Extending the Atlantic Community: Threat or Opportunity?

'Extending NATO Eastward'

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I have been asked today to speak on the topic of NATO's Eastern destiny which has become a very current and highly controversial topic. The question being asked is whether NATO should enlarge to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and if so, when and how.

This issue, with the NATO Summit coming up in a few weeks time, has to be urgently clarified for two main reasons. On the one hand, following the events in Moscow in early October, the fear of many Central Europeans of a reversal of policy in Russia and of a return to imperialist ambitions is now much more acute, and their need for security guarantees, for some kind of re-assurance is correspondingly greater. Visiting NATO Headquarters only last week, Polish Foreign Minister Olechowski reported that recent polls in Poland revealed that twice as many respondents feared for the sovereignty and security of Poland than just a few months before. On the other hand, the way in which Yeltsin triumphed, with the military forces gaining it seems even more influence over policy-making, gives many Alliance policy-makers every cause to be cautious about enlargement for fear of alienating Russia, and undermining the position of the democrats by giving ammunition to the communist nationalist coalition. At a time when the democratization process is at a delicate and crucial phase, this is a risk which cannot be taken no matter how much Alliance policy-makers dislike being held hostage to Russian domestic politics.

The subject of NATO enlargement has generated great debate of late and an enormous amount of newsprint. The best way to address this issue is to clarify some fundamentals first, and then give some idea about how a middle ground can be found between the "*Scylla*" of frustrating the aspirations of the Central and Eastern Europeans, and the "*Charybdis*" of marginalizing the most important security variable, for better or for worse: Russia. Faced with this dilemma, the worst thing for the Alliance would be to do nothing; for this can only precipitate the quest of the Central Europeans for alternative forms of security - which could well prove to be destabilizing - while comforting Moscow's perceptions that even a weak Russia can exercise an effective '*droit de regard*' over the fate of Central Europe and over NATO's decision-making.

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[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and in no way represent or are to be construed as official NATO policy.

If one examines the Atlantic Alliance, one thing stands out: the Alliance has never been simply an "Atlantic Alliance". From its inception, Italy was included as an ally. Thus NATO had already a Mediterranean dimension. In 1952, Greece and Turkey joined, thereby making it an Eastern Mediterranean or a South Eastern Mediterranean Alliance. Moreover, if one looks at the defensive parameter, it has had a tendency to move eastward over the years; in fact, it has moved about a thousand kilometres east. In 1949, it was on the Rhine, as Germany was not a member then. In 1954, when Germany joined, it moved to the Elbe. More recently in the wake of German unification in 1990, it moved to the Oder. The Alliance has thus jumped from eleven original members to sixteen. Can one argue that these previous phases of the expansion of NATO have led to a loss of cohesion, or to a breakdown in NATO's ability to fulfil its fundamental task of territorial defence by providing security guarantees?

To the historical experience can be added a simple and unavoidable moral imperative. We would miss a historic opportunity to anchor the Central and Eastern European countries into Western structures if we did not make it very clear that we are, in principle, willing to open the Alliance. This can and hopefully will be done in January, at the NATO Summit. The fact that enlargement is not an immediate possibility should not be an obstacle but rather a positive inducement to at least initiate the process that will eventually lead towards it. The perception of insecurity in Central and Eastern European countries is real. It cannot be dismissed even in the absence of declared hostile intentions. Russia, for the West, may no longer be a military threat, because it is now 1500 kilometres away, at least in military strategic terms, from where it was in the days of the Cold War and the division of Europe. But Central and Eastern Europe is more sensitive and even vulnerable to instability and relatively modest changes in the strategic balance than is the West. Security is not only about palpable threats, but also about perceptions. One has to feel secure to be secure. If one does not feel secure oneself, one is likely to engender feelings of insecurity in one's neighbours as well. To the extent that NATO can reduce this sense of a security vacuum, it will lift some of the pressure it is currently under to provide security guarantees - thereby winning the time it needs to devise an acceptable formula, both internal and external, for enlargement.

