices in order to bring their armed forces up to NATO standards have not been as unequivocal as they have seemed. Only Poland has shown the consistency of purpose and commitment by its government and people alike which, in addition to the country's other assets, make it eligible for membership in a class by itself.

Since NATO's July 1997 Madrid summit, which issued invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, new fissures have already appeared within the alliance, while pressure has been increased by the three countries to continue further invitations, without an end in sight. The prospect of NATO's dilution, and its transformation from the still very much needed military alliance to an instrument of preventive diplomacy, makes the suspension of enlargement imperative. This is the main issue to be addressed by the legislative bodies of the NATO states in deciding about

the ratification of the radical change of the alliance prepared by their governments without proper public discussion of the weighty commitments involved.

In order to minimize the disruptive effects of NATO's enlargement, the alliance should proceed for the time being with the admission of only Poland as the best qualified candidate. It should leave the possible membership of others open for future consideration without the pressure of deadlines. In the meantime, NATO should respond to the diverse security needs of different Eastern European countries by concluding with them bilateral agreements short of membership, while supporting their gradual integration into the European Union as a priority best suited to meet their most urgent needs.

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Vojtech Mastny

Introduction

Approaching fifty, NATO has reached the age of the change of life. The body is the same, but something fundamental has been altered. Although the alliance, like all things human, could never last indefinitely, suddenly this truism appears in a new perspective which cannot be ignored. This is not necessarily to say that the peak of NATO's life has passed, but rather it needs to make a special effort to redefine its life purpose in order to provide a new sense of reassurance.

Reassurance rather than security has always been the keyword for understanding NATO. The alliance was originally created to reassure West Europeans against the perceived Soviet threat; only later did it achieve the military substance necessary to deter a Soviet attack. But since, as we now know from the evidence on the communist side, Moscow never seriously contemplated an attack, we do not know whether the security provided was real or imaginary. By failing to reassure the enemy of NATO's defensive purpose and peaceful intentions, did the alliance contribute to generating the very insecurity against which it was meant to protect? These are essential questions for understanding security, the meaning of which has changed over the course of NATO's existence more fundamentally than during any previous period in human history. Within the area of the alliance's applicability, though not in the rest of the world, a major war has for the first time become all but inconceivable.

The ambiguous title of this study - *Reassuring NATO* - conveys the ambiguities of the alliance's present predicament that have resulted from its past performance. NATO has been eminently reassuring to its Western members - the main reason why it has become so attractive to the Eastern European applicants who have been painfully deprived of such a feeling. At the same time, reassuring Russia, the main successor state of NATO's original adversary, about its intentions remains both a challenge and a problem. But the alliance itself also needs to be reassured - about its purpose, its viability, its very reason for existence. The issue of enlargement

has brought all these diverse strains together in a way that makes reassurance about the soundness of what it is striving for more urgent than would otherwise have been the case.

The present study seeks answers to these questions by examining how the different issues arose, developed, and became what they are. It analyzes and interprets the evolution of East European and Russian attitudes and policies on NATO. In trying to grasp the politics of the region, excursions into history have become fashionable after predictions of its end proved premature. Yet in looking at the record, it is necessary to differentiate what is important from what is merely interesting, the traditions that are abiding from those that are misleading, the facts from the illusions.

The account that follows first considers the East European experience with alliances before NATO was created under the very unusual circumstances of the Cold War. It then discusses the convoluted impact of the Western alliance on its adversaries, particularly the belated creation and troubled course of its presumed counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, compulsory membership in which left a lasting imprint on a generation of East Europeans and Russians. The important question of what, if any, role NATO played in precipitating the surprisingly easy collapse of its Soviet enemy will be addressed to help assess the "security vacuum" that subsequently developed in so many heads, if not necessarily on the ground.

How the drive for NATO's enlargement arose from a desire to fill the perceived vacuum is the focus of the central part of the study, with particular attention to the elusive reasons why the goal was adopted after having first been evaded. The exaggerated importance attributed to the all but unanimous Russian opposition to enlargement is then juxtaposed with the remarkably diverse, yet seemingly irresistible Eastern European strivings for membership. The resulting rush to enlarge, which led to NATO's July 1997 decision to begin inviting new members from Eastern Europe, is seen as wrought with the danger of transforming the alliance beyond its ability to act effectively. The study concludes with a suggestion for how NATO might attain a limited enlargement without risking the destruction of the still indispensable Western alliance.

From the Origins of NATO to the End of the Cold War

Eastern Europe and Alliances

The notion that security is invariably and for all time predetermined by geography has been one of the more durable fallacies promoted by theories of international relations. It has often been invoked in trying to explain East Europeans' seemingly permanent security deficit and to justify their need for special arrangements to mitigate their presumably immutable geopolitical predicament.¹ Yet the fallacy is easily exposed by observing how in Western Europe countries which long faced "historic" neighboring enemies - Belgium, Ireland, not to mention France and Germany - have eventually attained a comfortable degree of security without changing their location. The historical experiences that account for the persistence of the fallacy in regard to Eastern Europe therefore deserve close attention - to demonstrate how drastically its historical predicament has changed since the end of the Cold War.

Lacking sovereignty as nation states, until World War I most peoples of Eastern Europe did not have the option of enhancing their security by membership in alliances. With the exception of some of the newly independent Balkan states, whose pact-building usually had the opposite effect, the alliance option was mainly exercised by the great powers, among which Russia cast a long shadow despite its reputation as a "colossus on earthen legs." Playing the then fashionable game of imperialism, the great powers managed their alliances in a fashion that was later widely, if not entirely fairly, held responsible for leading to the catastrophe of World War I. In this respect, the Russian and Serbian governments could properly be singled out for their propensity for reckless miscalculations, although they were by no means alone to blame.

The similarities between Europe before World War I and after the Cold

War may at first glance seem disturbing. An international scene again characterized by a proliferation of large, medium, and small powers without the discipline imposed by the two superpowers could be seen as conducive to a relapse into the nineteenth-century pattern of rivalry leading inevitably to confrontation. Yet before rushing to pessimistic conclusions, it is appropriate to set straight what has changed and what has remained the same during the intervening period.

The pre-1914 international order had become widely discredited by the time World War I ended with the destruction of some of the leading players instrumental in unleashing it, notably tsarist Russia. Having seized power there, the Bolsheviks took the lead in condemning imperialist alliances together with the whole capitalist system and enunciating the coming of a new millennium in which all alliances other than friendly proletarian ones would disappear. Although this never happened, the notion of an alliance built on ideological affinities rather than power interests continued to hold a remarkable sway on Soviet leaders until the end of their state. Indeed, one of the astonishing discoveries from their archives has been the extent to which those supposed pragmatists were prepared to sacrifice their power interests to nebulous ideological aspirations.

The post-World War I successor states that replaced the defunct empires in Europe began to seek security in new kinds of alliances, both with one another and with outside protectors. They were handicapped by the division between those who wanted to preserve and those who wanted to upset the international order created by the 1919 peace settlement. Nor did the affiliation of their respective groupings with such unreliable patrons as France and Italy, ever inclined to pursue their own interests at the expense of their clients, help the credibility of those alliances. The self-imposed exclusion of the United States from the European security system and the lukewarm commitment to it of the still respectable British power have rightly been remembered as its fatal flaws.

The Poles particularly remember that in 1920 they defeated the invading Soviet Red Army without foreign help, although their French military advisers, whose expertise was not needed, retrospectively raised specious

claims about their contribution to victory. France, which would have much preferred a renewed alliance with Russia if only its new rulers had been agreeable, was similarly reluctant to provide effective security guarantees to its other East Central European clients: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania. They together formed the Little Entente, masterminded by the region's most active proponent of alliance politics, Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš, against the far from overwhelming threat of the truncated Hungary, the only enemy the three had in common. The Little Entente offered no protection against their more formidable adversaries - Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. In any case, the alliance did not spell out military obligations. Neither did the still looser Balkan Union between Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, and Turkey.

The story of how Eastern Europe's alliances, not to speak of the League of Nations' ineffectual peace enforcement mechanism, failed to protect against Fascist aggression in the nineteen-thirties has often been told. What has not been stated often enough is how different Europe is today from the time when its anemic democracies, vainly groping for a way out of the depth of the Great Depression, seemed in full retreat before charismatic dictators ready to use force in pursuit of ever-expanding ambitions. So extraordinary was the setting that the nineteen-thirties could hardly provide any lessons of universal validity. Yet the decade proved a fertile breeding ground for myths, some of which have ever since distorted East European and Russian thinking about alliances.

Prominent among the myths has been that of the "Munich betrayal" of Czechoslovakia said to have been perpetrated by the British and the French in 1938. Despicable as their behavior was, only France had alliance obligations toward the Czechs while the British appeasement of Hitler merely influenced French willingness, or rather unwillingness, to act - a distinction often ignored even by security experts.² Although Prague never made plans to defend the country without foreign help, Czech governments have been able to capitalize on Western feelings of guilt by alleging the West's moral debt to East Europeans and demanding better security guarantees.

Another myth, favored especially by the Left, has been that "collective security" equaled real security. It presumes that the Soviet Union was ready to act against Hitler along with the Western powers if only these wanted to, whereas Stalin rather preferred a deal with the congenial Nazi dictator if only Hitler wanted to, and in the end got his wish. The collective security promoted by Moscow merely entailed consultation about common action without military obligations - another key distinction frequently lost in current debates about Europe's desirable "security architecture."

Since Czechoslovakia had an alliance with Moscow but in 1938 chose not to activate it, communists were able to cultivate the myth that the Soviet Union was the only reliable ally. In fact, Stalin in his quest for security sought loosely formulated "friendship" treaties with weaker countries that would allow the stronger Soviet side to interpret the terms to its advantage. He was particularly interested in the "right" to intervene by sending troops into neighboring territories whenever, in his opinion, Soviet security might be threatened. There was nothing attractive in his concept of alliances for anyone but him.

Apart from the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939 which, having precipitated World War II, provided the long-term basis for Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, other alliance commitments also proved dangerous for the East Europeans. The belated British attempt to deter German aggression by proclaiming a guarantee of Poland's integrity had the opposite effect. It has since been remembered as a textbook example of a rash security pledge made without proper consideration of its military consequences. Nor did its verbal extension to several Balkan countries enhance its credibility.

During World War II the East Europeans' record as allies was mixed. At its beginning, Poland succumbed within four weeks despite the bravery of its underequipped and overconfident army. So did Yugoslavia, whose armed forces collapsed within a few days, although the Serbs preserved a reputation for invincibility which held outsiders in awe until as late as 1995, when it was deflated by NATO in Bosnia. Of Britain's other wartime allies in the region, the Greeks alone put up impressive military resistance,

if only against the less than formidable army of Mussolini's Italy. Yet once the war became global, Polish and, in lesser numbers, Czechoslovak units fought valiantly as part of both the British and the Soviet armed forces.

The Czechoslovak and Polish units were the only ones from the region that fought on the Allied side from the beginning to the end. Otherwise, apart from the Yugoslav guerrillas operating independently on their home ground, Eastern European armies were German allies, though not particularly valuable ones. While Hitler professed admiration for the military prowess of the Romanian forces under the dictator Ion Antonescu, the Soviets who encountered them at the front were not so impressed. Nor did Moscow rate highly Hitler's Hungarian and Slovak allies, and it did not give a chance to the reportedly competent Bulgarian army to prove itself before it was paralyzed as a result of the communist-backed coup in the country's capital. Indisputably the best fighting force in the area was the Finnish army, which earned Stalin's respect by inflicting heavy casualties on his invading troops in 1939-40 and subsequently keeping distance from Germany as its co-belligerent but not formal ally.

All things considered, the experience of World War II cast grave doubts about the value of alliances in safeguarding Eastern Europe's security. After the abortive projects by the governments-in-exile of Polish-Czechoslovak and Yugoslav-Greek confederations, neither of which envisaged military provisions, the Western powers abstained from promoting alliance-building in the region. Instead they relied on the American concept of the United Nations, which allowed for the creation of subsidiary regional alliances, as the main guarantor of peace and stability throughout the world. Yet the tacit Western acceptance of Moscow's leading role in organizing Eastern Europe left the security arrangements there in Stalin's hands.

It was not the Soviet dictator, however, but Czechoslovak president Beneš who in 1943 took the initiative which subsequently led to the formation of Moscow's network of bilateral treaties of "friendship and mutual assistance" throughout the part of Europe that became its sphere of influence. Intent to establish his country's position as the most favored Soviet ally, Beneš proposed the kind of a vague, open-ended document

Stalin preferred. Although the Soviet leader was initially not in a hurry to sign a treaty with Czechoslovakia, he began insisting on its quick conclusion once the British had signaled their desire to postpone the signature until the end of the war. Moscow hinted that the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty was a possible model for Italy as well as France, but in the end Stalin applied the formula only to the countries he was able to control.

In the immediate postwar period, the treaties served Stalin as a more important instrument of control than they may seem to have been in retrospect. At a time when the imposition of Soviet-style communist regimes throughout the area was not yet a foregone conclusion in his mind, they were the main expression of Moscow's special relationship with its client states. Accordingly, Stalin assigned a high priority to preventing those states from concluding similar treaties with other countries or with each other, thus keeping them both isolated and divided.

Stalin's interventions to that effect marked important stages in the growth of the Soviet empire and the developing partition of Europe. In July 1947, he personally blocked Czechoslovakia's attempt to supplement its alliance with Moscow by a renewal of its prewar treaty with France. He vetoed the project at the same meeting with the delegation of the Prague government where he also compelled it to cancel its previously announced decision to participate in the conference where the Marshall Plan was to be inaugurated - a critical turning point in the Cold War.³

Six months later, Stalin intervened to counteract the mutual defense treaties he had previously allowed Yugoslavia's communist chief Josip Broz Tito to conclude with his neighbors - Albania, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria. Those treaties included a clause that could be construed as being directed not only against a possible German threat but also against the United States. Loath to provoke deeper American involvement in the Balkans, where Washington had recently extended support to the Greek government in its war against communist guerrillas, Stalin quickly summoned representatives of Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and forced them to sign bilateral treaties that conspicuously omitted the provocative clause.⁴

Another important time when alliance-building was at issue came in February 1948 when Stalin, having accelerated confrontation with the West, began to suffer setbacks. In trying to tie Finland more closely to the Soviet Union, he demanded that it sign the same kind of a "friendship" treaty that tied to Moscow its already subjugated Eastern European dependencies. Yet six weeks later, after Western indignation about the communist coup in Czechoslovakia had led to further Soviet political losses in Western Europe, Stalin accepted a different kind of alliance, one which allowed the Finns to preserve enough of their independence to be left outside of the Soviet bloc.⁵

Yet it was understood that Finland, much less any of the Eastern European countries by then already controlled by communists, must not ally itself with the West. This was all the more important since the West's own military alliance was now in the making, which was bound to give the Cold War an entirely new dimension. At this critical juncture, the alliances Stalin had been building in his part of Europe were of little use to prevent the establishment of the Western one, nor were they sufficient any longer to serve as the glue that would hold his empire together. Having never met the true security needs of the people of the region, the "friendship treaties" were not even relevant for their new communist rulers, whose unconditional submission to Moscow now provided the glue. In contrast, the emerging Western alliance - NATO - came to signify for the other part of Europe the crucial safeguard of its territorial integrity and political pluralism under American protection. The challenge that this novel alliance posed to Moscow and its unwilling allies determined in fundamental ways the entire subsequent course of the Cold War.

Enter NATO

Consistent with its belief in a hostile capitalist encirclement, the Soviet Union had suspected the West was building a military bloc against it long before NATO came into existence. Regarding especially the Marshall Plan as a design to mobilize Western Europe for a military confrontation, Stalin

considered all attempts at the recovery and unification of the region as subversive of his concept of security, which required weakness and division among all actual and possible Soviet adversaries. Nor was the dictator mentally equipped to grasp the voluntary nature of the partnership of the Western democracies. Imputing the United States with the same readiness to impose its will upon weaker countries that characterized his own style of running an empire, he regarded NATO as a mere instrument of American domination rather than an entity in its own right.

After last-minute Soviet maneuvers to derail the Western alliance by threats and blandishments had failed, Stalin did not respond to its proclamation in April 1949 as vigorously as he could have done. Since NATO was at this early stage little more than a diplomatic framework without military substance, Stalin was primarily concerned with its long-term potential in the event of war. And since he judged the probability of war to have decreased as a result of his decision to defuse the crisis he had created the year before by imposing the Berlin blockade, he did not deem it necessary to alter the already established system of bilateral military alliances that tied the Soviet bloc together or even significantly to step up its military preparedness. Neither was the long-term prospect necessarily alarming if the "general crisis of capitalism" that Moscow believed imminent could delay indefinitely the "inevitable" war which, according to Marxist writ, was inherent in the capitalist system.

Rather than in preparing for war, the Soviet dictator therefore sought security in the further consolidation of his realm, which in his terms presupposed more ruthless repression of real or imaginary internal enemies and required more thorough subjugation of the peoples of Eastern Europe. He rightly saw Western ideological subversion and covert operations as more dangerous to his totalitarian aspirations than was Western military power, especially after the Soviet Union had begun to checkmate that power by developing its own nuclear arsenal. Yet the situation changed to Moscow's disadvantage once the communist aggression Stalin permitted to be launched in Korea in June 1950 prompted in Europe a Western reaction that gave NATO the military substance it had been thus far lacking.

