

Managing NATO Enlargement

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# Managing NATO Enlargement

On March 5, 1997, the United States Institute of Peace convened the first session of its European Security Working Group to discuss the implications of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) commitment to enlarge the alliance at the July 1997 Summit in Madrid. The purpose of the working group is to stimulate dialogue among representatives from the administration and Capitol Hill, and policy thinkers on how best to manage the enlargement process. At the first session, Zbigniew Brzezinski (Center for Strategic and International Studies) discussed the ongoing NATO-Russia negotiations and possible outcomes of the ratification process. His recommendations make a serious contribution to the debate on the impact of NATO enlargement on European security and stability. This report, prepared by Institute program officer Lauren Van Metre, summarizes points made by Dr. Brzezinski in his remarks and the subsequent discussion among working group participants.

### Key Points

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski assumed in his remarks that the decision to enlarge NATO will be made at the Madrid Summit and offered insights into current thinking on this issue in Russia, Europe and the United States. He also suggested ways to enlarge the alliance and build a relationship with Russia without sacrificing the interests of Central and East Europeans or NATO's ability to fulfill its purpose and missions.

### Russian Thinking on NATO Enlargement

- Russian opposition to NATO enlargement rests entirely with the Moscow-based foreign policy elite and does not include the Russian public, which is ambivalent about or has yet to form an opinion on this issue.
- The basis of this opposition is residual "Soviet" interests in reestablishing influence in Central Europe and preventing a U.S. role in the area. Moscow's "outdated" interests are not surprising given that the current foreign policy elite are mostly former Soviet leaders.
- In the next few months, the United States and its NATO allies can

expect Moscow to continue its opposition to enlargement; attempt to intimidate weaker, less determined allies; bargain with the United States for as many accommodations as possible; and step-up activities to discredit would-be candidates.

- The purpose of these activities is to dilute the effectiveness of the alliance while attempting to derail ratification of first-round candidates, or ensure that no subsequent enlargements occur.

## How NATO Might Respond to Russia

- There is a need to adjust current thinking among alliance members who mistakenly accept the legitimacy of Russian concerns, which no longer have a place in Europe and are neither historically valid nor popularly based.
- By refusing to negotiate a charter on grounds defined by Moscow, the West will enhance its ability to achieve the best accommodation possible—an agreement that incorporates reciprocity and establishes greater transparency between NATO and Moscow.

## The Thinking of Allies and Possible U.S. Responses

- European public opinion strongly supports NATO enlargement.
- There is, however, considerable uncertainty regarding negotiations with Russia, ratification of new members by all allies, and support for a second round of enlargement.
- To ensure a successful ratification process, the United States should make it clear that countries that fail to ratify enlargement are rejecting not only new members but also the United States.
- It will also be important to provide intermediate security arrangements for the Baltic states, although the greatest assurance will be U.S. clarity and commitment that NATO's first expansion is the beginning of a process that will not be delayed for long. European uncertainty regarding a second enlargement of NATO should diminish when the first round has taken place and Russian predictions do not materialize.

## The Home Front: Opinions and Policies on NATO Enlargement

- Recent public opinion polls in the United States suggest favorable and resilient support for NATO enlargement.
- This level of public support should ensure a strong congressional stand in favor of enlargement.
- It will be important to enhance coordination on enlargement between the executive and legislative branches, as well as within the executive branch itself.
- The formation of a bipartisan congressional advisory commission to consult with the administration on negotiations with Russia would increase the likelihood of Congress endorsing the resulting

accommodation.

- It is important for the administration to maintain cohesion on the issue of NATO enlargement and to consider a major speech by the president that discusses the strategic and historic significance of this initiative.

## **Introduction: NATO Enlargement and the Future of European Security**

With a decision imminent on which countries to invite as potential new members of the Alliance, discussion must advance beyond the pros and cons of NATO enlargement to how best to manage the enlargement process. In this context, the United States Institute of Peace has formed a small working group on the Future of European Security to discuss the impact of enlargement on a number of regions of Europe—the Baltic countries, Central Europe and Ukraine, and Russia—and to consider the best options for easing the security concerns of Russia and the “wanna-bes,” that is, aspirants for NATO membership not selected in the first round of enlargement.

>The first meeting of the working group on March 5, held on Capitol Hill, featured a presentation by Zbigniew Brzezinski of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Participants included members of Congress, congressional staff, and representatives of the administration and the policy community. Dr. Brzezinski's remarks, summarized below, held important recommendations for negotiating the enlargement of the alliance and a NATO-Russia Charter, and provided the framework for a thoughtful discussion among participants on how best to manage the NATO enlargement process.