In any case, it has become interestingly apparent to Alliance policymakers that, whatever decision they make on enlargement, they cannot escape responsibility for the security of their Eastern neighbours. Integration is going to happen and is already happening little by little. If one looks at the current dynamics of cooperation, there are now plans for joint peacekeeping training and exercises and even for cooperation in defence planning within the framework of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. There is also agreement to discuss air defence, and common endeavours in fields like civil emergency planning, armaments cooperation and resource management. Thus, there is going to be - to the extent that these programs intensify as foreseen in the recently approved Third NACC

Workplan - a kind of *de facto* integration of these Central and Eastern European countries into Western security structures, from the bottom upwards as it were, over the next few years.

The distinction between what the rights and duties of members and non-members is going to become blurred. A kind of NATO I and NATO II (or, as the French would call it, an "*OTAN-bis*"), is almost inevitable over the next few years. Once the Alliance has accepted, as it did in Copenhagen two and a half years ago, that the security of Central and Eastern European states is its "direct and material concern", it is committed to provide some kind of post-aggression response even if it eschews pre-aggression guarantees or military deterrence. The closer the inter-action, the more the Central and Eastern European states will expect that response to be a firm one and the more NATO states will feel duty-bound to provide it. If this kind of creeping integration is inevitable, it is best for the Alliance to recognize it from the outset and to try to steer and shape the process consciously. In other words, it would be better if the Central European aspirants to NATO membership were admitted in normal peacetime circumstances (in ways which minimize the prospect of new instabilities) than for a situation to develop whereby NATO steers clear of accepting responsibility for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe only to dramatically reverse this policy once instabilities spin out of control and engender real military threats. The Central and Eastern Europeans may suddenly be faced with such a threat, and NATO may have to extend security guarantees in the middle of a crisis, knowing that such a precipitate step is as much likely to escalate as defuse that crisis.

If one looks at the origins of the First World War, one will note that it started because security guarantees had to be clarified in the middle of a crisis, most notably from Britain to Belgium. The Second World War is another example of a security guarantee being clarified in the middle of a crisis, in this instance from Britain to Poland. In both cases a political guarantee was extended against the background of all too obviously inadequate military arrangements. Inevitably, this kind of commitment is misinterpreted by the players, with consequences, in 1914 and 1939, which proved disastrous. Therefore, if the extension of guarantees would have to be accepted in a crisis situation anyway, then it is best that it be planned beforehand while there is still time and scope to design offsets and alternative arrangements for those who cannot be included in the first wave and who will feel the effects most.

There are six basic objections which are constantly being presented in newspapers, and in the academic literature, to the near-term enlargement of NATO. The first one posits that it is best if these countries join the European Union (EU) and the Western European Union (WEU) in the first instance. In other words, if they are good enough for the EC, they must be good enough for NATO. There are a lot of attractions to this view. If this position is taken, it means that we don't have to worry

about enlarging NATO's membership for perhaps another fifteen or even more years. This gives us plenty of time to work out our *modus operandi*. Also, we would be basically providing a security guarantee to countries which would need it less and be less likely to call on it because the EU criteria are so demanding in terms of democratization, treatment of minorities, economic market reforms, and political stability, that the EC member that joins NATO would have already largely stabilized its internal and external environment through its own efforts.

In a sense, what is being argued is that economics create security and that security comes from a momentum of economic development and a certain *per capita* standard of living. It is indeed self-evident that security and social stability come as much from an opening of Western markets as from the extension of Western security guarantees. But realistically this will be a long time coming and as John Maynard Keynes used to say: ' in the long run we will all be dead'. Note how after the Second World War the founding fathers of the Alliance saw things rather differently; to extend military security was to create a climate of confidence and stability which allowed governments not to overspend on weapons, or shut themselves off from their neighbours but to use their scarce resources for infrastructure renewal, for education, and for social reform. This created a climate of confidence for investment and for undertaking projects in the safe knowledge that things were going to be stable in the years ahead. Today, there is little evidence in Central and Eastern Europe for believing that the process of economic reform will carry on in the absence of some kind of security umbrella. The notion that these countries should join the EC first, and only thereafter NATO would be fundamentally wrong. The Central and Eastern European countries are not in the same situation as the neutrals, neither economically, strategically, nor in terms of historical experience. They have not found security and prosperity by occupying the middle ground between great powers. For them, independence means the choice and practice of alignment, not keeping one's distance and separateness. To the extent that these countries have a security umbrella, they are more likely to stay the course and meet the criteria for membership of the European Union over time.