By early 1951 Stalin panicked. He summoned top East European party and army leaders to Moscow and ordered them to not only put their economies on war footing but also prepare for offensive military action against NATO, presumably to pre-empt its expected attack.⁶ From intelligence reports about the alliance's December 1950 meeting, Moscow concluded that "in connection with their failures in Korea the Americans apparently intend to provoke in the summer of 1951 a military conflict in Eastern Europe with the goal of seizing the eastern zone of Austria. To realize this goal, the Americans intend to utilize Yugoslavia."⁷

Besides the rapid expansion of NATO's military capability, Stalin viewed the proposed inclusion in it of West Germany with particular foreboding because of the exaggerated notions he entertained about the proverbial German efficiency and military competence. He tried assiduously to prevent the rearmament of West Germany, believing that Bonn would inevitably gain control of the alliance and use it to aggressively pursue the reunification of the country, with dire consequences for the integrity of his Eastern European empire. Underestimating the strength of the bonds that held NATO together despite the frequent bickering among its members, he repeatedly tried to exploit their discord, only to see them close their ranks and strengthen the alliance. He never reconciled the Marxist dogma that posits an increasingly bitter competition between capitalists of different countries with his belief in their anti-Soviet conspiracy. Hence also he could not possibly grasp the role NATO played in helping its members, notably the Germans and the French, to overcome their national prejudices.

Stalin's successors were initially reluctant to modify his ineffectual NATO policies. They reduced their own military expenditures but were unable to stop the growth of the Western alliance. In a desperate move, in 1954 Soviet foreign minister Viacheslav M. Molotov challenged NATO to prove its peaceful intentions by agreeing to admit any country that wanted to join, including the Soviet Union. His posturing inaugurated a Soviet campaign for a new European security system which, accelerated after the

conclusion later that year of the Paris agreements setting the date for West Germany's membership in NATO, marked Moscow's reassessment of the value of alliances.

The campaign for a new European security system, promoted by party general secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev after his rise to supreme power in early 1955 as part of his revision of Soviet security policy, was intended to put the West on the run by demilitarizing the Cold War. After NATO had begun to install tactical nuclear arms in Europe to offset its inferiority in conventional forces, Khrushchev sought to neutralize the West's overall superiority in nuclear weapons by accelerating both real and pretended Soviet development of these increasingly destructive weapons. At the same time, he scaled down his country's more usable conventional forces, thus reducing the incentive for an East-West military showdown. He banked on the Soviet ability to outperform the West in non-military competition, firmly believing that the Soviet system was politically, economically, and ideologically superior to the capitalist adversary.

Against the background of Moscow's promotion of a European collective security system at a time of diminishing international tension, the establishment in May 1955 of the Warsaw Pact as the Soviet bloc's own military alliance may seem baffling. The official explanation that the organization was needed to counter the threat posed by West Germany's recent admission into NATO could hardly be reconciled with the Soviet reluctance to put substance into the new alliance. Presented by Moscow to its Eastern European dependents at short notice for their signature without their consultation, the pact included a secret annex singling out the military contingents the signatories would be required to contribute, but did not provide for the creation of the appropriate joint institutions. These would in any case have been superfluous given the Soviet Union's effective control of the military potential of its vassal states through political domination and the bilateral treaties that had been in existence since the onset of the Cold War.

Having drawn up the Warsaw treaty to mirror the founding document of NATO, Moscow proceeded to propose the dissolution of both ostensibly

equivalent alliances, which would deprive Western Europe of the only one it had while leaving the Soviet network of bilateral treaties intact. The Soviet Union could then expect to dominate what it envisaged as Europe's new "collective" security system, from which the United States would be excluded. Only Khrushchev's illusions as a Marxist true believer could possibly justify his belief that the West would seriously entertain such an unfavorable deal. He assumed that NATO's current ascendancy could be reversed to arrive at a situation which would somehow make it possible to convince the capitalist leaders that they had no choice but to accept the Soviet terms.

As the Soviet bid for the dismantling of alliances faltered, the Warsaw Pact marked time searching for a purpose. No building up of its institutions followed the establishment in 1956 of its political consultative committee and joint military staff. The committee, consisting of high-level representatives of the member states meeting at most once a year, served mainly to give an appearance of collegiality to Khrushchev's assorted diplomatic initiatives. And the joint staff under a Soviet general was initially used for little more than making Moscow's sometimes reluctant allies follow its example in reducing their armed forces as required by its new security design.

In March 1956, Khrushchev told visiting Danish Prime Minister Hans-Christian Hansen that "we proved our peace-loving nature, and will continue to prove it. Thereby we shall shake NATO loose. We will continue to reduce armed forces unilaterally [...] [and] you will find it hard to justify NATO before public opinion."⁸ In seeking a military disengagement that would eventually compel the West to negotiate away both alliances and replace them with an all-European security system guaranteed by Moscow, the Soviet Union targeted especially the Nordic countries. It urged Norway and Denmark to follow the Austrian or Finnish models of neutrality and entrust national security to bilateral arrangements with Moscow. The withdrawal without any quid pro quo of Soviet forces from the Porkkala-

Udd base in Finland impressed the Icelandic parliament sufficiently to demand, albeit in vain, a similar closure of the U.S. air force base at Keflavik, the provision of which was Iceland's main contribution to NATO.

While the Soviet probes did not seriously affect the unity of the Western alliance - or the extent of disunity it always showed - NATO exerted a disruptive influence on Moscow's own allies. Shortly before the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in November 1956, the Polish general staff had established a special commission to propose an overhaul of the Warsaw Pact with the goal of making it closer to the partnership exemplified by its Western counterpart. The commission produced a memorandum which questioned the authority of the Soviet-appointed supreme commander of the alliance over the armed forces of its member states, insisting that his term be limited and that in peacetime the national contingents be subordinated exclusively to their respective governments. A commentary by chief of operations Gen. Jan Drzewiecki criticized as illegal Moscow's imposition of the Warsaw Pact without approval by any representative bodies.⁹

The proposal was shelved after the Soviet commander whose powers it intended to curtail, Marshal Ivan S. Konev, took personal offense at the daring of the attempt. "What do you imagine to be doing," he exploded, "making us set up a NATO here?"¹⁰ Still, having referred to NATO's arrangements with U.S. forces as models, Poland at least won a favorable agreement which regulated the status of the Soviet troops stationed on its territory differently from other parts of Eastern Europe. Even though the provision subordinating the troops to Polish rather than to Soviet law was ignored in practice, the agreement amounted to Moscow's recognition of the country's special position within the Soviet bloc.¹¹ It did not discourage Polish officers from proceeding, even if not succeeding, with a project to create within the Warsaw Pact a separate "Polish front" that would remain the nation's exclusive area of operations.¹²

Although the Warsaw Pact did not fulfill its purpose of prodding the West to start negotiations about the European security system Moscow wanted, until 1958 Khrushchev continued to use its meetings to at least put

on record his undiminished desire for the dissolution of both the bogus Soviet alliance and the real Western one. Until the end of his rule six years later, he kept advancing the proposal for a non-aggression pact between the two alliances. The time and effort invested in promoting this verbal declaration would seem worthy of a better cause if Khrushchev had not seen it as a public relations venture to blunt NATO's anti-Soviet thrust by bringing about "psychological improvement" in the relations between East and West.¹³

Moscow was alert to any signs of deepening disagreements between the Americans and their European allies that could make such an "improvement" possible. It was at most times well informed about NATO's internal affairs - mainly through West German channels - and habitually magnified the discord in the enemy camp by wishful thinking. In the spring of 1958, Soviet intelligence intercepted a message by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to U.S. ambassadors in which Dulles expressed his concern about the constancy of the NATO partners' commitment to the common values and their readiness to stand up to the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Soon afterward Khrushchev began to test their solidarity by provoking in Germany the crisis that three years would backfire by forcing him to build the Berlin Wall.

In trying to intimidate the West Europeans by expatiating on the dire consequences for themselves of a nuclear war to which they might be drawn by their American ally, Khrushchev underestimated NATO's capacity to hold together under pressure. In the West his threats were rightly discounted as bluff and bluster, but the Soviet military took more seriously what they regarded as the necessity to prepare for the possibility of having to fight a nuclear war against NATO. The task promised to compensate for the diminished role Khrushchev assigned to the conventional forces in his attempted revision of Soviet security policy, an initiative now in suspense because of his failure to obtain by non-military means the desired Western concessions in Germany. But the upsurge of

international tension during the Berlin crisis also provided a suitable setting to give the Warsaw Pact the missing military dimension, thus making it a more credible counterpart of NATO.

The joint maneuvers, introduced as a new feature of the Soviet-led alliance shortly after the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, were calculated to bolster Moscow's authority among its allies, recently shaken by the embarrassing defection of the smallest of them, Albania, and to impress the West with the Warsaw Pact's military prowess. Its well-publicized first joint maneuvers, codenamed Tempest, coincided with a supersecret exercise at the headquarters of the Soviet forces in Germany at Wünsdorf near Berlin. Under the guidance of top Soviet generals, its Eastern European participants designed there plans for the invasion of Western Europe as far as the Pyrenees, English Channel and North Sea during which atomic and hydrogen bombs were to be liberally used to destroy major cities.¹⁵

There was a make-believe quality about these exercises, described by one of the Polish participants as "childlike" games at a war in which next to nothing could be reliably predicted.¹⁶ Presuming its initiation by NATO's massive nuclear strike without warning, they enacted a counteroffensive miraculously bringing the enemy to his knees in a few days.¹⁷ As if protected by divine providence, the victorious troops would then march unscathed into the radioactive ruins of the Western cities, within hours of their destruction. In directing the Wünsdorf exercise, the future supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Ivan Iakubovskii, mistook Luxembourg for the Belgian capital, while Polish airborne and amphibious units were assigned to descend on the Danish island of Bornholm although they were not equipped with the landing craft needed for the operation.

The scary Soviet war games, given a touch of plausibility by the narrow escape from a nuclear clash during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, prompted at least one Warsaw Pact government to reduce the risks inherent in membership in the alliance by approaching the enemy. In October 1963, Romanian foreign minister Corneliu Mănescu secretly passed the word to the United States that in case of a nuclear confrontation involving the Soviet Union his country would remain neutral - a message sensational

enough not to be shared by Washington even with its closest allies.¹⁸ As Khrushchev's position weakened, Romania sought to loosen its ties with the Warsaw Pact by adopting in April 1964 his earlier call for the simultaneous abolition of both of Europe's alliances.¹⁹ Later that year, Bucharest promptly took advantage of Khrushchev's fall from power to bar Warsaw Pact maneuvers on its territory, reduce the size of the Soviet military mission there, and revive the earlier Polish proposal for the rotation of the alliance's supreme command among its member states.

Khrushchev's successors gratified the Soviet military by reversing his army reductions and placing renewed emphasis on the conventional forces, without slowing down the development of the nuclear ones. They did not succeed, however, in their attempt to reimpose the level of political control Khrushchev had once exercised over the Warsaw Pact allies. While joining in the Soviet campaign against NATO's plans to give West Germany access to nuclear arms, the East Europeans tried to use it at same time to discourage Moscow's own military buildup.

With Soviet blessing, but with its own priorities in mind, Poland had since 1958 pursued different variants of the plan advanced by its foreign minister Adam Rapacki for banning nuclear arms from Central Europe. If implemented, the plan would have made Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as the two German states, wards of an international agreement, thus diluting Soviet control over them. Czechoslovakia prepared - though never actually presented - its own proposal against nuclear proliferation that also aimed at imposing restrictions on both superpowers.²⁰

In 1965, NATO's plans for nuclear sharing became the catalyst of further Eastern European attempts to break out of the strait jacket imposed by the Soviet alliance. The January meeting of the Warsaw Pact had been delayed by Romanian moves designed to block the adoption of an anti-West German statement that would hamper Bucharest's efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Bonn in defiance of Moscow. Poland proposed an expanded version of the Rapacki plan which envisaged denuclearization of all of Europe by an agreement between nuclear and non-nuclear states.²¹ In allusion to NATO's "dual key" idea, Czechoslovakia demanded a say in the

use of any Soviet nuclear weapons that were to be installed on its territory, while Romania wanted to share responsibility even for those deployed in other Warsaw Pact countries.²² Later that year Czechoslovakia agreed to stationing the weapons on its soil, but Romania never did.

Thus NATO, having originally been created to deter a Soviet attack, came to exert a more subtle kind of influence on its adversaries. Arguably, it was always the military might of the United States alone rather than of the Western alliance as a whole that caused Moscow never to feel strong enough to seriously contemplate attacking. But it was NATO that epitomized the crucial contrast between the security of its Western members derived from their voluntary association and the insecurity of its Eastern opponents chafing under Soviet tutelage. Whereas Moscow's involuntary allies tried to improve their lot by aspiring to a position approximating that NATO allowed its members, the Soviet Union attempted to reassert its control over its allies by securing the Western acceptance of the Warsaw Pact as a legitimate counterpart of NATO. Moscow took steps toward reforming its bogus alliance just as it began to seek a *détente* in its relations with the West.

NATO's Eastern Imitation

The creation in March 1969 of the Warsaw Pact's new institutions, particularly the committee of defense ministers and military council, appeared to most contemporaries as a routine development. It had been, after all, anticipated since the beginning of the alliance and did not significantly alter the effective control Moscow always exercised over the armed forces of its nominal allies. The addition of joint institutions could therefore be plausibly regarded as primarily intended to placate the disgruntled allies by giving them a feeling, if not the reality, of greater participation at a time when the recent Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia had not yet achieved in Eastern Europe the degree of consolidation Moscow desired.

Yet the reform of the Warsaw Pact, which had been initiated by Soviet

party general secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev two years before the onset of the Czechoslovak crisis, entailed more than merely an attempt to more effectively manage the alliance.²³ In his first speech to the alliance's political consultative committee after his rise to power, Brezhnev explained that the relaxation of tension in Europe presupposed a military strengthening of the Warsaw Pact as well as added pressure on the West by extended support for the "national liberation wars" in the Third World.²⁴ In reversing Khrushchev's notion that in waging the Cold War the Soviet system's superior nonmilitary performance justified diminished reliance on military power, the Brezhnev leadership saw in the buildup of military power a way to compensate for the system's increasingly glaring deficiencies in other fields.

The drive for reinvigoration of the Warsaw Pact grew out of Moscow's reassessment of the NATO challenge, as a result of which improved opportunities could be seen to advance Soviet power and influence amid reduced international tension - the gist of the Soviet concept of *détente*. By the end of 1966, the Kremlin leadership concluded that because of the growing destructiveness of nuclear weapons the inhibitions against their use were such that a military conflict in Europe need not necessarily become nuclear.²⁵ Ironically, it was NATO's shift from its posture of massive retaliation, with its reliance on nuclear weapons, to the seemingly more sensible strategy of flexible response, intended to give a chance to conventional defense, that made Moscow perceive "a real possibility of conducting conventional war in Europe."²⁶ According to the Warsaw Pact supreme commander Marshal Andrei Grechko, combat readiness and advances in weaponry now mattered more than strategic missiles. The new Soviet priorities translated into an accelerated modernization of the alliance's arsenal and its increasingly realistic war games, practicing offensive thrusts into NATO territory.

Thus the advent of *détente* coincided with the militarization of Soviet policy after Khrushchev's unsuccessful attempt at its demilitarization. Moscow tried to minimize its allies' concern about the new trend by inviting them to present proposals for the further development of the

Warsaw Pact. Some of the allies wanted the pact to be looser, others more effective. The Romanians tried to limit the members' obligations to consultation and not add any institutions that could infringe on their sovereignty.²⁷ The Czechoslovaks, in allusion to French President Charles de Gaulle's doubts about the U.S. nuclear umbrella, questioned the utility of the Soviet one and demanded a greater voice in the alliance's decisions.²⁸ The Poles wanted the Soviet contribution to the Warsaw Pact's budget to increase from 31 to at least 50 per cent.²⁹

In the end, the reform fell short of the Soviet desiderata. The March 1969 Warsaw Pact conference in Budapest created the foundations of a military command structure comparable to NATO, including particularly a committee of defense ministers, military council, and committee on technology, but postponed the establishment of a unified military staff. It failed to create a permanent secretariat, whose absence prominently distinguished the Eastern from the Western alliance. With Moscow's attention focused on its widening rift with China, which had recently climaxed in armed clashes along the Ussuri river, the outcome of the conference was a compromise between the dominant power and its restive allies. The watered-down final communiqué omitted several important topics on which no consensus could be reached.

The discussion at the conference revealed significant differences of opinion about how the Warsaw Pact should function and about its relationship with NATO. Reaffirming Khrushchev's old proposal to dissolve both alliances, Romania sought to insert into the public communiqué formulations that would make it more difficult for Moscow to justify another intervention such as the one just suffered by Czechoslovakia. Poland and Hungary joined Romania in advocating a compact of European states against the use of force or the threat of force.³⁰ Later on Warsaw went so far as to prepare on its own a project for a European security treaty which the Soviet Union felt compelled to block before it could be made public. It proposed obligatory consultation between

the two alliances in case of a crisis, which could give NATO a say in the affairs of Eastern Europe, and envisaged disarmament measures that might require greater cuts by the East than by the West.³¹

Détente entailed calculated risk for Moscow. Concessions to the East Europeans were not to hamper the twin goals of strengthening Soviet control over them and enhancing the military effectiveness of the Warsaw Pact in the long run. Nor was the expansion of its conventional capability to be restricted by arms control agreements with the West which limited the growth of the respective nuclear arsenals. The alliance was consequently supplemented by a new set bilateral treaties which included specific references to the Soviet hegemonial role.