### **NATO Enlargement and the NATO-Russia Charter**

Dr. Brzezinski established as the point of departure for his remarks the premise that the decision to enlarge NATO will be made in July 1997, at the Presidential Summit in Madrid. Therefore, the months leading to the summit will be decisive. At stake is not simply the size of NATO, but the shape of Europe's future and its relationship with the United States. Also at stake, although not explicitly so, is the issue of a democratic Russia. Dr. Brzezinski contended that, as the enlargement process moves forward, the chances increase that Russia will emerge as a democratic state with strong ties to Europe and without geopolitical ambitions vis-à-vis portions of Europe. Therefore, he voiced strong support for NATO enlargement and focused his remarks not on the merits of enlargement, but on three areas critical to the successful management of the enlargement process.

### **Russian Opposition to NATO**

#### **The Nature of Russian Opposition**

Opposition to NATO enlargement resides solely in the Russian foreign policy establishment. Recent public opinion polls in Russia suggest that the majority of the Russian people are not anxious about NATO's decision to add new

members. In fact, many have yet to even form an opinion, and others have indicated that NATO enlargement is simply not an issue of concern. The Russian foreign policy elite, composed primarily of members of the Soviet foreign policy establishment, have been deliberately deceptive on this issue. Many claim that enlargement will strengthen the positions of those who are the main enemies of the West. Dr. Brzezinski contended that Russian leaders are playing a deceitful game by telling the West that they do not consider NATO enlargement a threat, but that the Russian public is amok with anxiety and fear. Yet, these same leaders try to cultivate in the Russian people a fear that NATO expansion poses a threat in the form of foreign troops and weapons deployed closer to Russia.

It is not surprising that today's foreign policy elite, as former Soviet leaders, are opposed to NATO enlargement, but their position is not based on Russian public opinion or reaction to NATO's policies. Instead, Dr. Brzezinski felt that their opposition is rooted in residual "Soviet" views that (1) Central Europe must be kept open for the day when Russia regains its strength and can reassert its influence (or more), and (2) that the United States should not play a major role in Europe.

### **What to Expect from Russia**

In light of this situation, what can be expected from the Russians between now and July?

- Continued opposition to NATO enlargement, and perhaps attempts to intimidate weaker, less determined allies through bluster, posturing, and threats.
- Bargaining with the United States to obtain as many accommodations as possible, with the intent of diluting NATO's effectiveness as much as possible.
- Insistence on a ten-year freeze on future enlargements, with the understanding that at no time and under no circumstances should the Baltic countries be considered as candidates for membership (although this stance implies tacit acceptance of membership for others, such as Slovenia and perhaps Romania).
- Stepped-up activities to discredit would-be candidates. Covert action is still a tool of Moscow's foreign policy implementation, and a variety of initiatives could be taken to precipitate incidents either between the candidate members and their neighbors or domestically, such as on the sensitive issue of the treatment of Jews.

Regarding dangers on the horizon, Dr. Brzezinski identified the following as the most serious, but less likely to occur:

- An arrangement that dilutes NATO through the admission of Russia into councils. This would allow Russia to play on divisions within the alliance (Turkey and Greece, and French aspirations) while at the same time confining new members to second class status by

restricting their participation in NATO. Even more ominous would be Russian participation in NATO despite a failure to ratify enlargement, possibly because of pressure from Moscow. In this case, Russia would have its cake and eat it too, gaining the benefits of accommodation by the West and failed enlargement.

- The indefinite deferral of the second wave of enlargement, which would cause misgivings and uncertainty in a significant part of Europe. Deferral would create the feeling that the West was accepting a de facto new division of Europe into spheres of influence. This would have corrosive effects on NATO, America's position in NATO, and the cohesion of the alliance.
- The failure of ratification owing to opposition by a member country such as Greece or Turkey, without pressure from Russia.
- Russia's rejection of an agreement with NATO.
- A demonstrative Russian move on one of the Baltic countries- Estonia and Latvia would be the primary candidates.

## How the West Might Respond to Russia

Because of the foregoing, Dr. Brzezinski expressed misgivings about U.S. and NATO negotiating tactics with the Russians. Thus far, negotiations have been based largely on accepting the legitimacy of the so-called Russian concerns at face value. Are these concerns in fact legitimate, or are they essentially tactical negotiating devices? Russian Foreign Minister Yevgenii Primakov, when commenting on NATO's decision not to deploy nuclear weapons on the soil of would-be members, has ascribed this concession to Western concerns about Russian reactions to NATO enlargement. Given such tactics by the Russians, Dr. Brzezinski recommended that the United States (and allies) state openly, and not just privately, that Russian aspirations and objections are motivated by residual interests that no longer have a place in Europe, and that cannot be satisfied because they are historically invalid. Otherwise, the West will lend credibility to Russian objections and reinforce Russia's capacity to influence our publics and legislatures, whose members will be voting on ratification. This is a tactical mistake that has strategic consequences.