The second argument is that of cohesion. First of all, there is the belief that NATO performs extremely well with sixteen members, and that seventeen would create disruption and disorder. This would be comparable to an Arab sheik who has sixteen wives but would become dysfunctional if he takes on an additional one. Somehow, sixteen is portrayed as a kind of magic number which ensures cohesion whereas seventeen is its antithesis. Why, or how, is the question. Cohesion in the Alliance has always been based not on numbers, but on the sharing of common democratic values. In fact, the Alliance of sixteen genuine democracies that has existed in recent years (since the return of democracy to Portugal, Greece and Turkey) has enjoyed greater legitimacy, and even been able to assume a more active and outward-looking role, than the Alliance of eleven of the 1950s that was indeed smaller but had some non-democratic countries in its midst.

Thirdly, it is alleged that enlargement would introduce instabilities into NATO. Instead of exporting security to them, we would import their insecurity into the Alliance. It strikes me that we are in a dilemma: either we take them in, and try to deal with their problems, or alternatively, their problems - by growing - are going to affect us anyway, sooner or later. There has been much commentary of late pointing out that the new kind of security problems (refugees, organised crime, drugs, the spread of regional conflicts and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction) cross national boundaries with ease and undermine neighbouring states far more readily than the old type of security problem (for instance, thirty Soviet motor, rifle, and tank divisions in Central and Eastern Europe) which largely proved self-deterring and produced in any case an automatic counter-reaction in the form of the linear border defence of NATO. Thus, if one is not actively spreading security, one is increasing one's vulnerability to insecurity. The situation cannot be frozen in a timeless balance of calculable forces. It is rather like Mr. Delors' image of the bicycle: if you are not perpetually going forward, you'll fall off.

The fourth objection is one of the major ones telling against the expansion of NATO: the extension of a security guarantee, of Article Five. Are we willing, *du jour au lendemain*, to guarantee the security of other states, especially when defence budgets are tending to decline as well as the political will to undertake additional burdens and commitments. This is a much more serious objection that has to be confronted. First of all, it must be clarified that NATO has never really provided a legal security guarantee. When the Alliance was founded in 1949, Dean Acheson was asked to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He was asked by Senator Vandenburg at the time, 'Mr. Secretary, if this NATO pact is ratified by Congress, does that mean that American troops are going back to Europe?' He answered 'no'. Had he said 'yes', there would not have been a NATO because Congress would never have ratified the Washington Treaty. In other words, the Americans clearly accepted NATO because it did not commit them to provide a security guarantee. It was seen as providing a kind of political reassurance, and if worse came to worse, the Americans would provide air support and logistics. It was the Korean War which produced US ground troops in Western Europe, not the Washington Treaty.

NATO's security guarantee has always been much more a question of day-to-day defence cooperation, joint exercises, and the integration of forces than of binding obligations. The practice of 'doing' security together has been the guarantee, not the legal document. In fact, the WEU Treaty, the modified Brussels Treaty of 1954, is far more explicit on the military guarantee than the NATO Treaty.

Thus, in many respects, to the extent that we "do" security with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, through military contacts and exchanges, particularly the joint manoeuvres suggested recently by the Danes and the Germans, we are essentially providing a security guarantee to the countries

of Central and Eastern Europe even before they sign the Treaty. For example, a potential aggressor would inevitably ponder carefully the degree of interaction a country has with NATO before it resolved to attack. Country X may not have a formal security guarantee from NATO, but it is very friendly to NATO: they are doing joint military exercises as well as peacekeeping operations, their military work very closely together, and they are a part of the same air defence and communication systems. Would an aggressor attack that country? Most probably not, because clearly the Alliance would have a moral commitment (and no matter how reluctant democracies are to accept moral commitments before a crisis, they usually have a change of heart when the crisis is upon them) to defend it. Thus, what is important for the security guarantee is not how much confidence a Pole, a Czech, or a Ukrainian have in it, but how much credibility it has in the eyes of the potential aggressor. Military cooperation without a security guarantee may therefore be more valuable than the reverse.