In 1973 that role was reinforced by the adoption of new rules which allowed for bypassing the Warsaw Pact's principle of unanimity, thus nullifying possible opposition by members other than the already excluded Albania. This applied particularly to the Romanians, although their obstructionism was more an annoyance than a threat to Moscow. "One must be patient with them," Brezhnev responded in 1966 to East German party secretary Walter Ulbricht's indignation at the antics of the Romanian leader and his representatives. "Comrade Ceauşescu is still young and inexperienced."³²

The buildup of the Warsaw Pact into a credible equivalent of NATO helped set into motion the arms control negotiations regarded as the critical yardstick of détente. The December 1970 communiqué of the North Atlantic Council for the first time referred to the communist alliance as a legitimate negotiating partner - a landmark on its progress toward respectability since its uncertain debut fifteen years earlier when NATO officials had contemptuously dismissed it as a "cardboard castle."³³ The inflated respect subsequently accorded to the seemingly formidable military edifice of the Soviet bloc had the important effect of diverting attention from the more pertinent real weaknesses of its political and economic structures.

The excessive preoccupation in the pursuit of détente with the process of arms control, with its wildly speculative scenarios concerning the

potential utilization of the increasingly surrealistic nuclear arsenals, highlighted the growing mismatch between military power and political purpose. It was indicative of the inadequacy of the process that the arsenals kept growing even as their justification was becoming ever more tenuous. Yet the discrepancy did not seem to matter as long as the perception of military parity between East and West nurtured the feeling of détente; the problem arose once détente started to falter, for no readily identifiable reasons, in the mid-nineteen-seventies.

Although the problem troubled both alliances, it was more acute for the Soviet Union, which had set so much store by its military ascendancy and yet began to feel insecure again after the temporary reassurance provided by the initial success of its détente calculation. For the Soviet leaders it would have been all but impossible to recognize that the root causes of their new insecurity were internal rather than external. The systemic weaknesses of their power bloc had reached a critical point by 1975 - the year of the Helsinki agreement they hailed as a major achievement in the consolidation of their empire. Instead the agreement proved a catalyst of the empire's undoing because of the unexpected potency of its human rights provisions in exposing the Soviet system's critical vulnerabilities.

Incapable of grasping the real reasons of what went wrong with détente, Moscow was predisposed to perceive the threat to its security as being military and emanating from NATO. Soviet generals, with their professional vested interest in the existence of an enemy to defend the country against, had never really ceased to regard the Western alliance as hostile and arms control as risky. Even as détente was beginning to bloom in 1971, the supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact Marshal Iakubovskii cautioned its assembled representatives that the situation was "still extremely tense."³⁴ And once the United States disengaged itself from the Vietnam war, the Soviet military were quick to see a threat in Washington's again turning its attention to NATO. In an alarmist response to NATO's modernization program, they directed the Warsaw Pact allies to shorten the

warning times for alerts and improve their forces' state of readiness in anticipation of nuclear strikes to be launched against enemy concentrations.³⁵

Incapable of reassuring themselves sufficiently regardless of what NATO might or might not be doing, the Soviet leaders could therefore never make the necessary political decision to reverse their burgeoning military programs, which then continued to be driven by momentum rather than by design. The inherent danger was not so much in the growth of the nuclear arsenals - limited, however inadequately, by the arms control agreements - as in the expansion of the conventional forces, subjected to no such limitations. Moscow obstructed the talks between the two alliances that Washington hoped would lead to a mutual and balanced reduction of those forces in Europe. The Soviet Union also used its superiority in conventional forces to elaborate a new military doctrine that envisaged using them to defeat NATO before its members could agree on resorting to nuclear arms for defense; hence also the priority Moscow assigned to campaigning for a ban on their first use.³⁶

In 1977 Moscow initiated the deployment of its new SS-20 medium-range nuclear missiles not because of any new threat from NATO, but simply because the missiles were available and, considering their range, presumably suitable to impress upon the United States that a nuclear war could remain limited to Europe while sparing the territories of both superpowers. As if a confrontation were looming, the following year the Warsaw Pact finally established its unified command structure for war, with the main purpose of tightening control over nuclear weapons.³⁷ Its commander-in-chief became none other than Brezhnev himself, by then in an advanced stage of decrepitude.

Brezhnev's appointment as the nominal chief of the alliance epitomized Soviet confusion about the substance of the security it was meant to serve. The Warsaw Pact's chief of staff Gen. Anatolii Gribkov later reminisced that his superiors never came to grips with the question of who would actually initiate war. With all of Western Europe covered with Soviet missiles, the question of what to do next was asked but never answered.³⁸

Contrary to the contemporary estimates that the Moscow leaders had adopted a pragmatic outlook compatible with Western thinking, internal evidence now available from the Soviet side shows they were in fact prevented by ideological blinkers from grasping that NATO could possibly feel threatened by their military buildup. They genuinely believed that there was a fair balance between the two alliances for, as Gen. Gribkov retrospectively described it, "we had more tanks [but] you had more anti-tank weapons."³⁹ The extent to which both sides were acting at cross purposes while thinking they finally understood each other was one of the disturbing ironies of *détente*.

Moscow did not see a good reason for the Western alarm about the deployment of its SS-20 missiles, for which there was no NATO equivalent. Hence it considered totally unwarranted the alliance's December 1979 "dual decision" to proceed with the installation of the qualitatively superior Pershing-2 and cruise missiles if the concurrent Geneva negotiations did not result in the withdrawal of the already deployed Soviet weapons. In trying to prevent NATO from achieving what Warsaw Pact supreme commander Marshal Viktor Kulikov described as its goal of military-technological superiority,⁴⁰ the Soviet leaders unwisely placed their bets on the success of the opposition to the "Euromissile" deployments by the Western "peace movement," which they verbally supported but did not control.

Moscow similarly discounted Western concern about the material support it gave to Third World "national liberation movements," which it also did not sufficiently control. It supported them on mainly ideological grounds, regarding their victory as a historical inevitability in which the capitalists would have no choice but to acquiesce - as the United States had seemingly done in Vietnam. NATO was a secondary consideration in the Soviet Union's using its growing surplus of conventional weaponry to pursue ill-defined ambitions in parts of the globe where it had no vital security interests - in American eyes the most important single cause of the collapse of *détente*. Baffled by Washington's indignation at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Brezhnev sounded as if he

truly believed the explanation he gave his Warsaw Pact allies, namely that "the ghosts of the Cold War have come out not from the ravines of Afghanistan or the high plateaus of Iran but from the corridors of the White House."⁴¹

As tension mounted, the transformation of the Warsaw Pact into a military counterpart of NATO, originally intended by Moscow to make détente possible, instead hastened its demise. The Soviet bloc's arms buildup gave a false impression of its strength just as its terminal decline was accelerating, while on the Western side the opposite was happening. The spreading mood of Europessimism and malaise under the Carter administration, with its image of indecision and incompetence, were deceptive of the essential soundness of the Western alliance, thus increasing the risks of miscalculation by the Kremlin.

Concerned primarily about parity, Soviet officials did not share their Western counterparts' intense preoccupation with the maintenance of "crisis stability."⁴² If the overly sophisticated Western strategists took much too seriously far-fetched scenarios involving nuclear weapons, the more simple-minded Kremlin leadership did not take seriously enough the destabilizing potential of the conventional armaments that it allowed to grow without adequate control. As the aging political leaders were losing their grip, by default rather than by design the Soviet military became capable of exercising greater influence on policy than was generally suspected.

While the Soviet military, traditionally lacking political ambitions of their own, did not initiate the Soviet foreign ventures that doomed détente, they welcomed the opportunity to develop and test their weaponry without regard to political costs. Having become for all intents and purposes an extended arm of the Moscow ministry of defense, the Warsaw Pact continued to practice targeting for nuclear strikes against NATO and simulating conventional thrusts into Western Europe until as late as 1989.⁴³ The most pernicious product of the Brezhnev "era of stagnation," the increasingly influential Soviet generals, were totally devoted to the system that secured their privileges and would survive it as its most reactionary

and anti-Western remnant. Given the generals' prejudices and input into policy during the Soviet Union's twilight years, Moscow's benign response to the massive rearmament program NATO adopted during the Reagan administration was therefore not a foregone conclusion.

NATO and the Soviet Collapse

How important was the role of NATO, with its own misconceptions about the Soviet threat, in encouraging Moscow's historic reassessment of the Western threat, without which the Cold War could not have ended as peacefully as it did? The Kremlin leaders initially showed little inclination to come to grips with the challenge they unexpectedly faced from a president rated by the veteran Soviet foreign minister Andrei A. Gromyko as "no lion", with nothing but a vacuum "behind his statements, indeed, behind his soul."⁴⁴ Yet when the Reagan administration in March 1983 announced its Strategic Defense Initiative, which challenged Moscow to a technological race, Brezhnev's successor as party general secretary Iurii Andropov - as the former head of the KGB intelligence agency the person best informed of his country's real condition - took alarm.

Andropov accurately perceived the NATO rearmament policy pressed by the "political bully" in the White House as designed to enable the West to "radically change the international situation to its advantage, so that it could dictate to us how we should live and handle our affairs."⁴⁵ In an important secret speech to the Warsaw Pact allies in January 1983, the Soviet leader lamented that the ensuing arms race would impose an intolerable burden on his country while presenting no such problem for the United States, which presumably could exact the necessary sacrifices from its citizens by cutting down their welfare.⁴⁶ His reasoning was a reversal of the argument frequently advanced against Reagan's rearmament program by its Western critics wrongly attributing that capability to the Soviet government.

With an uneasy eye on Romania's demands for unilateral armament reductions by the Warsaw Pact and the participation of its members in the

arms control negotiations between the two superpowers, Andropov insisted that the effective equality of their respective arsenals amounted to "more or less stable parity" between the two alliances, which NATO sought to upset by striving for superiority. Convinced that Washington was actively preparing to launch a nuclear war, he responded to Reagan's announcement of the new U.S. strategic doctrine by ordering a crash effort to find out about the putative U.S. plans for a nuclear first strike - an undertaking remembered by Soviet ambassador Anatolii Dobrynin as the "largest peacetime intelligence operation in Soviet history."⁴⁷

Following the approval in November 1983 of NATO's Euromissile deployment program by the West German parliament, which removed the last obstacle to its implementation, the Kremlin was badly shaken by the alliance's command exercise "Able Archer," whose simulation of nuclear release procedures in the event of war had an electronic signature indistinguishable from the real thing.⁴⁸ Yet despite Andropov's alarm at what he wrongly believed to be NATO's aggressive intentions and his awareness of what he rightly appreciated as his country's vulnerability to Western "human rights blackmail," he did not draw practical conclusions from his grim assessment of the situation. He failed to act upon the memorandum prepared for him by his security adviser Viacheslav Dashichev who - in accordance with the Western concept of "security dilemma" - argued that the Soviet striving for security at the expense of other countries inevitably compelled the latter to react by forming a hostile alliance.⁴⁹

Instead, the short-sighted reaction of the by then seriously ill Andropov to NATO's resolve was acting on the Soviet threat to break off the Geneva arms control negotiations, as favored by his foreign minister, and proceed with the deployment of additional missiles in Eastern Europe, as desired by his generals. This time, the resentful Warsaw Pact allies included not only the maverick Romania but also Moscow's most faithful ally, East Germany. In a display of self-confidence at a time of mounting leadership crisis in the Kremlin, East German party chief Erich Honecker signaled in no uncertain terms his unhappiness with the Soviet willingness to sacrifice the remnants

of détente at the expense of Europeans. He sought "damage limitation" by forming a "coalition of reason" with West Germany, thus discharging what he considered a special responsibility of the two German states for the preservation of peace.⁵⁰

Honecker took the unusual step of trying to tell his Soviet patrons what was in their best interest because he was mistakenly convinced that he would be able to drive a wedge between West Germany and the other NATO members, thus weakening their resolve to proceed with the Euromissile deployments. At the peak of his confidence in his regime's growing international stature and internal stability, he became the Warsaw Pact's leading advocate of a demilitarization of the East-West relationship, which, much like Khrushchev before, he justified by socialism's allegedly growing superiority over capitalism. In cultivating this self-deception, he found a kindred soul in none other than his Romanian counterpart Nicolae Ceaușescu, with whom he exchanged compliments about their respective countries being "from the sociopolitical point of view far ahead of the most advanced capitalist nations."⁵¹

At a meeting with Andropov's similarly infirm successor Konstantin Chernenko, Honecker defended his method of subverting NATO, boasting that his country was able to exercise greater influence on West Germany than was the case the other way around. To a skeptical response by Soviet minister of defense Dmitrii Ustinov, he retorted that "we know very well what we are doing," proudly citing the recent decoration of "two female comrades who had worked in the NATO headquarters" with medals for their spying feats.⁵² Honecker's arrogance contrasted with the defensiveness of his Soviet interlocutors, worried about the ascendancy of the Western alliance yet unable to decide what, if anything, could be done about it.

The lack of an effective decision-making mechanism in the Kremlin during the succession crisis at least ensured that for the time being nothing would be done to provoke the West to further accelerate its military buildup. In September 1984, Marshal Sergei Ogarkov, reputed in the West to be a believer in the possibility of waging and winning a conventional war by offensive thrust into NATO territory, lost his influential position as

chief of general staff to become the commander of a newly formed special grouping of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe and western USSR. While his competencies remained unclear, the reorganization tended to blunt rather than sharpen the Warsaw Pact's ability to deliver the dreaded thrust.⁵³ More importantly, as soon as Mikhail Gorbachev became the new party general secretary early the following year, the Soviet Union froze its missile deployments in Eastern Europe and reversed itself by returning to the Geneva arms control talks despite NATO's failure to fulfill any of the preconditions Moscow had set for their resumption.

By then a reassessment of Soviet security policy, the beginnings of which can be traced to the aftermath of Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative, was underway. It revealed significant differences of outlook between civilian experts, better attuned to the Western thinking because of their frequent interaction with Western officials, and the more parochial military officers, who lacked the same educational experience. Indeed, the emergence within the Soviet establishment of an influential group of people with a vested interest in continued dialogue with the West, or at least the preservation of their travel privileges, has been plausibly identified as an important by-product of détente, deeply subversive of the Soviet system by sowing among its beneficiaries doubts about the worthiness of defending it in its present form.⁵⁴

In a seminal article in 1988, Soviet security expert Sergei Kondrashev dismissed the NATO threat as an invention of a system that needed a foreign enemy to justify its repressive domestic policies and oversized armed forces, whose commanders were still mesmerized by the memory of their narrow escape from defeat at the hands of the Nazi invaders in 1941. He described the real threat as being "in ourselves," thus identifying the critical link between the necessity of internal reform and of military accommodation abroad.⁵⁵ In pointing the Soviet reformers to the way to that accommodation, made imperative by the military buildup promoted by

the Western political Right, the innovative thinking of the Leftist critics of the buildup provided the necessary complement to help bring the Cold War confrontation to a happy end.

In March 1985, the Czechoslovak dissident organization Charter 77 addressed to the Amsterdam conference organized by Western pacifists a call for the dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO on the grounds that they were stumbling blocs to the reunification of Europe. In an essay written for the conference, in which he was prevented from participating, Czech playwright Václav Havel invoked plague on both houses while challenging the Soviet Union to relinquish control over Eastern Europe, although he did not expect it to comply.⁵⁶ In the opinion of his fellow-dissident Dienstbier, "if the populations of these countries were offered the status of Finland in a free referendum, they would vote for it with overwhelming enthusiasm, and would certainly prefer it to transferring their allegiance into the other camp."⁵⁷

In trying to stop the NATO buildup by providing it with the necessary reassurance about Soviet intentions, the Gorbachev leadership embraced such concepts of the Western Left as "non-provocative defense" and "structural inability to attack."⁵⁸ The June 1986 meeting of the Warsaw Pact political consultative committee supported a restructuring along lines that would "exclude not only the possibility of a surprise attack but also the waging of large offensive operations."⁵⁹ As Gorbachev came to realize, "nowadays progress is only possible when the interests of all parties are taken into account."⁶⁰

Far from being intended to weaken the Warsaw Pact, the revision of Soviet security policy aimed at strengthening it by greater flexibility. Following the inconclusive Gorbachev-Reagan summit at Reykjavik, the alliance decided to launch a "broad offensive" to convince the Western public, not only by words but also by deeds, that it was no longer a threat, thus taking the steam out of Reagan's military engine.⁶¹ At its Berlin meeting in May 1987, the Warsaw Pact issued a statement describing its military doctrine as that of defensive sufficiency.⁶² Soviet defense minister Dmitrii Iazov explained to the participants that this meant maintaining an

equilibrium at the lowest possible level while reducing the military potential to the minimum necessary for defense; publicly, however, he qualified his explanation by saying that "the limits of sufficiency are set not by us, but by the actions of the U.S.A. and NATO."⁶³

Moscow tried to beat NATO at its own game by adopting its positions on arms control, but no substantial Western concessions were forthcoming. Gorbachev nevertheless proceeded toward the conclusion of the landmark INF agreement on the limitation of medium-range nuclear missiles essentially on Western terms, while insisting to his Warsaw Pact allies that the "initiative is in our hands."⁶⁴ But this was not the opinion shared by the Soviet ministry of defense, whose spokesman Gen. Mikhailov warned them that NATO's military strength was growing and the danger of war correspondingly increasing. Marshal Kulikov therefore called for undiminished defense spending, further modernization of the Soviet bloc's armed forces, and better intelligence gathering to avoid being taken by surprise by the enemy.⁶⁵

Meanwhile a rapprochement between the two alliances had been progressing. Already since 1987 they had been engaged in negotiations about the reduction of their respective conventional forces in Europe which, despite resistance by Soviet military, were proceeding faster than originally expected toward the rectification of their lopsided ratio. Moreover, the Warsaw Pact acted upon the Polish proposal to exchange visits of parliamentarians, thus allowing delegations of the North Atlantic Assembly to interact with their counterparts in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.⁶⁶ The interaction reinforced there the growing feeling that the communist alliance was untenable in its present form.