There is also another point to be considered here. Is NATO really worried about Country X in Central Europe attacking Country Y, both of which would be NATO members? This is an eventuality that has long preoccupied the Alliance in view of the strained relations between Greece and Turkey. To whom would the security guarantee apply? Here, the Western European Union offers a useful model. When Turkey became an associate member of the WEU two years ago, Greece, which at the same time became a full member, was persuaded to sign a protocol saying that the Article Five security guarantee of the Western European Union Treaty would not apply in the case of a Greco-Turkish conflict. In other words, the security guarantee applies only to non-members, and not to internal disputes. NATO could take the same approach.

The fifth objection is an even more serious one: differentiation and marginalization. In other words, just like the EU which cannot take on board five, or six, or even seven new members simultaneously, neither can the Atlantic Alliance. Whether it is best to take on one or two members, or perhaps three, or the four *Viscgrad* countries en bloc (or perhaps two initially), is open to debate. This is an issue which still has to be addressed. There are currently eight Central and Eastern European countries that have expressed an interest in joining NATO. In other words, countries have made it known over a period of time that joining NATO is one of their main foreign policy goals. What happens to those that don't become members of NATO? A few months ago, Foreign Minister Zlenko of the Ukraine, visiting Brussels, expressed publicly his concern to that if Poland were to become a member of NATO, the Russians might interpret this as implying that countries further to the East, such as the Ukraine, were in their sphere of influence. In other words, by choosing certain countries as members, the impression could be given to others that they are not of immediate concern to NATO, and that therefore a new Yalta, albeit less severe and dangerous, would be implicitly accepted. Thus, from a Ukrainian perspective, there is more security if NATO rejects enlargement than if it embraces it, to the extent that the choice would have to be selective and offer few compensations and

alternatives, for the time being at least. This feeling is also shared by the Romanians, the Bulgarians and others. It proves not that enlargement is impossible or undesirable but simply that the time is not yet ripe nor the circumstances in place for it to be possible. Moreover, if the criteria for NATO enlargement are not just who do Alliance members want, but also who is capable of contributing to the Alliance (because it is in its interest to take countries that are able to provide to some degree for their own defence, and are not just net recipients of security), then some countries could promote their claims with some justification. Romania, for instance, has gone very far along the road to restructuring its armed forces and is even developing a rapid reaction force, specifically designed for peacekeeping. It has shown itself to be very willing to participate in such missions under NATO authority. Romania - and it would not be alone - could thus feel all the more slighted that NATO's preference would go to the Visegrad grouping for essentially political reasons and notwithstanding its own efforts in the military field.

There is the clear problem of identifying on what basis or criteria NATO says 'yes' to potential new members, and 'no' to others, particularly when those it says 'no' to could perhaps be more able and willing to contribute both to the common defence and to the Alliance's new crisis management and peace support tasks. It is a problem to which there is no easy answer.

The sixth, and final, difficulty is Russia. Recently President Yeltsin sent a letter to the "2-plus-4" governments (the governments involved in negotiating the Treaty on German Unification in 1990) expressly ruling out the enlargement of NATO. He made it clear that Russia would not welcome this, proposing instead a joint Russian-NATO security guarantee of the Central and Eastern European countries and suggesting NATO should develop a privileged relationship with Russia. This letter can be interpreted in two ways. One is as a Russian search for a new Yalta, where large countries or groupings strike a deal over the heads of smaller ones. The Congress of Vienna springs to mind in that the two main power centres (NATO and Russia) would have amicable relations across a kind of "Finlandized" zone in Eastern Europe, where Poland might be close to NATO but not formally an ally, while other countries might be close to Russia but not part of a reconstituted Warsaw Pact alliance. This would create a zone of enforced neutrality, even limited sovereignty, which would obviously be unacceptable to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and destined like all such enforced diplomatic solutions to create the very tensions and instabilities it is designed to repress. However, this letter could also be interpreted as a sort of *cri de coeur*, an urgent cry not to leave Russia out, or to seek to exploit its - transitory - phases of weakness. The letter could be seen as a plea to NATO not to do anything which would make things more difficult for Yeltsin in the short term with the incipient promise that such restraint would bring dividends in terms of a stable Russian "Westpolitik" in the long term.