By 1988 all the Soviet bloc governments except Romania's agreed on the desirability of reinvigorating the Warsaw Pact by making it into a partnership for political and economic rather than merely military cooperation.⁶⁷ Bucharest claimed that the reason it still preferred a looser grouping was to protect its national sovereignty, but the stance was in actuality prompted by the neostalinist regime's well-founded fear that the former tool of Soviet domination was becoming a vehicle of reform. Even

East Germany, despite its worries about the direction the arms control negotiations were taking, favored the transformation of the alliance. Wanting the communist states to follow the example of Western Europe and create "a sort of a common parliament," Honecker was still convinced that a thriving "United Socialist States of Europe" could ensue.⁶⁸

At the April 1989 meeting of the foreign ministers of the unraveling Soviet bloc, Moscow proposed an appeal to NATO on its fortieth anniversary, urging additional mutual arms reductions. Depicting such reductions as a way to strengthen the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet representative praised the Helsinki process for helping to overcome the division of Europe.⁶⁹ His call for a reform of the alliance to promote political and economic as well as military cooperation was taken further six months later by Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who wanted it to be transformed from a military-political to a political-military structure, free from ideological content. By then Poland, no longer ruled by a communist government, opposed any alliance obligations that would affect the internal order of the member states, while Hungary insisted on their sovereign right to shape that order in accordance with the Helsinki principles.⁷⁰

Closing the circle that had been opened in 1949 by the rise of the Western alliance as the prime incarnation of the enemy, it was the Warsaw Pact's attempted remodeling to the NATO image that, despite all the imperfections of the latter, had by 1989 effectively neutralized the communist alliance as an instrument for upholding the integrity of the crumbling Soviet bloc. NATO's costly military buildup had set this process into motion by helping to convince Moscow and its Eastern European clients that by adopting Western models they could modernize their system and keep themselves in power. By the time they realized their mistake it was too late.

The End of the Soviet Threat

The Warsaw Pact's lingering existence after Moscow's Eastern European empire had come to an end in 1989 was suggestive of the difficulty the members of both alliances had in grasping how much the meaning of

security had changed. At the Malta summit in December of that year, Gorbachev indicated his desire to remodel the Warsaw Pact along NATO lines as a means of political dialogue.⁷¹ But the main reason why the alliance was widely believed to be worth preserving was its alleged indispensability for maintaining Europe's military stability together with NATO. In the later stages of the Cold War, the CFE conventional arms reduction talks, in which the two alliances had been partners, proved a more important measure of the shifting power than the increasingly esoteric nuclear arms control talks between the two superpowers. Yet the CFE negotiations were quickly overcome by events once the Soviet Union, as a result of the bilateral agreements it concluded with its Hungarian and Czechoslovak allies, now led by politically hostile governments, began to reduce its military presence in Eastern Europe far more drastically than the treaties that were being drafted envisaged.

The preservation of the two alliances in their existing form was made impossible by the impending unification of Germany. On the question of its future, both the Soviet Union and the Germans' eastern neighbors - as well as their Western friends - displayed vacillation indicative of how difficult it was for them to imagine a European security system different from that to which they had become accustomed. The gyrations of Moscow's policy during the eight months following the breaching of the Berlin Wall showed the extent to which developments were driven by a momentum largely out of the governments' control.

Although as late as December 1989 Gorbachev vowed never to abandon his country's "East German ally," soon the question was that of a united Germany's membership in NATO. This he said was "absolutely ruled out"; yet his pro-German advisor Dashichev, known to have publicly anticipated changes in Soviet positions before, promptly cast doubt on that statement by suggesting that his government's opposition to Germany's inevitable entry into NATO was but a bargaining ploy. Afterward Moscow floated the idea that each German state should remain in its respective alliance for a transitional period of several years. As that period seemed to be getting shorter and shorter, the more absurd variation, which envisaged the united

country's simultaneous membership in both alliances, was raised and dropped. By June 1990, Gorbachev was saying that the decision about whether to join or not to join NATO ought to be left to the German people, but then he corrected himself by explaining that he really meant the decision about joining any alliance. In the end, the Western rejection of Shevardnadze's last-ditch proposal to allow the united Germany to join NATO after five years set the stage for an agreement to ease its early entry.⁷²

The agreement was made easier by Gorbachev's view of West Germany as a moderating force in NATO, substantiated by Bonn's successful opposition to the U.S. plans for the modernization rather than retirement of the alliance's tactical nuclear missiles in Central Europe. The Soviet leader's huge popularity among West Germans, besides Chancellor Helmut Kohl's sensitivity to his vulnerabilities, further helped to clinch the deal. In return for Moscow's acquiescence in the whole Germany's all but inevitable membership in NATO, he promised on its behalf to abstain from introducing foreign troops and extending its infrastructure, including especially its nuclear installations, into the territory of the former GDR. Although the agreement was thus limited to Germany, in spirit even if not in letter it was at the time rightly perceived to be expressive of NATO's unwillingness to take advantage of the former enemy's distress by expanding into any territory Moscow lost.

The two members of the former Soviet bloc whose germanophobia antedated communism, Czechoslovakia and Poland, had mixed feelings about the bigger Germany's membership in the Western alliance. The Warsaw Pact's meeting in February 1990 agreed on the Germans' right to reunification but not on its political and security implications. Czechoslovak president Havel, the former dissident whose public plea for reconciliation through acknowledging the mutually inflicted past injustices met with resentment from his compatriots, made contradictory statements about the desirability of removing all foreign troops from both Germany and the rest of Europe while accepting that a neutral Germany would be absurd. But his friend Dienstbier, now foreign minister, suggested that

Soviet troops might well stay in Germany, for in the part of the world "where we live, in a symbiosis of the Good Soldier Schweik, Franz Kafka, and Josef Stalin, nothing is absurd."⁷³

Unable to decide whether a rising Germany might not be a greater threat than the declining Soviet Union, the new Polish leaders likewise gave contradictory signals. While Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski expressed his country's preference for a unified Germany in NATO, Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki qualified that opinion by suggesting that both NATO and Warsaw Pact troops remain stationed on its territory until the establishment of an all-European security system would allow their withdrawal.⁷⁴ Pending that uncertain prospect, Warsaw, in trying to obtain security assurances from Bonn, unwisely abstained from pressing Moscow as vigorously as did the Czechs and the Hungarians to accelerate the departure of Soviet troops from Poland, thus allowing Soviet commanders to drag their feet. It was indicative of the benign winds that were blowing in Europe that in the end the Poles managed both to get the German assurances they wanted and rid themselves of the unwanted Soviet military presence as well.⁷⁵

While the Soviet attitude toward NATO was at that time overwhelmingly determined by the immediate consequences of German unification, other members of the disintegrating Warsaw Pact, with their own security interests in mind, cast their eyes beyond the present, pondering what, if any, role either of the alliances should have to play in future Europe. Not surprisingly, the April 1990 meeting of the Eastern European heads of state in Bratislava - which brought together the incongruous trio of the former dissident Havel, the architect of the Polish martial law Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, and the veteran Hungarian party ideologue Mátyás Szűrös, ended without seriously addressing this, or any other, question.⁷⁶ Afterward the three central European countries adopted positions significantly different from each other, as became evident during the contentious next meeting of the Warsaw Pact's political consultative committee in Moscow in June. Their only agreement was that both their alliance and NATO should best be done away with.⁷⁷

Rooted in their dissident reveries about a security system for an undivided Europe which not so long ago had seemed no more than a pipe dream, Czechoslovak politicians now developed ambitious visions of the future. During their visit to Washington in February 1990, Havel and Dienstbier startled their American hosts by proposing that NATO be dissolved and replaced by a broader European organization, and all foreign troops would leave the Continent. Two months later, Havel outlined to the Council of Europe the seemingly more plausible - indeed, as it would eventually turn out, prescient - vision of a Europe entrusting its security to a NATO radically changed in both its doctrine and its membership. And Dienstbier submitted to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe an elaborate proposal which envisaged all its numerous member states forming an European Security Commission, which would then create a Council at the ministerial level, to be topped by a permanent Secretariat in Prague. None of these proposals was acted upon.⁷⁸

While in Czechoslovakia discussion about security matters remained the all but exclusive domain of a few prominent members of the new political elite, in Hungary a wider political debate embraced both former dissidents and reformed communists. From among the latter, foreign minister Gyula Horn created a stir by becoming the region's first responsible official to suggest that his country should join NATO. He did not quite mean what he was saying, however, for he quickly qualified his statement by explaining that he had in mind Hungary's eventual membership in political organizations more or less associated with NATO, such as the Atlantic Assembly and the Council of Europe, after the Warsaw Pact would have converged with NATO and transformed itself into a political organization.

Following the vote in the Budapest parliament which mandated Hungary's withdrawal from the alliance, Horn's successor Géza Jeszenszky formulated more clearly his government's desire to associate the country with as many international organizations as possible while seeking its security in a regional arrangement. Meanwhile different Hungarian public figures were expressing an array of opinions, ranging from advocacy of continued membership in a reformed Warsaw Pact to a call for the

dissolution of both military alliances. According to Jeszenszky, most Hungarians wanted their country to be neutral. If Prime Minister József Antall were to have his way, however, this would be neutrality in a Europe secure under the protection of an unchanged NATO.⁷⁹ According to Csaba Kiss, the head of the planning department of the ministry of defense, what mattered was creating "virtual security guarantees - which are not hard security guarantees, but mechanisms which could compensate for the lack of hard security guarantees."⁸⁰

Affecting a posture of self-reliance, in 1990 Poland went the farthest in signaling a desire to remain neutral. Its deputy minister of defense Janusz Onyszkiewicz, a noted Solidarity activist, denied his government had any plans to join NATO.⁸¹ Polish spokesmen expressed their preference for an all-European security system, but not strongly enough to elaborate on its specifics in any way comparable to the Czechoslovaks. Instead, Poland became the first country in the region to announce its new military doctrine, which, however, was rightly criticized for its being "spiritually bound to the past." Built upon the old premise that a future war would be a clash between two alliances, it reaffirmed the value of Poland's existing military treaties, including the Warsaw Pact. As Gen. Drzewiecki's 1956 memorandum had vainly sought to achieve under Soviet domination, the document asserted the government's sovereign control over the nation's armed forces and their operational autonomy in wartime - something that would have been quite an accomplishment thirty-four years earlier but was pointless now. Prepared by a commission chaired by the old-timer Gen. Jaruzelski, the defense doctrine showed the price that Poland was paying for having been the first country to break the communist hold on power but not having totally abolished it.⁸²

From NATO's point of view, there was something to be said for the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact as a framework for further disarmament negotiations. The July 1990 offer by the North Atlantic Council of a 23-point "peace package," featuring the formerly Soviet idea of a non-aggression pact and the abandonment of such Soviet *bêtes noires* as the strategies of flexible response and forward defense, was conducive to

the preservation rather than disintegration of the ex-enemy alliance.⁸³ Yet any lingering doubts among its non-Soviet members about whether it deserved to be kept were dispelled by their shock at Moscow's attempt at the end of January 1991 to forcibly suppress the Baltic people's drive for independence and its unhelpful attitude toward NATO's participation in the war against Iraq.

The response of the three Central European governments showed how well they had already learned to look after their security interests together. Within days after the Soviet-provoked violence in Vilnius and Riga, the Polish, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian foreign ministers meeting in Budapest demanded the dissolution of the military structures of the Warsaw Pact by mid-March at the latest. After Gorbachev, in trying to salvage the remnants of the alliance against secession by its members, agreed to the convocation of its political consultative committee, the heads of state of the three countries added pressure by forming a loose alliance of their own at the Hungarian town of Visegrád on February 15. The meeting of the Warsaw Pact's foreign and defense ministers ten days later then terminated its military functions effective March 31.⁸⁴

Alarmed at the precipitous unraveling of the alliance, the Soviet military insinuated that these events were a Western ploy to bring its members into NATO. On ostensibly realistic and pragmatic rather than ideological grounds, they criticized the Gorbachev regime's reformist security policy for supposedly allowing a threat of war to arise through the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the continued existence of NATO. According to Chief of the General Staff Gen. Mikhail Moiseev, the new situation invalidated the existing conventional arms control agreements between the two alliances, necessitating their renegotiation or else NATO's symmetrical dissolution. Minister of Defense Iazov called for the agreements to be scrapped, and Gen. Vladimir Lobov urged a new effort to bolster the strength of the Soviet army.⁸⁵

In actuality, no one in a position of responsibility had so far seriously suggested that any East European country should become a full member of NATO. When in November 1990 Bulgarian foreign minister Lyuben

Gotsev mentioned his country's interest in doing so during his visit to Brussels, he meant that Sofia was offering its services to help mediate disputes between NATO members Greece and Turkey - an offer which was politely ignored.⁸⁶ Before visiting the same place five months later, Havel explained he was not going to discuss there Czechoslovak membership in the alliance but merely cooperation and partnership.⁸⁷ In the opinion of the Hungarian minister of defense Lajos Für, "considerations of a full NATO membership for Hungary bypass reality."⁸⁸ And foreign minister Skubiszewski of Poland dwelt on its interest in closer military collaboration between the three Visegrád countries but not in the formation of a regional alliance.⁸⁹ He did not want to give the slightest comfort to former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's alarming proposal for an Eastern European buffer zone between NATO and the Soviet Union.

Kissinger's idea was particularly untimely in view of Moscow's last-ditch attempts to substitute the Warsaw Pact with a refurbished network of bilateral treaties that would tie together its former members. As promoted by veteran Soviet diplomat Iulii Kvitsinskii at the April 1991 meeting of the outgoing alliance's deputy foreign ministers, the treaties were to prohibit membership in any groupings hostile to the other signatories and deny territory, communications, and infrastructure to loosely termed "aggressors."⁹⁰ Only the Romanian government, still controlled by former communists and favoring a separate security system for Eastern Europe, concluded with Moscow the kind of agreement it wanted; other countries of the region responded by signing security treaties with one another.⁹¹

On July 1, 1991, the Warsaw Pact ended its existence with the dissolution of its political remnants at its last meeting in Prague. Among the delegates present on the occasion, Soviet vice president Gennadii Ianaev - by then an active participant in the conspiracy aimed at toppling Gorbachev - was the only one who bemoaned the passing of the alliance while questioning NATO's suitability to meet Europe's security needs.⁹² As far as Gorbachev was concerned, he wisely acquiesced in the inevitable, while welcoming as "very important" the statement by the London NATO conference which described the former enemies as security partners.

Regarding the phantom NATO threat, the Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennadii Gerasimov sounded relieved that "now we can tell those grumbling generals that they are wrong."⁹³

From the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 until the Moscow coup attempt of August 1991, the Soviet Union had been retreating from Europe but otherwise retaining a formidable military capability while its political direction remained uncertain. Under these trying circumstances, the East Europeans and their Western well-wishers proved capable of managing the resulting security challenges with considerable success. They did so by using their available resources without regarding it necessary to expand NATO to the east, while also resisting the idea that the alliance should be disbanded. Ironically, this sensible frame of mind began to change soon after the failure of the anti-Gorbachev conspiracy precipitated the breakup of the Soviet state and with it the disappearance of the Soviet threat.

From the Demise of the Warsaw Pact to the Enlargement of Nato

The Mythical Security Vacuum

The Moscow coup attempt of August 1991 sent shivers down the East Europeans' spines. Attesting to their new spirit of cooperation, senior officials of the three Visegrád countries met for emergency talks in Warsaw, while their governments kept in close contact by telephone and the Polish army was ready to mobilize.⁹⁴ Although the quick collapse of the amateurish conspiracy soon proved their fears unfounded, its very occurrence underscored, as Jeszenszky told the North Atlantic Assembly, the need for their countries' "institutionalized and formalized political relationship with NATO."⁹⁵ In a joint declaration issued in Cracow, Antáll, Havel, and Polish president Lech Wałęsa vowed their countries' intention to form such a relationship. They were ready, Skubiszewski added, for any kind of association, including membership in the alliance. Yet for the time being their practical goal was, according to Jeszenszky, a "framework for regular consultations on security issues."⁹⁶

The alliance responded promptly and effectively by creating the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as a consultative forum that would bring together for annual meetings the foreign ministers of NATO, of the six former Warsaw Pact states, and of the three by now independent Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. First proposed by Secretary of State James Baker and German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher at the beginning of October, the Council was inaugurated on December 20, 1991. At a time when the Soviet Union was breaking up and an array of independent states, including a new Russia, was emerging from the debris, the NATO initiative generally received a good reception. Russian president Boris Yeltsin, riding the crest of his popularity as a hero of the resistance

against the reactionary coup, declared enthusiastically that although "today we are not posing the question of Russia's entry into NATO [...] we are ready to consider it as a long-term political goal."⁹⁷

Yeltsin's statement elicited Skubiszewski's reminder that for the moment the admission of new members was not topical but, should it become so, Poland considered itself a candidate.⁹⁸ The East Europeans welcomed the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as the beginning rather than the end of a process they were trying to accelerate in order to bring themselves closer to the Western alliance. Havel during his visit to its Brussels headquarters spoke eloquently about his country's need for reassurance, so that in the event of a threat it would not "feel alone and forgotten by the democratic community." He depicted the region as "sliding into a [...] security vacuum."⁹⁹

The much overused term was indicative of the prevailing loose thinking about security. Even experts were prepared to argue that despite the absence of serious external threats there was a "real and worrisome" vacuum in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁰ If employed as an analytical tool rather than a rhetorical flourish, the concept conveys the proposition, central to the realist theory of international relations, that a deficit of power anywhere inevitably attracts power from somewhere else, breeding conflict among states competing to fill the void.

Yet the peaceful ending of the Cold War after the Soviet Union abstained from using its ample power to defend its supposedly vital interests exposed the inadequacy of such a mechanistic model for explaining the behavior of governments. Nor did the notable reluctance of European states to be drawn into the ostensible vacuum created by the subsequent collapse of Yugoslavia make the old notions of power politics any more applicable to the new Europe. Indeed, the main reason why the Yugoslav crisis festered for so long was precisely the outsiders' unwillingness to get involved in an area which, rightly or wrongly, they did not consider to be in their vital interest. The fuzzy imagery of a security vacuum nevertheless continued to exercise its superficial attraction.

With the Yugoslav tragedy before their eyes, Eastern European leaders

sought to engage NATO in the region on the grounds, later proven to be false, that the Balkan instability was contagious; in reality, the self-destructive atrocities visited by the Yugoslav belligerents upon one another had the salutary effect of discouraging rather than encouraging potential imitators. Understandably, the first formal request for admission into NATO came in December 1992 from the neighboring Albania, but was not seriously considered.¹⁰¹ More difficult to ignore were the pleas by the Hungarian government which, following the attack on a Hungarian village by a Yugoslav warplane, began to urge NATO to not only act in its own defense but also protect European countries outside of its treaty area.¹⁰²

The Budapest government was initially reluctant to allow NATO air operations over its territory, lest they provoke Serb retaliation against the Hungarian ethnic minority left in rump-Yugoslavia. But by the end of 1992, having received an up-to-date anti-aircraft defense system from the United States, Hungary was providing its airspace to help NATO monitor the UN ban on flights over Bosnia and drop humanitarian supplies there. At the same time, it took the lead in diplomatic activities aimed at spinning a web of diverse military ties with not only its former Warsaw Pact allies but also nearly all the member states of NATO.¹⁰³ Still, as late as 1994 no more than a third of Hungarians wanted their country to become a member of NATO.¹⁰⁴

Invoking the danger of "Yugoslavization," Wałęsa in April 1992 proposed the so-called "NATO II" - a quasi-alliance of Eastern European countries, including the former Soviet republics but not Russia, which would help defuse regional conflicts, if necessary by jointly using force, until NATO would prove up to the task.¹⁰⁵ A clumsy attempt to elicit in advance the assurance of their admission into NATO, the proposal made no headway. Yet this did not prevent Poland from proceeding to systematically prepare itself for NATO membership with a single-mindedness unparalleled in the region.

As early as March 1992, Polish minister of defense Jan Parys announced that his nation's armed forces would be restructured so that they could use NATO weapons and offered its territory to the alliance for

training purposes.¹⁰⁶ His successor Janusz Onyszkiewicz hailed the conclusion in January 1993 of the agreement on military cooperation with Germany as a milestone on his country's road to NATO. With an eye on the French-German example, Warsaw was particularly keen on bringing German soldiers to Polish soil for joint exercises to show how well the reconciliation between the two peoples was progressing. Polish delegations became frequent guests to NATO's military installations while large numbers of Polish officers enrolled in its military schools.¹⁰⁷

The draft of Poland's new military doctrine, prepared in July 1992 to replace the obsolete communist product, was the most advanced such document in Eastern Europe. Its enumeration of the threats the country faced showed how profoundly the reality and perception of security had changed. Rather than in any military danger, the document saw potential security threats in such contingencies as the possible spillover of political and social disorder from the east, Poland's own internal instability, or "other countries' failure to meet their contractual obligations" - a euphemism for economic blackmail by Russia. It set as the nation's goal its admission into NATO, besides separate military arrangements with individual members of the Western alliance and cooperative links within the Visegrád "triangle."¹⁰⁸

Venturing the prediction that Poland would be NATO's first new member, possibly still during Secretary General Manfred Wörner's tenure, Onyszkiewicz promised to make the Polish military politically neutral to improve the country's eligibility for membership.¹⁰⁹ He was addressing a troubling legacy of a nation whose generals had often been contemptuous of politicians, and had acted accordingly. Nor were the politicians above the temptation to manipulate the military to serve their own ambitions, as President Wałęsa had been trying by stretching his authority as commander-in-chief under Poland's patchwork provisional constitution. Defying the principle of civilian control of the military, he obstructed the subordination of his favorite chief of staff to the ministry of defense controlled by his political opponents.¹¹⁰ Yet even while this convoluted conflict remained unresolved, Poland continued to build up its credibility as a NATO candidate.

Czechoslovakia, beset by an internal crisis that in 1993 led to its splitting into two states, did not cultivate that credibility as assiduously as Poland. Whatever the elite's preferences, "many people brought up in almost pathological mistrust of the West's military institutions" dreamt about neutrality.¹¹¹ The Czech army, still ridden with communist-era officers, was described as having "lost breath" or only recently awakening from a "deep sleep."¹¹² It was not clear what, if any, role the Czechs would want to play in NATO. Even after signing a cooperation agreement with it, Prime Minister Václav Klaus showed little enthusiasm.¹¹³ In a conversation with NATO's supreme commander Gen. John Shalikashvili, he mused that his country's membership in the alliance depended, first of all, on whether it would continue to exist, besides internal Czech politics and the situation in the former Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

In Slovakia, neither the elite nor the public seemed to take a serious interest in security. The country was the only one in Central Europe where as late as 1993 most people still believed that NATO, as a product of the Cold War, should follow the example of the Warsaw Pact and dissolve itself.¹¹⁵ In an interview shortly before the proclamation of independent Slovakia, its leading foreign affairs specialists were unwilling or unable to articulate any coherent opinion on its future relations with NATO.¹¹⁶ Later on Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar's ambivalence contrasted with a more positive attitude of the foreign ministry.¹¹⁷ After his first visit to the NATO headquarters, the Prime Minister commented whimsically that the Slovaks should not seek membership in order to spare the alliance trouble. "They would have to refuse us," he predicted correctly.¹¹⁸

Russia's response to the evolving rapprochement between its former allies and former enemies was not unequivocally hostile as long as Moscow could itself hope to benefit from a rapprochement with NATO, particularly by obtaining its recognition of equal legitimacy in peacekeeping matters. Yeltsin's suggestion that NATO send a peacekeeping force to Nagorno-Karabakh, the hotbed of Azeri-Armenian conflict in the Caucasus, could be seen as an invitation to reciprocity.¹¹⁹ Yet since Russia's claiming the role of the force of order on the Soviet Union's whole former territory, with the

possible exception of the Baltic states, was widely, if not quite fairly, seen as imperialism in disguise, Moscow did not get the recognition it wanted.¹²⁰ And it was less likely to succeed after provoking indignation by its disastrous pacification of Chechnia - technically its own home territory.

Nor was the Russian policy of protecting the Serbs in Bosnia from NATO intervention, which alone was apt to bring the hostilities there to an end, conducive to smooth cooperation between Moscow and the alliance. The areas where Western cooperation with the Russian military was making progress and bringing results - particularly the dismantling of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal and measures to prevent the proliferation of its remnants - were areas where the Western partner was the United States rather than NATO. When NATO officers visited Russia to discuss partnership and collaboration, they often encountered among their counterparts the same mistrust and suspicion that used to be typical of the Soviet times, now supplemented by a sense of inferiority resulting from the country's humiliating military decline.

The draft of Russia's new defense doctrine, prepared by its general staff rather than its parliament and made public in May 1992, was a distressingly old-fashioned document.¹²¹ Echoing Soviet worst-case scenarios, it mandated preparation for a large-scale war against the implied NATO enemy by maintaining large counteroffensive capability - however illusory this was given the country's parlous financial condition. Warning the West against taking advantage of Russia's current weakness, the document envisaged making the loose Commonwealth of Independent States into a tight alliance along the lines of the Warsaw Pact.¹²² By contrast, it recommended that NATO be superseded by an all-European collective security structure. The draft still seemed too pro-Western to the conservative generals, including Yeltsin's future appointee as defense minister Igor Rodionov.

Alluding to the resentments of the Russian military and the nationalist agitation against the Yeltsin government, foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev tried to dissuade NATO from expanding eastward lest water be brought onto the mill of Russia's hardliners. Yet it was in accordance with the

preferences of those hardliners that he campaigned to convince the Western alliance either to dissolve itself or become a subsidiary of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This ineffectual grouping of all the countries of the Continent operating on the principle of consensus was promoted by Moscow as the pillar of Europe's vaunted "security architecture."¹²³ In Kozyrev's hardball imagery, it was "not a matter of increasing the number of NATO team players playing on the European field but of reconstructing the field itself and adjusting the rules of the game to apply to the new conditions."¹²⁴

Yet despite the lack of the new architecture, Europe was enjoying an unprecedented measure of security.¹²⁵ Following the withdrawal of the last ex-Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, the region was now more secure from outside threats than it had ever been in history. Poland, no longer sharing a common border with Russia except for the Kaliningrad enclave, found itself surrounded by seven new states, all of them preoccupied with domestic consolidation. Nor did Hungary find it easy to sustain its traditional view of itself as an island buffeted by hostile seas; unable to identify credible military threats, it singled out as the objectives of its security policy membership in the major European international organizations and better relations with neighbors.¹²⁶ And the peaceful breakup of Czechoslovakia was a vivid demonstration that the region's proverbial ethnic frictions need not lead to violence.

There was, to be sure, the nasty war in former Yugoslavia. Yet despite the European powers' embarrassing failure to stop it, the war notably failed to spread, thus defying the historical stereotype of the Balkan "powder keg." Nor did the predicted masses of refugees fleeing the political and social turmoil in Russia ever materialize. And the extent of disintegration of its armed forces deprived its image as a dangerous international aggressor of any plausibility in the foreseeable future.

This unfamiliar situation generated uncertainty about NATO's mission and its very *raison d'être*. In trying to respond to the East Europeans' pressure for additional security that they did not need and to the Russians' concern about NATO's expansion that they could not stop, the West's will

was being sapped by its self-imposed restraint in Yugoslavia. The longer Europe's sole remaining military alliance was proving impotent in the one part of Eastern Europe where a war was raging, the greater was the urge to do at least something in the part of the region where no danger loomed yet whose governments still yearned for reassurance. This was the awkward background of NATO's decision to enlarge.

The Origins of Enlargement

On his return from the United States in June 1993, the Polish minister of defense Onyszkiewicz could report with satisfaction that the possibility of bringing the four Visegrád countries into NATO was beginning to be discussed within the Clinton administration.¹²⁷ Mid-level officials in the State Department and the White House have since been identified as having generated pressure for an early decision. But Secretary of State Warren Christopher, his deputy Strobe Talbott, and much of the top U.S. military harbored misgivings.¹²⁸ Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Stephen Oxman cogently summarized the problems as concerning the possible new members' ability to contribute adequately equipped forces, the danger of making NATO decision-making more difficult, the uncertainty about the Russian and Ukrainian responses to the enlargement of the alliance, and doubts about its current members' readiness to commit themselves unambiguously to the defense of Eastern Europe under any circumstances.¹²⁹ Although these problems were as topical then as they would be four years later, they soon became overshadowed by developments that diverted attention from matters of substance to matters of appearance.

At the end of August, Yeltsin during his visit to Warsaw created a stir by his impromptu statement suggesting that he had no objections to Polish membership in NATO. "Now the West has no argument to say no to Poland," Wałęsa's spokesman Andrzej Drzycimski rejoiced, and Polish politicians demanded their country's quick admission into the alliance.¹³⁰ As Yeltsin continued his tour of Central Europe, his remark in Prague that

Russia "has no right" to hinder the Czechs joining any international organization they wanted added to the impression that the Russian government would not mind an enlarged NATO.¹³¹ This, however, was not the case.

Following Kozyrev's campaign to show that Yeltsin had not really meant to say what he was saying, the president dispatched to the key NATO governments - those of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France - letters which, though not public, soon leaked out to the press.¹³² He advanced the specious argument that the 1990 agreement on German unification prohibited any expansion of NATO to the east rather than merely to East Germany. Insisting that its enlargement without the simultaneous admission of Russia was unacceptable, Yeltsin proposed that NATO and Russia should become joint guarantors of European security, thus making the enlargement of the Western alliance superfluous.¹³³ His message appeared to be indicative of the ascendancy of those Russian hardliners that his foreign minister warned against.

The October confrontation between Yeltsin and his Parliament seemed to offer a telling proof of the dangerous instability of Russian politics. But the key role of the armed forces in enabling Yeltsin to face down the parliamentary opposition conveyed the wrong impression that they were becoming the country's arbiter of power rather than its wasting asset. The struggle for power in Moscow nevertheless frightened East Europeans. It "makes us cold sweat," commented an associate of Slovak Prime Minister Jozef Moravčik, who briefly replaced Mečiar as the head of government.¹³⁴

Perceived as a potential threat to European security rather than an event of local significance, the showdown in Moscow prompted further Eastern European demands for Western reassurance, although opinions about what was best to be done varied. Poland, firmly opposed to any Russian security guarantees, was alone in adamantly demanding NATO membership. On a visit to Washington, Czech foreign minister Josef Zieleniec stated that this was also his country's long-term objective, but in Prague Prime Minister Klaus described NATO as an organization which, having "originated in a

bipolar world, has somewhat outlived itself." "It is necessary to watch carefully both the possibilities and the aims of other security initiatives," he added.¹³⁵

The Moravčik government in Bratislava viewed a rapprochement with NATO as more important for its country than its membership in the European Union, but considered political rather than military rapprochement sufficient to prevent Slovak cold sweating.¹³⁶ For Hungary, Jeszenszky spoke approvingly about NATO's "continuous and gradual" eastward expansion along the French model, by which he meant excluding integration of possible new members in the military command structure of the alliance. Yet outside the government, foreign affairs commentator Gusztáv Molnár recommended to "somehow provoke NATO into accepting us."¹³⁷

Among the Western allies, the French were still quite unwilling to get so provoked, whereas the Germans no longer needed a provocation. Paris rightly opposed too quick an admission of new members but for dubious reasons, while Bonn wrongly pressed for an early enlargement for much better reasons. Opposing the enlargement as likely to complicate French efforts to break the American domination of the alliance, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur advanced his alternative plan for making the European Union rather than NATO the centerpiece of the Continent's new security structure, but found little interest.¹³⁸

Germany more admirably promoted the enlargement as a way of reassuring East Europeans about its intentions. Anxious to dispel their concern about looming German hegemony in their region, Bonn dwelt on its willingness to share with them the responsibility for maintaining common security. Like the French, the Germans were trying to shift the focus from defense to preventive diplomacy, but saw an altered NATO rather than the European Union as the best vehicle.¹³⁹ According to German minister of defense Volker Rühle, since the East Europeans' entry into the EU had to be delayed for economic reasons they ought to be admitted to

the military alliance first.¹⁴⁰ Since his visit to Prague in October, Růžek most actively promoted their cause while trying to reassure the Russians as well.¹⁴¹

In an effort to influence the December meeting of the North Atlantic Council, which was expected to make a basic decision on enlargement, Havel restated forcefully the principal, if debatable, reasons for the Czechs' yearning for reassurance. He recalled that in the past no major European conflict had bypassed their homeland - as if geographical location were an immutable determinant of security. He proclaimed that his country shared and wanted to shape the same values that NATO existed to defend - as if the alliance were the same exclusive vehicle for their defense as it used to be in the dark days of the Cold War. And he invoked his people's painful memory of Munich as a justification for a collective security system based on NATO - as if the extraordinary experience of the nineteen-thirties could provide reliable guidance in the very different post-Cold War Europe. The president summed up that "these countries simply strive to be where they fundamentally belong."¹⁴²

The Partnership for Peace project, which emerged from the debates in Washington decisively influenced by Gen. Shalikashvili, responded perfectly to the East Europeans' diffuse yet fervent strivings for reassurance.¹⁴³ It offered not only to them but also to Russia, as well as to any other country in Europe and even former Soviet parts of Asia that might care to join, a framework for cooperation short of membership as extensive or as limited as they themselves would wish and prove capable of making. Taking into account both East European and Russian needs, the PFP was well suited to channel the pressure for enlargement, with its vague expectations and unpredictable consequences, into the more productive practical cooperation conducive to reassurance regardless of formal membership. It opened up the promising prospect of different countries using NATO's procedures and experiences to gradually acquire the habit of settling their conflicting interests and aspirations in a consensual rather than confrontational way. Here was what the then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright aptly described as the "squaring of the

circle" by responding all at once to the alliance's need for a new mission, Russia's concern about its intentions, and the East Europeans' demand for more security.¹⁴⁴

The reasons why the PFP's potential was not exhausted while the drive toward enlargement gained speed are to be sought in the lack of clarity about what exactly was to be accomplished rather than in any deliberate shift of priorities. The management of the partnership began inauspiciously with the almost off-handed manner in which word about it was first made public by U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin at the October meeting of NATO defense ministers in Travemünde.¹⁴⁵ The absence of a clear explanation of whether the PFP was intended to facilitate or sidetrack admission caused uneasiness in the Visegrád countries. Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski of Poland wondered aloud whether this was "just a second Yalta or closes [the] door to NATO membership," leaving Poland and its neighbors in a "no man's land," with catastrophic consequences for the whole of Europe.¹⁴⁶ Wörner's explanation, that NATO did not intend to pose the question of the admission of Eastern European countries in the near future but did not exclude it either, reflected accurately the uncertainty of the PFP's American architects about the direction the project should take.¹⁴⁷

The East Europeans' concern that the PFP might not be enough to reassure them increased after a report by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, published at the end of November, stated bluntly that any enlargement of NATO was inimical to Russia's interests and might compel it to radically revise its defense posture.¹⁴⁸ In another few weeks the implied threat seemed to assume dramatic proportions following the landslide victory of the ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskii in the December elections to the Russian Duma. Since it was difficult to estimate whether or not he was actually on his way to power, his victory gave the impression that Russia was becoming a greater threat to others rather than merely to itself.