Russia's predicament is clear: it is more Western looking today than it has been at any time in its history, and yet

geographically, it is farther away from Europe. There is the belief among some influential Russians that the addition of Central Europeans to NATO would intensify and make manifest what they have always suspected the organisation of being, namely an anti-Russian alliance. However, NATO is not an anti-Russian alliance. Yesterday, given the rigidity of Cold War confrontation, NATO could never have dispelled such a misconception among Russians. Today NATO can, particularly given its increased cooperative efforts in peacekeeping and crisis management activities, its political and military dialogue with Russia and its strategy to maximize political as well as military reassurance. Yet there is a perception in Russia that if, for example, Poland were to become a member of NATO, it would use its historic fear of Russia to lobby for the Alliance's resources, strategy, and thinking to be directed towards maintaining the balance of power and even containment of Russia. Thus, in Russia's eyes, an enlarged NATO would be paradoxically a traditional NATO whereas in Western eyes the purpose of enlargement would be to facilitate the emergence of an altogether different NATO based not on deterrence but on crisis management and pan-European co-operation.

Perhaps one way of preventing Central Europe and Russia from going off on different tracks is, as James Baker has suggested, to have Russia as a NATO member, or at least as a treaty-linked partner. Yet here another dilemma arises. On the one hand, one does not want to give the Russians a *droit de regard* over European security. Is it for Moscow to say who does what? Are Moscow's interests so enormous and legitimate that they prevail over those of other countries? Kissinger once remarked about the Soviet Union, 'absolute security for the Soviet Union means absolute insecurity for everyone else'. Is NATO not an autonomous, sovereign organization? However, on the other hand, what happens in Russia will, of course, determine what happens to European security. Russia is still a great military power and will continue to be so, almost under any scenario, for a long time to come. Russia is a Security Council member whose compliance is needed for Gulf War-type situations around the world and Russia still has thousands of nuclear weapons. What the East as well as the West have most to fear is either chaos in Russia or the return to an authoritarian government, both of which cannot be discounted even if we have perhaps today more reason to believe our preferred outcome possible: a democratic Russia at ease with itself, at ease with us.

The essence of a dilemma is that it can only be solved over time, and as political circumstances change. A democratically mature Russia would understand that its own process of reform depends upon having as much stability as possible around its own borders. It would thus be a net beneficiary rather than a net loser from an expansion of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe. But another factor is essential: that in tandem to NATO's enlargement a pan-European security system be constructed that takes account of Russia's legitimate security interests and gives it a rôle commensurate with its great power status (while obviously at the same time disciplining that power by making it subject to international rules and transparency, notably in Russia's CIS peacekeeping activities).