As a result, when President Bill Clinton set out for Europe at the beginning of 1995 to clarify the Partnership for Peace offer to its

prospective recipients, their need for reassurance was acute. Yet since the concept had not been sufficiently clarified even in its authors' minds, he sounded evasive rather than reassuring: "There's no consensus to expand NATO at this time, and we don't want to give the impression that we're creating another dividing line in Europe [...]. What we want is a secure Europe and a stable Europe. And I think that the proposal that I put forward would permit the expansion of NATO, and I fully expect it will."¹⁴⁹

Wałęsa minced no words by calling the PFP a "loose and one-sided concept," "blackmail" rather than partnership, "necktie for a coffin," while a Romanian daily described it as a "tiny bone thrown to the hungry of Central and Eastern Europe."¹⁵⁰ When Albright and Shalikashvili came to Warsaw to explain that the PFP should not necessarily be regarded as a step toward membership, they met with a predictably lukewarm reception. On their next stop, in Budapest, Jęszczyk tried to impress upon them that there were "no valid historical, political, or strategic reasons that would keep Hungary out of NATO." Indeed, the absence of compelling reasons *against* the enlargement was getting to be more important for the administration than the presence of compelling reasons *for* it.¹⁵¹

Initial Russian applause for the PFP was enough to convince many East Europeans that there must be something wrong with the project. Sergei Karaganov, deputy director of the Russian Academy's Institute of Europe and member of Russia's Presidential Council, noted with satisfaction that "we have won the first round."¹⁵² Soviet ambassador to Slovakia Sergei Iastrzhembskii hailed the PFP for having dispelled Russian fears about a new division of Europe.¹⁵³ Kozyrev claimed that the PFP was "a step in the right direction," for it "is essentially based on our proposals," and Yeltsin endorsed it despite the prevailing Russian skepticism about it.¹⁵⁴

Whatever the East Europeans' grumblings about the inadequacy of the project, they soon began to compete with each other in trying to take advantage of the opportunities it offered. Romania was the first to formally join, barely two weeks after the PFP was launched, and others, including former successor states of the Soviet Union and Western European neutrals, followed. The Czechs, self-confident in their economic accomplishments,

felt encouraged to abandon the Visegrád framework to better position themselves for a short route into NATO. At the May 1994 meeting of defense ministers in Brussels, Poland's Adm. Piotr Kołodziejczyk was alone in criticizing the PFP for its failure to clarify the modalities of transition from partnership to membership.¹⁵⁵ Yet his country vigorously made use of the new possibilities for collaboration. In July the Poles became the first to finalize their Individual Partnership Program, going so far as to appoint a German general as their adviser.¹⁵⁶ By then it already became abundantly clear that the PFP was an unqualified success.

What had not been such a success was the Clinton administration's foreign policy in various trouble spots around the world - from Somalia to Bosnia - where it had been criticized for either too much or too little activism. With the elections approaching, the president was under growing pressure to prove his mastery of foreign affairs, particularly by showing a long-term sense of purpose - not an easy matter given his overwhelming concern with domestic politics and his propensity for a short-term calculation of costs and benefits. In such a situation, the success of the Partnership for Peace was well-suited to tempt the president to reach for more than it had originally been intended to accomplish. The enlargement of NATO promised an aura of statesmanship with seemingly little effort.

Washington's embrace of the enlargement idea after a period of hesitation has been explained in very different ways. The President's supporters have seen a continuity of his commitment from that rainy day on April 22, 1993, when Clinton was described as "deeply impressed" by pleas for NATO expansion by Eastern European leaders gathered in Washington for the inauguration of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.¹⁵⁷ Unconvinced, some of the administration's critics have been prepared to see nothing but a "cynical effort to attract votes from Polish, Czech and Hungarian Americans" - an unsubstantiated speculation which exaggerates both the size of the ethnic vote and the importance of NATO in determining the voters' preferences.¹⁵⁸ It was more pertinent that the president, having previously made ambiguous statements that could be interpreted as implying his commitment to enlargement, had reasons to be worried about

his credibility. Even so, the casual manner of the administration's public responses to the East Europeans' pressure for clarification showed a commitment growing almost as a second thought rather than a result of a policy review leading to a firm decision.

The decision was made, according to *The New York Times* columnist R. W. Apple, Jr., "in characteristic Clinton Administration style, without a structured evaluation of competing viewpoints, without political debate, and over the initial objections of senior military officers."¹⁵⁹ Having previously referred to a lack of consensus about the enlargement of the alliance, in mid-January 1994 in Prague the president emphasized that he himself favored it. In April the previously skeptical Talbott, speaking in Warsaw, was already depicting the PFP as the "path leading to NATO" and insisting that its enlargement was no longer in doubt.¹⁶⁰ And in July Clinton waxed enthusiastic about the prospect during his own visit to the Polish capital, describing the remaining question as no longer whether but only when. He still disappointed his hosts by not mentioning a timetable.¹⁶¹

When the following month the activist Richard Holbrooke succeeded the more skeptical Oxman as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, he set out to forge within the administration the missing consensus for a policy that had already been decided in principle. Only at this late stage did extensive consultations take place between him, Talbott, and the Pentagon, which surprisingly abandoned its previous objections. By the fall of 1994, Washington was ready to take the lead in pressing the NATO allies to rally behind it in support of the enlargement.¹⁶²

Among America's three key European allies, the French and the British harbored misgivings. French President François Mitterrand warned against a hasty admission of new members from Eastern Europe, which the British feared might create new divisions on the Continent rather than enhancing its security.¹⁶³ But much though the allies may have fretted about Washington's "steamroller policy-making that leaves basic questions unanswered", they failed conspicuously to do anything about it.¹⁶⁴ Since in the past they had often proved quite adept at contesting U.S. positions on

much less important matters, it is difficult to avoid the impression that they no longer sufficiently cared about the direction in which the alliance was moving.

Embarrassed by their own impotence in dealing with the Yugoslav war in their own backyard, West Europeans came to regard NATO intervention under American leadership as their last hope there. Relying on that leadership, they were poorly equipped to question Washington's wisdom about the future of the alliance. When its possible enlargement was considered at the December 1994 meeting of its foreign ministers, German representative Hermann von Rihthofen is reported to have criticized the Americans for pushing too hard - but only in a confidential dispatch to his government.¹⁶⁵ An agreement on enlargement in principle was quickly reached without even much of a discussion. With the question of whether to enlarge thus answered in the affirmative, the conference took up the question of when by setting a nine-month timetable for the preparation of a study that would specify the criteria and map out the procedure for admitting new members as expeditiously as possible.

In embarking on the course of enlargement, the alliance did not consider the more urgent needs of Eastern Europe, whose security was not being seriously threatened, nor did it give sufficient attention to the possible effects of the process on its own cohesion which, in contrast, was being threatened by uncertainty about NATO's mission.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the desirability of admitting the formerly communist countries was justified by the alleged need to ensure their democratization and stability - as if precisely the leading candidates had not already demonstrated a firm enough commitment to these virtues for their own internal reasons. Moreover, the prospect of a very different alliance, concerned with preventive diplomacy rather than military effectiveness, was raised without addressing its feasibility or necessity in a Europe that had no shortage of international organizations designed to keep peace short of the use of force. What NATO did address as a matter of high priority after its December meeting was the perceived urgency of reconciling Russia to the enlargement, thus creating a problem where none had before existed.

"No Friend of Russia"

Once the December decision had so unexpectedly moved the enlargement issue from the realm of noncommittal discussion to that of practical politics, the Russian reaction was little short of panic. It was shown in a range of desperate suggestions about how the country should respond to the suddenly looming prospect of what Russians invariably referred to as "expansion" of the Western alliance. Raising the specter of a "cold peace," Yeltsin proposed to counter it by Russia's following the French example by joining the political, though not the military, structures of NATO.¹⁶⁷ Not quite accurately, Kozyrev observed that neither Moscow nor Washington excluded Russian membership, to which Vladimir Kozin, writing in the journal *Segodnia*, saw no alternative.¹⁶⁸ Karaganov did see alternatives, though none satisfactory. In the case of enlargement, Russia's foremost security expert equivocated, Moscow should abandon cooperation with NATO or else seek admission, although the alliance was not really needed in the first place, for it was bound to be anti-Russian in any variation.¹⁶⁹

Ever since the enlargement question had first been raised, the conviction that NATO was "no friend of Russia" united politically articulate Russians regardless of their different opinions about other matters.¹⁷⁰ But originally few besides diehard generals and ultranationalists like Zhirinovskii professed to believe that NATO was a military threat. While the condition of the Russian armed forces was going from bad to worse but the illusion of their might still held sway, such people publicized extravagant proposals for smiting the enemy - from creating a replica of the Warsaw Pact and installing nuclear missiles along Russia's periphery to striking NATO bases in Western Europe with those missiles and marching troops into the Baltic states and beyond.¹⁷¹

Mainstream members of Russia's political class did not pretend to believe that NATO was a military threat. Though unequivocally opposed to its enlargement as creating political and psychological problems for the Russian people, if not for more substantive reasons, they were not

excessively worried as long as the alliance seemed to be resisting the East Europeans' pressure for admission. Moscow had been reassured by the Partnership for Peace, perceiving it as a clever scheme to deflect and eventually neutralize that pressure. Yet, acutely aware of Russia's limited ability to influence Eastern Europe's growing rapprochement with NATO, the Yeltsin government all the more emphasized its preference for Kozyrev's idea of replacing NATO by an all-European system based on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In view of the condition of Russia's armed forces, its officials remained particularly uncertain about whether joining the PFP on Western terms would signal the country's supposed strength or its real weakness.

For former ambassador to Washington Vladimir Lukin, joining the program was tantamount to a "rape" of Russia. The military remained deeply suspicious: retired Gen. Viktor Chudov suspected a nefarious American plan for world domination to be lurking behind the idea of joint exercises with NATO.¹⁷² The Yeltsin government, incensed by NATO's April 1994 bombing of the Bosnian Serb positions at Goražde without prior consultation with Moscow, dragged its feet. It tried to hold its adherence to the PFP hostage to the Western acceptance of Russia's role in mediating the Yugoslav war. According to Kozyrev, his country was ready for cooperation with NATO but only as an equal, for it was not a weak country and had no inferiority complexes.¹⁷³

Among indications to the contrary, the Russian delegation at the June meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in Istanbul put up what struck one of the Western participants as "an absolutely Soviet exercise" in obstruction, "a pretty bloody affair [and] [...] a disastrous performance for the Russians."¹⁷⁴ The delegation blocked the adoption of a final communiqué that referred to the PFP as the possible conduit toward full NATO membership. A few weeks later Moscow finally signed up for the partnership, but failed to achieve the kind of recognition of Russia's special status that it desired. Merely acknowledging the country's existence as a "major European, international, and nuclear power," NATO particularly resisted the demands by the Yeltsin government for the creation of a

mechanism for automatic consultation on security matters and the adoption of a blueprint leading toward the transformation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe into the main pillar of the Continent's security architecture.

At the OSCE's September meeting, Russia pushed for the metamorphosis of that hapless body into a giant capable of supervising NATO, the Western European Union, and the Commonwealth of Independent States as well. It submitted a proposal for the establishment of an executive council of ten members, among whom Moscow would have one of the five permanent seats, but made no headway.¹⁷⁵ In anticipation of this outcome, Kozyrev had already been preparing, much against the opposition of the communist majority in the Duma, a plan for his country's cooperation with NATO through the PFP. It was this plan, nearly ready to be signed, that became the casualty of the alliance's December 1994 meeting, where the foreign minister angrily scuttled it in protest against NATO's proposed enlargement.

In trying to explain what happened, director of the Moscow Institute on Europe Vasilii Zhurkin blamed the "psychological and political shock" the West had administered to his people for engendering among them a "feeling that Russia was being betrayed by the same leaders and nations that it was just about to join."¹⁷⁶ But there was a minority opinion that rather blamed its own government for the outcome. Wondering why the West, in less than a year, adopted a course toward NATO's enlargement without exhausting the possibilities of the Partnership for Peace, Sergei Osnobishchev faulted Moscow's courtship of the Bosnian Serbs, its search for partners among disreputable ex-Soviet clients such as Iraq, its procrastination about joining the PFP, its predilection for differing with the West on international issues for no good reasons and, not the least, its genocidal war in Chechnia.¹⁷⁷

Yet the truth was that Russia had not figured as the main factor in NATO's decision to enlarge - a telling commentary on the former superpower's slide to irrelevance. Having revealed the true dimensions of its military collapse, the disastrous war in Chechnia not only exposed the

fallacy of the Russian imperial threat as a rationale for NATO's enlargement, but also highlighted Moscow's impotence in trying to persuade the alliance to change its course once the goal had been set for other reasons.

In June 1995, a thoughtful article by junior diplomat Vladimir Frolov observed that the country had reached a dead-end. He noted that retaliatory measures of military nature against NATO, such as the repudiation of the conventional or nuclear arms limitation agreements advocated by some Russian generals, were not in Russia's interest any more than the attainment of an equal partnership with NATO was within its power. Frolov saw the way out in the formulation of clear strategic goals and the conclusion of a special treaty with NATO which would include non-aggression pledges reinforced by arms limitation agreements and confidence-building measures.¹⁷⁸

Meanwhile the accelerated drive for enlargement following the publication in September 1995 of the NATO study spelling out the conditions for the admission of new members merely elicited increasingly angry, but ineffectual, Russian protests. In the campaign leading to the Russian presidential elections, Yeltsin dissociated himself from the vociferous opponents of NATO. His most important rival, Gen. Aleksandr Lebed, took the sensible view that, however distasteful NATO's advance might be to the Russians, the best way to minimize its effects was not to worry about it too much. On his visit to Brussels, the outspoken general told his NATO hosts that "whatever NATO decides, Russia is not going to go into hysterics. [...] The main thing is not to hurry, or you may trip up."¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere he commented that if the NATO states wanted to be so foolish as to spend billions of dollars to enlarge so they could better face the nonexistent Russian threat, that was their business.

After his re-election, Yeltsin took a more active stand against NATO's plans. Taking the December 1996 decision by the North Atlantic Council to postpone the invitation of new members without setting a firm date as evidence of the alliance's sensitivity to Russian objections, Moscow stepped up its anti-enlargement campaign. It impressed the outside world

by creating the appearance of an all but unanimous Russian opposition against the project. Yet the reality was that in Russia, much like in the West, the issue stirred the elites while most other people did not care.

In early 1996, polls found 30 per cent Russians to believe that NATO's expansion hurt their national interests while only 10 per cent saw no harm; by far the largest proportion of the population voiced no opinion. When asked about what ought to be done about NATO's plans, 35 per cent of respondents did not know, 31 favored obstructing them, and no fewer than 22 per cent thought that Russia should itself join the alliance.¹⁸⁰ The true picture was that of confusion rather than of consensus.

A defining feature of Europe's new security environment, Russia's decline as a great power was not within NATO's capacity to reverse. Much as in Soviet times, the root causes of Russian insecurity were internal, and could therefore not be allayed by any amount of assurances about the alliance's peaceful intentions. Yet, as the decision to invite new members approached, the unattainable task of reassuring Russia became NATO's foremost priority. Its pursuit opened up for Moscow an opportunity to make strength out of its weakness by extracting from the alliance concessions that otherwise would have been impossible to obtain.

Self-Differentiation and Self-Selection

In determining the NATO candidates' qualifications for membership, their attitude could make a difference. The Baltic states surpassed all others in the consistency with which they regarded the Western alliance, rather than any other creation, as the only suitable safeguard of their security. Their striving to forge ever closer links with NATO, promoted by their active participation in the PFP, was encouraged by their Nordic neighbors, although initially only Denmark favored their admission as members. Other Nordic countries offered help, including assistance in building their armed forces. Sweden under Prime Minister Carl Bildt even asserted a special security interest by borrowing the Russian term to describe the Baltic states

as its own "near abroad." Summing up their case, Latvian president Guntis Ulmanis referred to NATO's presence in the area as "a historical necessity and a geopolitical imperative."¹⁸¹

In contrast to the Baltic countries, none of the Soviet Union's other successor states had before 1997 indicated an intention join NATO. Ukraine viewed its possible extension with trepidation, fearing that its eastward advance could prompt Moscow to apply pressure on Kiev to look to Russia for protection, thus diminishing Ukraine's newly won independence.¹⁸² Moldova, likewise mindful of its vulnerable geographical location, dramatized by the presence of Russian troops in its breakaway Transdnistria district, enshrined its preference for neutrality in its constitution.¹⁸³ Belarus - or, more precisely, its eccentric president Alyeksandr Lukashenka - sought to "out-Russian" the Russians by not only advocating the formation of a military alliance under their leadership but also offering his country's territory for the possible deployment of their nuclear missiles, to be targeted on NATO's prospective Eastern European members. In a calmer mood, he resuscitated the former Soviet proposal for a nuclear-free zone in the region as an alternative to the extension of the Western alliance. Meanwhile he wanted to keep the Russian SS-25 missiles as a hedge, but was undercut in November by Moscow's compliance with its commitment to withdraw them.¹⁸⁴

Although nearly all of the Soviet successor states joined the Partnership for Peace, with the exception of the Baltic states they tended to regard it as the limit of their collaboration with NATO, while the East Europeans saw it as a barely adequate beginning. Disparaging the PFP as an exercise in hypocrisy, a Romanian newspaper accused NATO of having "washed its hands like Pontius Pilate" and left the countries of the region in a limbo of "self-differentiation" and "self-selection."¹⁸⁵ This was indeed a fair description of what they were actually doing, in contrast to the many clichés about their overwhelming desire to join NATO.

In the Balkans, the Yugoslav war pitted NATO's enemies, most outstandingly the Serbs, against its real or pretended friends from among all other peoples. Rightly regarding the alliance as the only force capable of

thwarting their aggressive ambitions, Serb nationalists expressed their hatred of it in theatrical hyperbole. They referred to the international embargo of their country as the creation of a "concentration camp" guarded by NATO troops, to the United Nations as an instrument for NATO's step-by-step conquest of the world, and to the NATO bombing of Bosnia as a replication of Nazi atrocities.¹⁸⁶ Once the bombing succeeded in finally stopping the war there, the Serbian Writers' Association hoisted a black flag at its Belgrade headquarters, wailing that "the Serbs' weeping now reaches to the stars."

Not without reason, the Serbs blamed NATO for assisting the Croat conquest of Krajina in August 1995. The Croats, as well as the Bosnian Muslims, had long been trying to have the ineffective UN peacekeeping force replaced by a NATO force, and finally succeeded. As the enemy of their enemy, the alliance was their friend, although their attitude toward it was ambivalent. On the one hand, they needed it for support and protection; on the other hand, they resented its commitment to a fair peace settlement, which they sought to circumvent. Neither Croatia, with its authoritarian regime contemptuous of European human rights standards, nor Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose very viability as a state remained uncertain, were eligible candidates for NATO membership, and they did not try to pretend otherwise. Nor was Albania such a candidate although it did unsuccessfully apply for admission, besides vainly urging NATO to dispatch a peacekeeping force to protect the Albanian population in the Serbian province of Kosovo.¹⁸⁷ In May 1993 Macedonia announced that it was going to apply, but it never did.¹⁸⁸

Slovenia's desire to dissociate itself from the other heirs of the former Yugoslavia by dwelling on its Central European heritage was an important initial motive in its bid for NATO membership. Once the idea became topical in 1995, there could be no question about the support it enjoyed among a substantial majority of the population or about the capacity of the country, whose per capita domestic income exceeded that of NATO members Portugal or Greece, to sustain the costs of membership.¹⁸⁹ No could there be a doubt about the ability of the tiny Slovenian army, which

was being built from scratch to conform to NATO standards, to smoothly integrate into the alliance. The pertinent questions rather were whether Slovenia, facing no security threats despite its proximity to the Balkan killing fields, really needed the membership or whether, considering the small size of its territory and population, the alliance needed a member whose only substantive contribution could arguably be providing an overland connection between Italy and NATO's other possible member, Hungary. This geographical asset, however, was more valuable in theory than in any easily imaginable strategic scenario.

Relative strategic insignificance also detracted from the much less convincing bid for membership by Romania, pursued by the unreformed postcommunist regime of President Ion Iliescu mainly as a public relations enterprise. With an uneasy eye on neighboring Hungary's thriving rapprochement with the alliance, the Romanian leader insisted that no country should be given preferential treatment for admission, while at the same time trying to ensure that Romania would not be left behind. Not only was Romania the first to join the Partnership for Peace, describing itself as getting "from the bottom of the queue to the steering wheel,"¹⁹⁰ but it also managed to impress visiting NATO officers with the professional competence of its armed forces - no small accomplishment for an army that had only recently been reputed as the worst in the Warsaw Pact.¹⁹¹

Nor were the Romanian public opinion polls, which scored as much as 95 per cent support for NATO membership, necessarily reliable in a country long notorious for the skill of its ruling cliques in manipulating a politically inexperienced citizenry. According to the opposition newspaper *Tineretul liber*, the PFP fitted "the interest of the current political establishment in Bucharest like a perfect glove"; just as NATO did not intend to spread its security umbrella over Romania, its regime did not seriously want to join the alliance, only to drum up "solidarity around a general and harmless idea."¹⁹² In trying to break its international isolation while deflecting outside scrutiny of its domestic practices, the regime advertised the adaptation of its armed forces to NATO standards and their

participation in peacekeeping operations from Bosnia to Albania. "We are going up like a rocket," Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu boasted in October 1996.¹⁹³

Trying to steal a cause from the democratic opposition, which alone favored NATO membership in good faith, Ilescu posed as a champion of Romania's national interests in seeking its integration into Europe, while preparing to benefit from the probable rejection of the country's membership application. Both the ultranationalist and the communist supporters of his government paid lip service to NATO, while resenting it, respectively, as a threat to Romania's national identity and an obstacle to its friendship with Russia. Ilescu's adviser Ion Mircea Pascu, who as secretary of state for defense policy and international relations was managing Bucharest's bid for admission into NATO, was widely regarded as a manipulator primarily concerned with shoring up the regime's eroding power base.¹⁹⁴

Similarly shady, if less skillful, maneuvering against political rivals gave the characteristically ambivalent flavor to the expressions of interest in NATO membership by the Mečiar government in Slovakia. His regime shared with its Romanian counterpart both its authoritarian proclivities and its nationalist ambitions, besides common concern about the Hungarian competition. Having enlisted the same incongruous support from right-wing nationalists and unreformed communists, Mečiar earned the distinction of being the only leader of a former Warsaw Pact country who ostentatiously sympathized with Russia's anti-enlargement campaign, for which Slovakia received Moscow's praise as well as the promise of lucrative contracts.¹⁹⁵ In trying to counter the opposition charges of gratuitously pushing the country to the east rather than the west, he professed enthusiasm for NATO membership.¹⁹⁶ He alternately suggested that the membership was all but certain and that it was not because the alliance did not really want the Slovaks.

Public opinion in Slovakia, more reliably measured than in Romania, showed by September 1996 as many as 70 percent of the people favoring membership, yet most of them did not believe that their government was

actually leading them toward that goal.¹⁹⁷ Their skepticism appeared substantiated by the Mečiar regime's response to Western criticism of its authoritarian practices. After a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry, the Prime Minister insisted that "during negotiations with representatives of foreign countries, Slovakia should not act like a student standing in front of a teacher, waiting for assessment of his behavior."¹⁹⁸ As it became increasingly obvious that the country did not meet the requirement of democratic politics set by NATO for the admission of new members, the ruling party's newspaper accused the alliance of using double standards, citing Turkish repression of the Kurds and the release by the Italian court of a Nazi war criminal as examples. With Slovakia becoming a laughing stock as a "bride whom no one wants,"¹⁹⁹ Mečiar seemed at a loss about whether it was better to try to blame his domestic enemies for blocking the door to NATO or to deprecate the membership as unimportant.

In a reversal of the Slovak situation, the Czech government had by 1996 firmly made up its mind in favor of NATO membership, but the people were not nearly as convinced about its merits as most Slovaks were. Among the prospective candidates, the Czech Republic was the only country where public opinion polls showed a declining support for joining NATO just as the issue was becoming increasingly topical. The proportion of those in favor fell from 54 per cent in March 1995 to 46 per cent a year later and, according to a different survey, to as low as 38 per cent at the time the North Atlantic Council met in December 1996 to discuss the schedule of issuing invitations.²⁰⁰ The percentage of the people willing to bear the higher cost of defense at the expense of welfare was even lower, only one in fifteen Czechs. This was the lowest figure in the region, lending support to the estimate by the director of NATO affairs in the Prague ministry of defense that the "Czechs feel secure. They are occupied by private problems and [...] are not informed about NATO."²⁰¹

While declining defense expenditures and drastic reductions of the armed forces were common to all former Warsaw Pact countries except Romania, in the Czech Republic they also reflected widespread indifference besides what Havel perceived as "the public's diminishing trust

in the army."²⁰² "People say our army never fought for our country," noted the above-quoted Czech ministry of defense official.²⁰³ Although the Czech Republic, having been the first to respond to the conditions NATO had set for the admission of new members, vowed to spend on defense no less than other states of comparable size - and proceeded spending proportionately one-third more than Poland or Hungary - the condition of its army continued to worsen.²⁰⁴ In January 1997, the nation's most respected opinion magazine commented that "only fools would seem to be interested in such an army" as an ally.²⁰⁵ The official Czech document on defense doctrine was only adopted in December 1996; vague about the threats the country might be facing, it was silent about the kind of weaponry needed to cope with them.

In July 1995, chairman of the foreign affairs committee in the Prague parliament Jiří Payne criticized his colleagues on the defense committee for their lack of interest in military affairs.²⁰⁶ A year later, Czech politicians still remained confused about the obligations attendant to NATO membership. Some of them mistook the alliance's requirement that its members permit overflights of their territory by nuclear-armed aircraft for the demand for stationing nuclear weapons on the ground. Hence also the government prepared to enact the country's non-nuclear status similar to Norway's as if this were not what NATO envisaged for Eastern Europe in the first place.²⁰⁷

Exploiting the people's persisting anti-German prejudices, left-wing critics of enlargement insinuated that it was a German scheme to sacrifice Czechs as "geopolitical victims" by building a glacis that would prevent Germany from becoming a "frontline state."²⁰⁸ Opponents of NATO membership constituted a majority within the nation's largest opposition party, the Social Democracy. The party committed itself to submitting the issue to a referendum, the likelihood of which increased after the Social Democrats' success in the July 1996 national elections.

Hungary had been more successful than the Czech Republic in promoting its eligibility as an ally despite its only marginally higher percentages of citizens unequivocally supportive of NATO membership and

their similar skepticism about the condition as well as the worth of the nation's army. At least the popular support for NATO was not declining but rising, especially once the initial resentment at the presence of its forces on Hungarian territory for deployment in former Yugoslavia gave way to their enthusiastic reception.²⁰⁹ Hungary's relations with the alliance further benefited from the replacement of its right-of-center government, whose followers' ultranationalist pronouncements had sometimes raised Western eyebrows, with a left-of-center coalition led by reformed communists. The new government proved more capable than its predecessor of settling the country's differences with its neighbors - one of the key preconditions of admission into NATO.

The origins of Hungarian-Romanian rapprochement date back to 1990, when the two governments responded to the idea of an "open skies" agreement by initiating mutual aerial surveillance leading to extensive collaboration between their militaries.²¹⁰ The desire for better relations was the result of a pragmatic conviction that they were in both nations' best interest, rather than of any opportunistic calculation to meet the criteria for NATO membership - which only became topical later. Still, the landmark treaty of September 1996, which settled the status of Romania's huge Hungarian minority, inevitably had a salutary effect on both countries' international standing. And Hungary's standing further increased when it concluded a similar treaty with Slovakia; the belated ratification of the treaty by the Slovaks and their reluctance to put its provisions into effect could properly be blamed on them. All this time, the seriousness of the Hungarian discourse about NATO membership contrasted favorably with the frivolous handling of that subject by Bratislava.

Yet Hungary never went so far as Poland in systematically preparing itself for membership in the alliance. The Poles took pains to make themselves, as the 1966 declaration by leading defense and foreign affairs officials of their different governments put it, "members even before the fact,"²¹¹ thus trying to make it all but impossible for the alliance to refuse them. This policy was pursued by all Polish governments, regardless of their political coloration, ever since Warsaw abandoned its flirtation with

neutrality in 1991. It was embraced enthusiastically by most former communists and flourished after the election of one of them, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, as president. By finally subordinating the military to civilian control, he ended the embarrassing controversy gratuitously initiated by his predecessor Wałęsa's attempt to manipulate the general staff.

In its wooing of NATO, Warsaw even expressed its readiness to allow the stationing of foreign troops and nuclear weapons on Polish territory if the alliance wanted this.²¹² Styling itself as the leader of a "club of active NATO partners," Poland set an example to others by hosting the first international maneuvers under the PFP auspices; codenamed "Cooperative Bridge '94," the maneuvers brought together troops from thirteen countries under joint U.S.-Polish command.²¹³ The Polish army cultivated its close collaboration with the German Bundeswehr, and although the full effect of the brotherhood-in-arms on the brotherhood of hearts could not be easily determined, Poland's rapport with NATO's key European member contrasted favorably with the frequently tense Czech-German relationship. Encouraged by relations with Bonn developing more satisfactorily than those with Moscow, Prime Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz expressed particular satisfaction at Germany's support for enlargement.²¹⁴

Alone among the candidates for NATO membership, Poland in February 1996 adopted a long-term plan for the adaptation of its armed forces to achieve their integration into the alliance over a period of five years, including the estimated costs. It expressed its readiness to act on NATO's defense planning questionnaires within two to three years. It prepared a 22-page discussion paper for conversations with the alliance's sixteen ambassadors, and once the talks started, Deputy Minister of Defense Andrzej Karkoszka was pleased to note that "we were the ones who 'cross-examined' the NATO representatives."²¹⁵

Despite the Poles' reputation for military prowess, their armed forces, starved for funding and burdened with obsolescent Soviet-era equipment, leave much to be desired. The reports about recruits having to practice grenade throwing with beer cans because of the shortage of the real thing may have been invented, but otherwise the condition of the Polish armed

forces is hardly better than that of the Czech or Hungarian ones.²¹⁶ Yet their deficiencies need not make much difference if Czech Prime Minister Klaus was right in his estimate that the condition of military equipment was "really secondary," since the question of joining NATO was a political one.²¹⁷ After all, the Czechs reasoned, NATO seemed mainly interested in small military units for peacekeeping operations, and in that role the Eastern European contingents serving in former Yugoslavia acquitted themselves fairly well.²¹⁸ As Secretary of Defense Perry described it - for better or for worse - "the future of NATO is being shaped in Bosnia."²¹⁹

As the enlargement decision approached, polls showed the far from overwhelming majority of 53 per cent of East Europeans wanting their countries to join NATO.²²⁰ Yet more instructive than this total were the national figures indicative of the self-differentiation and self-selection that had taken place. Only in Poland was membership in the alliance supported by a clear consensus of the elites and the people alike, thus warranting Kwaśniewski's unsuccessful attempt in the summer of 1996 to convince Clinton that his country should be admitted before others. Elsewhere the commitment to the alliance, quite apart from the qualifications for membership, was not nearly as unequivocal as in Poland. The challenge to NATO leaders was how the considerable differences among the applicants could best be reconciled with the interests of the alliance and the security of Europe as a whole.

Rush to Madrid

The slowing down of enlargement preparations as a result of the inconclusive outcome of the December 1996 session of the North Atlantic Council worried East Europeans while encouraging Russian hopes that the drive might still be reversed. Secretary of State Warren Christopher's public suggestion in September 1996, that the invitation of new members be postponed until 1997, was seen by Moscow as an early signal that its opposition to the plan would be heeded. NATO's subsequent decision to do as Christopher had suggested could then be interpreted as an attempt to

delay the enlargement, perhaps indefinitely, particularly in view of the simultaneous establishment of the Atlantic Partnership Council, suitable for promoting consultation short of membership. Judging wrongly that the wind was blowing from Brussels rather than from Washington, Yeltsin's entourage welcomed the "sensible views" that seemed to be prevailing over the "NATO bureaucracy's egoistical desire to speed up the alliance's expansion."