It is in this respect that the US proposal for a "Partnership for Peace" has its full significance. It allows for a gradual opening up of NATO structures and buys the Alliance the necessary time to win Russia's confidence. Although there is no formal link between "Partnership for Peace" and enlargement, the first new members to join the Alliance will obviously be those who, through their full participation in this programme, will have demonstrated their ability to contribute to the common defence as well as carry out the necessary military reforms at home. The possibility of participation in a PFP joint planning cell attached to NATO, of joint defence planning, training and exercises, will vastly enhance the sense of security of partner countries without introducing a formal special status vis-à-vis the Alliance which might alienate Russia. Russia itself can use PFP to develop closer military links to the West and even gain Western help and support for its peacekeeping activities while not committing NATO in any way to accept Russia as a member of the Alliance along with the Visegrad countries. In short, instead of NATO having to perform the discrimination against candidate members, they themselves would choose how fast and how far they wish to go in developing their military co-operation with NATO structures. The fact that this would also involve on their part a certain financial effort would clearly distinguish between those who are willing and able to engage themselves permanently in the Alliance, and partake of all its new as well as traditional activities, from those who are merely looking for a security guarantee for a minimal return. Countries which join the Alliance through PFP will be fully operational members from the outset without the need to go through a prolonged learning curve and the negotiation of special arrangements as happened after Spain's accession in 1982. The process of familiarization which the PFP offers would make it easier for the Alliance to extend security guarantees because partners will have demonstrated by their actions not only their willingness to defend themselves militarily but also to resolve their security problems politically. PFP will also give the Allies time to work out how new members can be integrated into the existing NATO command structure, perhaps passing through transitional regimes, such as Henry Kissinger has suggested, to enhance reassurance. As an alternative to enlargement, PFP would undoubtedly represent a failure of imagination and nerve on behalf of the West. But as a means of progressive enlargement it can serve simultaneously to satisfy the aspirations of the Visegrad countries while building up the practice of co-operative security which is vital to the emergence of a pan-European security structure, thereby satisfying the aspirations of Russia and other East European states. What is required of the Alliance is flexible and creative diplomacy but also determination not to be deflected from the goal of eventual enlargement. By not naming countries or putting a timetable on enlargement at the Summit, the Alliance can give the Russians the necessary time to adapt to this concrete goal and seek the best offsets for its own security. At the same time, stating that NATO will open up will indicate to Moscow that the Alliance remains a sovereign body that takes its own decisions and one which does not give Moscow the key to this issue.

Finally, a related issue is the development of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to play a more important role in conducting political consultations so as to complement the essentially military co-operation under PFP. Given its pioneering work in developing co-operation in peacekeeping and the expertise that it is developing in regional issues, the NACC could eventually become the security arm of the CSCE. The fact that the neutrals are not in the NACC (although Finland is an observer) doesn't have to be an obstacle to such an evolution, as Austria, Sweden and Finland are participants in the NACC ad hoc group on peacekeeping. The real concern for the Alliance is that in such an evolution the NACC might become an autonomous body, with its own secretariat and decision-making structure, that loses the special link to NATO which is of course in the eyes of the Central Europeans its main advantage. Perhaps that is why Russian Foreign Minister Kosyrev has recently been advocating just such a development.

In conclusion, there are no easy options for dealing with the security problems and aspirations of Central and Eastern Europe. But because one cannot satisfy their aspirations doesn't mean that one cannot deal with their problems. The disappointment of the Visegrad countries at not being offered immediate NATO membership is more evidence of their understandably inflated expectations than a lack of Western responsiveness. Facile notions like a "security vacuum" only disguise unhelpfully the large-scale military co-operation that is already taking place and which with the introduction of PFP will give Central and Eastern European countries special consultative rights vis-a-vis NATO. Countries which offer such special consultative rights will testify that this always conveys a special responsibility if not a binding security guarantee. So this is no minor privilege. This being said, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are entitled to ask NATO to clarify its intentions on enlargement. Moreover, the reality of politics is that if there is no agreement on the end, there is little agreement on the means. Knowing that they are heading towards an enlargement will oblige NATO member governments to come up with the resources to make PFP work optimally. Given the straightened financial circumstances of NATO governments, this will be difficult enough, but I fear without expansion as a goal, almost impossible. And if NATO doesn't provide the initial seed money, our Co-operation Partners will see little reason to make the far larger financial sacrifices necessary to gain the full benefits from PFP.

An American homespun philosopher, Nathan Cummings, once said: 'nothing will ever be achieved if all possible objections have first to be overcome'. For some time to come striking the right balance between the competing aspirations of its Co-operation Partners will be a difficult task for the Alliance, but getting it right the key not only to its own future but also very much to that of a secure, prosperous Europe.