While united against the expansion, Russian officials and politicians were divided in their opinions about what to do about it. In trying to prevent it, some wanted to penalize the West by making its relations with Russia even more difficult. Others, resigned to the inevitability of enlargement, merely wanted to cut Russian losses. They believed that its effects could be better nullified, or at least mitigated, by influencing NATO from within through cooperation rather than confrontation, as advocated by Lebed.²²¹ The communist chairman of the Duma security committee Viktor Iliukhin thundered that nuclear missiles should be retargeted on Eastern Europe.²²² But the National Security Council secretary Ivan Rybkin thought it better to join NATO, except for its integrated command, so that Moscow would be consulted in all its important decisions.

This time the Yeltsin government reacted to the likely growth of NATO more coherently than it had done before. Despite playing a weak hand, Moscow acted purposefully to make the best of the situation. Kozyrev's successor Evgenii Primakov restated his country's opposition to enlargement but indicated a willingness to discuss it. He praised Western readiness to renegotiate the conventional forces agreement with the goal of better accommodating Russia's special security interests in the Caucasus, shattered by its defeat in Chechnia. At the same time, Minister of Defense Rodionov put in question his government's continued willingness to collaborate in the dismantling of the former superpowers' nuclear arsenals - more urgent a security issue than the enlargement of NATO. Warning that all the multilateral arms control treaties could be invalidated by the

emergence of new zones of confrontation, he harked at the Western alliance's alleged aggressiveness in terms "reminiscent of Soviet-style rhetoric."²²³

Having in fact become committed to enlargement much more deeply than the Russians wanted to believe, the Clinton administration felt that much greater the need to reassure them about NATO's peaceful intentions - as generations of Western leaders had tried to do in vain in Soviet times. The need appeared to be even greater after the appointment as Secretary of State of the Czech-born Madeleine Albright elicited the grumpy Russian commentary that "Moscow would be genuinely surprised if Ms. Albright shows an understanding of its worries about NATO's eastward expansion."²²⁴ Emotions ran high as disaffected Sevastopol admirals and generals sent an open letter to Yeltsin urging him "not to sign" the START II treaty, which Russia had already signed in 1993, and re-build its obsolescent nuclear arsenal. Even the president's star reformer Anatolii Chubais hinted darkly that enlargement would trigger "serious changes" in Russia which, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin warned, would mean that "the tanks will start rolling out" from the factories again.²²⁵

Despite the emptiness of such threats in a country whose economy was still collapsing, whose central government was incapable of enforcing its will in much of the land, and whose army had all but ceased to exist as a fighting-force, the artificially fomented "anti-NATO hysteria" made an impact. It did not affect so much ordinary Russians, of whom no more than a third shared the elite's concern about NATO's expansion while 45 per cent refused to be worried.²²⁶ But the hysteria influenced Western policy, still based on the fallacious premise that Russia's recovery as a great power was historically inevitable rather than increasingly improbable.

Overrating both the need to reconcile Moscow with the enlargement and the possibility of actually achieving that goal, the Clinton administration negotiated the agreement signed in Paris on May 27, 1997, under the pompous name of "The Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation." Far from creating the foundations of a satisfactory relationship, the agreement

provided for the establishment of a joint Cooperation Council of ill-defined competence, whose role was viewed very differently by each side. While they both agreed on the desirability of its ensuring that nothing in the alliance's decisions would contradict Russia's vital interests, what Washington regarded as an expression of political good will was seen by Moscow as a binding commitment under international law. Hence Russia, but not the United States, intended to submit the document to parliamentary ratification.²²⁷

In effect, Russia was given less than the right of veto, but more than the right to merely express its opinion about matters concerning the Western alliance. As the first of NATO's subsidiaries, the Council could possibly be manipulated to influence its decisions against the wishes of its members. The tripartite chairmanship is to consist of one representative of the NATO states chosen annually on a rotating basis, the Secretary General, and a Russian delegate appointed by his government without a time limitation, thus giving Moscow a disproportionate weight because of the continuity of its representation. Its ability to shape the Council's agenda was further strengthened by the decision that the three co-chairmen take turns in chairing sessions separately rather than preside as a group.²²⁸

Primakov understandably hailed the Founding Act as a "great victory" for his country and, for less obvious reasons, the "world community." For their part, East Europeans resented the paradox that Russia was given a better opportunity than NATO's prospective new members to influence the alliance's decisions. Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati of Poland demanded for his country the right to be represented on the Council.²²⁹ It was not true, as *The Washington Post* wanted to believe, that after the signing of the treaty "all the wind went out of anti-NATO bluster" in Moscow.²³⁰ Taking a longer view, the Ukrainian historian Ihor Torbakov grasped better that the document left more questions open than it answered.²³¹

The nearer the July Madrid 1997 meeting where NATO was expected to invite some of the candidates, the greater was their rush to press their arguments for admission. While the Baltic states insisted that a Europe that would leave them at Russia's mercy by barring them from NATO could

never be secure, Slovenia dwelt on its unique qualifications for membership as the only candidate that did not meet with Russian objections. At the beginning of 1997, the two Balkan states whose previous crypto-communist governments had effectively disqualified them - Bulgaria and Romania - began to vigorously knock on NATO's door after their recent election had brought to power governments with democratic credentials. They both advanced the specious argument that NATO needed them to close its alleged strategic missing link in the Balkans.

Of the two, Romania's first democratically elected government in its history launched a campaign designed to appeal to the NATO members presumed to be sympathetic on account of linguistic affinity - France, Italy, Spain, Belgium. The emotions aroused by the campaign showed how much the question of NATO membership had become divorced from tangible security considerations and intertwined with vague perceptions of national identity. For the 90 per cent of Romanians who, according to public opinion surveys, clamored for the membership, at issue was nothing less - and possibly nothing more - than international recognition of their rightful place in Europe. Invoking the alleged debt owed by the West to compensate the Romanians for the ordeal of communism, the demagogic Bucharest press warned that Madrid would be "another Yalta" if Romania were not invited. President Emil Constantinescu had difficulty explaining that "there are no historic debts to be called in," that NATO was not a charity, and that its members were expected not only to require but also to provide security.²³²

The support that the Romanian, as well as Slovenian, candidacy received from not only France and Italy but also from some of the alliance's other members suggested that the president's criteria may have been more rigorous than NATO's own. Many of the allies no longer seemed to favor a definition of NATO as a special-purpose defensive alliance rather than an instrument for building a greater Europe, as former U.S. national security adviser Gen. Brent Scowcroft did.²³³ Instead they appeared to be attracted to Havel's stirring, if nebulous, vision of NATO as a protector against local flareups of "tribal passions" in a Europe made into a single political entity.

"It is not a matter of the United States being called up to defend a small country"²³⁴ in Eastern Europe, the Czech president predicted, implying that NATO members' commitment to stand by each other unconditionally should no longer be taken seriously. If new members were to be admitted with the understanding that they would not have to be defended, the definition of the alliance would indeed be fundamentally altered.²³⁵

On the eve of the Madrid meeting, more important than the all but certain invitation of three countries - after the Clinton administration made public its backing of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary - was the question of whether more should be invited at the same time and the prospect be kept open for the admission of still more later on. After Secretary of Defense Perry's undiplomatic statement the year before that the Baltic states were not ready for admission because of their inability to meet an attack by force, Washington was especially eager to reassure them.²³⁶ It consequently gave assurances that the prospect of further admissions was open, without giving due attention to the implications for the inner workings of the alliance.

After meeting with U.S. officials, Latvian foreign minister Valdis Birkavs was able to acknowledge American support for a "process that has to remain, and we are sure will remain, inclusive," expressing his belief that NATO's enlargement will not be complete until the Baltic states [...] are members of the alliance."²³⁷ Now also Ukraine, contrary to previous signals from Kiev, began showing interest in membership. Following a call by Ukrainian politicians that their country, too, should eventually be admitted to NATO, President Leonid Kuchma together with Havel issued a joint statement to that effect, declaring that the alliance should be "open to all interested countries which are ready for membership."²³⁸ Making eligibility rather than need the main criterion for enlargement opened up a prospect of NATO's taking in new members with no end in sight until all of Europe, with the possible exception of Russia, would belong, thus making the alliance into a superfluous replica of the OSCE.

However, this dismal prospect does not necessarily have to materialize. An alternative development has been under way that, if continued, might be

more suitable to meet the different countries' most urgent new security needs. On May 28 the presidents of the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine met in Tallinn to discuss the potentially adverse repercussions of the NATO-Russia agreement. While reaffirming their support for open admissions, they appropriately focused their attention on closer economic cooperation with one another.²³⁹ In supplementing the East-West context of the NATO enlargement with an innovative North-South dimension, they were followed a week later by Turkey's president Suleiman Demirel visiting the Baltic capitals.²⁴⁰ While Turkey's support for the Baltic states' entry into the alliance served primarily to advance its own difficult bid for admission into the European Union, the visit showed the potential for regional cooperation between NATO and non-NATO countries along Russia's western border regardless of the enlargement.

The expressed U.S. intention to conclude special security treaties with the Baltic states, besides NATO's treaty with Ukraine modeled after that with Russia, could likewise be regarded as a durable alternative to enlargement rather than its temporary substitute. Much would depend on how the alliance would want to utilize the new Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the joint NATO-PFP forum created shortly before Madrid with the stated goal of merging military cooperation and political dialogue.²⁴¹

At the July Madrid meeting, however, which Secretary General Javier Solana appropriately described as NATO's "defining moment,"²⁴² the alliance notably failed to define its future character. Although it extended the expected invitations to the three Central European countries, it did so while a majority of its members unsuccessfully lobbied for inviting two more.²⁴³ Unable to resolve their differences beforehand, the allies left open the important question of whether the first round of invitations should soon be followed by another or rather be used to delay any more rounds. Nor did they make it any clearer which, if any, of the countries that had been left out now should be brought in later and on what grounds. Their uncertainty reflected their indecision about whether the alliance should remain the same or, as its members' widening range of opinions about its purpose seemed to show, should rather become something different. Later that

summer the operetta sight of mighty NATO trying to play umpire between two rowdy factions of Bosnian Serbs in the city of Banja Luka suggested what the difference might be.

Already the U.S. resistance to France's pressure for admitting five new members, including Romania and Slovenia, prompted Paris to serve notice that it would not pay the costs of admission even of the three. So far, to be sure, no reliable calculation had been made of what those costs might be, the estimates ranging from as little as \$27 billion by the administration to as much as \$125 billion by the Congressional Budget Office.²⁴⁴ In one expert's opinion, the East Europeans "need only make their current forces interoperable with NATO, meaning providing English-language courses, changing air defense and command-and-control procedures, and perhaps purchasing communication equipment."²⁴⁵ If such enlargement on the cheap were to happen, applying the Iceland or Luxembourg model to a country like Poland, it would on paper provide first-rate protection in return for little more than a token contribution, but in reality would cast doubt on the value of the protection.

No sooner did the three candidate countries receive their invitations than their governments pledged solidarity with the three Baltic states, vowing to press the alliance for their early admission.²⁴⁶ Moreover, they declared that Slovakia, which had in May 1997 aborted a farcical referendum designed by the Mečiar government to demonstrate popular support for its reservations about the alliance, should be speedily admitted into NATO and the EU as well. Such vigorous special pleading, intended to ensure that the alliance would keep looking east rather than south - from where its main challenges are more likely to be coming - augured ill for NATO's future ability to build consensus with its new members. With Romania reaffirming its "irrevocable desire"²⁴⁷ to join and others given incentives to follow, Russian ambassador to Washington Iulii Vorontsov could plausibly predict that the enlargement would eventually destroy NATO by undoing its consensus.²⁴⁸ Thus NATO would itself accomplish what Soviet leaders had in vain tried to accomplish for forty years - an apt revenge for its contribution to the demise of their state.

Saving the Alliance

In pondering the merits of NATO's enlargement, the U.S. Senate and the parliaments of the alliance's other countries, whose unanimous ratification is needed for the project to be implemented, should be aware of where the real risks lie. They do not lie in encouraging the rise of the imaginary Russian threat - the specter invoked much too often by both the critics of the enlargement and its supporters, still haunted by the Cold War scenario. There are far greater risks involved in NATO's enlarging itself out of recognition, thus ceasing to exist as an effective alliance long before the putative recovery of imperialist Russia, yet too soon before more plausible threats, possibly necessitating the use of its unique military capability, could be ruled out. With good luck, such threats may not materialize, but banking on this best-case scenario would hardly be more prudent than preparing for the worst.

The unnecessary complication could have been avoided if the issue of enlargement had not been posed in the first place, for Europe, after all, is remarkably secure as it is. But since the issue has been posed, and pushed too far for a reversal to be possible without adverse consequences, the question is how to mitigate the consequences without running greater risks. If the enlargement can no longer be stopped it could still be brought under control by being carefully limited with the goal of suspending the process while absorbing one country as a member and proceeding with alternative security arrangements for others.

Among the NATO applicants, Poland is the only one that has unambiguously demonstrated its potential of becoming not only a consumer but also a provider of security. It alone has systematically striven for admission by preparing itself for both the privileges and the obligations of membership, while showing a consistency of commitment by the elites as well as the public at large. Because of its size and location, Poland is

strategically more important for Europe than other countries of the region. Without being discriminatory, its separate admission can be justified as an exception for all these reasons that place Poland in a class by itself.

Despite the deficiencies of its armed forces, Poland is better prepared than others to bring them up to NATO standards not only symbolically but also effectively. They enjoy popular respect, their officer corps has been purged of communist holdovers, and civilian control has been established. Their integration into NATO is a task that could reasonably be expected to be accomplished within a relatively short time at acceptable cost, thus making them ready to substantially contribute to any military operation NATO might be required to undertake.

Justifiable on its own merits, the admission of Poland, but not of any additional countries for the time being, need not be seen by Russia as either a concession or a provocation. While unlikely to please extreme Russian nationalists, it would be suited to reassure the more moderate Russians alarmed about an ever-encroaching NATO by marking not the beginning but the end of its advance for the foreseeable future. In preparing for Poland's admission, NATO could negotiate, informally rather than formally, for an assurance of Russian self-restraint in regard to the Baltic states in return for its own self-restraint on Polish territory - mutually reinforcing pledges that would enhance security in the area.

Specific security concerns of countries whose admission into NATO lacks a compelling rationale could then be addressed, with due attention to their different needs, in bilateral treaties with NATO and, if appropriate, with some of its individual members as well. Already such a treaty has been signed between the alliance and Ukraine; in addition, the United States envisages concluding one with the Baltic states, while Great Britain has signaled a willingness to develop a special security relationship with Estonia.

Such treaties would help reduce to normality the artificial exceptionality of NATO's "founding" treaty with Russia, thus discouraging its being used for unwarranted interference in the affairs of the alliance. The downgrading of that treaty would conform with the probability of Russia's evolution into

an important but not great European power - one, perhaps, on the order of Spain, with which it is likely to share in the future both extra-European involvements and exposure to the demographically unstable areas to the south that are bound to be NATO's growing preoccupation.

Aside from the newly formed Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, where all NATO and PFP members will have an opportunity to regularly discuss their military and political concerns with one another, the bilateral treaties would help perpetuate Europe's present benign international environment by improving its already existing "security architecture". Such a diversified construction would be better suited to respond to the wide variety of challenges the Continent is likely to face in the future than would an ever-expanding but diluted NATO, whose integrity in its present form should be preserved for dealing specifically with military emergencies. Such emergencies, of limited rather than cataclysmic nature, are realistically to be expected in both Europe and other parts of the world, not so much despite as because of the growing multipolarity of the international system.

Notes

Abbreviated source references:

AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych [Modern Records Archives] (Warsaw)
AÚV KSĚ	Archív Ústředního výboru KSĚ [Archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia]
BA-MZAP	Bundesarchiv, Militärisches Zwischenarchiv Potsdam (currently in Freiburg im Breisgau)
BAP	Bundesarchiv Potsdam
CAW	Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [Central Military Archives] (Warsaw)
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
KC PZPR	Komitet Centralny PZPR [Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party]
MNO	Ministerstvo národní obrany [Ministry of National Defense] (Prague)
MR	Ministerrat [der DDR]
SAPMO-BA	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (Berlin)
SÚA	Státní ústřední archív [Central State Archives] (Prague)
VHA	Vojenský historický archív [Military Historical Archives] (Prague)
ZPA	Zentrales Parteiarchiv [der SED]

1. In this study, the term "Eastern Europe," rather than the more cumbersome "East Central Europe," is used in reference to the area between Germany and Russia and between the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas, while the term of "Central Europe" is reserved to the territory comprising today's Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.
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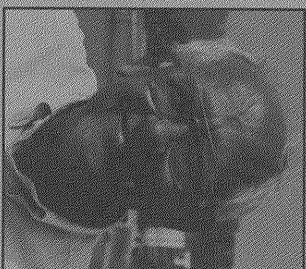
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Reassuring NATO

Against the background of the changing Russian and East European attitudes toward NATO before and since the end of the Cold War, this study examines the origins of the alliance's enlargement and the implications for its cohesion and ability to act. The author recommends suspending the enlargement after the admission of Poland, the best qualified candidate.

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