Dr. Brzezinski also advocated the importance in the negotiation process of making counterdemands. If Russia is going to have a voice in NATO as part of a larger settlement, what about reciprocity? Could not the West insist that, if there are no nuclear weapons in Central Europe, Russia forgo forward deployments to Kaliningrad, or even to its western frontiers? NATO might also demand a voice in the peacekeeping policies and operations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Russia's involvement in them. And, if participation in NATO bodies provides Russia greater transparency regarding Western political-military decision making, why not insist on a reciprocal arrangement? Dr. Brzezinski also cautioned U.S. leaders not to let an agreement with Russia take effect before the expansion of NATO has been ratified. Otherwise, the ratification process would be vulnerable to Russian efforts to prevent it.

## **NATO Enlargement and Europe**

As far as our allies are concerned, it appears that European public opinion towards NATO enlargement is favorable and reasonably stable. There are, however, considerable uncertainties regarding how firm our allies will be in negotiations with Russia, specifically what concessions will be made as part of the broad accommodation that will enable enlargement to proceed. There is also uncertainty regarding the ratification process, particularly with Turkey and Greece. Therefore, a great deal of sustained effort by the United States will be required. And a clear, demonstrative U.S. lead will be necessary so that the Europeans recognize that American involvement in Europe is at stake. The administration should make clear that countries that fail to ratify enlargement are not rejecting Poland or Hungary—they are rejecting the United States. The administration should also give some thought to what would happen if the decision is made to proceed with enlargement, but ratification fails. If this occurs, there will be an enormous crisis of confidence in Europe. Therefore, the United States should consider a special bilateral relationship with the candidates that have not been approved, in the form of a unilateral or executive agreement.

### **The U.S. Home Front**

Public opinion in the United States is also favorable and fairly resilient in the face of the types of challenges that are likely to arise in the ratification process, according to recent polls conducted by the University of Maryland. This fact should provide the basis for confidence that Congress will take a strong stand, and it will signal the U.S. intention, even before the decision is made to enlarge NATO, to ratify enlargement.

Dr. Brzezinski recommended forming a bipartisan advisory commission at some stage on Capitol Hill, which could consult with the administration regarding the negotiations with Russia. When the process was completed, this commission could endorse the resulting accommodation and help prevent dissension in Congress. Otherwise, if the accommodation with Russia were perceived as involving fairly significant concessions and were to become the subject of public debate, it could undercut support for the ratification process on the Hill.

Dr. Brzezinski also thought it very important to enhance coordination on enlargement both between the executive and the legislative branches and within the executive branch itself. The Clinton administration in its first term showed considerable cohesion among the principals on this subject. He expressed hope that each of the new second-term principals, as well as second-echelon officials in key departments, such as State, would be equally supportive.

In the long run, it will also be important to provide specific U.S. assurances and arrangements for the Baltics. But more important, it must be made clear that the first expansion is the beginning of a process that is not going to be

delayed excessively. Dr. Brzezinski contended that U.S. clarity and commitment on this issue is more important to the Baltic states (and in the long run to others such as Ukraine) than any specific, concrete, intermediate arrangements. Such short-term policies will not compensate for lack of clarity on the issue of a second enlargement, and might in fact provoke greater anxiety.

It must be understood that we are engaged in a historical process that will build a larger Europe to which America and Russia are related. This is in effect the great stake involved in this enterprise, and it means that not only the next three months will be decisive, but also how the alliance positions itself in the longer run.

## **Discussion**

In the question-and-answer period that followed Dr. Brzezinski's remarks, he was asked whether there was any possibility of building better relations with Russia on issues of NATO enlargement. Brzezinski noted that some leaders in Russia have a more enlightened view on this issue. Not politically "in the loop" but certainly meriting respect is former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, who has admitted that he does not share the official view on enlargement. General Aleksandr Lebed, who enjoys significant popular support in Russia, has made it quite clear that he thinks the Russian elite are locking Russia into isolation, and that NATO enlargement is not a threat to his country's security.

Dr. Brzezinski reiterated that the West would be in a much better position if we exposed publicly the game Russian leaders who oppose enlargement are playing. Otherwise, we legitimize Russian concerns and take for granted that the NATO threat to Russia is real and must be minimized. Dr. Brzezinski warned that NATO will not have the best accommodation possible with the Russians if it negotiates a charter on grounds defined by Moscow. To achieve the best accommodation, the arrangement must be reciprocal so that the West gains transparency and access to parts of Europe that are not in NATO, including the European parts of Russia. This ought to be the fundamental strategic objective of the negotiations-not merely to purchase Russian accommodation to NATO expansion, which will be tenuous at best to obtain.

A participant in the working group noted that much of the U.S.-Russian security relationship is related not to enlargement but to a 1994 bilateral agreement to develop a strategic partnership or special relationship. To put these activities on hold until the ratification process is completed would reduce relations with Russia to the single issue of enlargement and send exactly the wrong signal-that we are not ultimately concerned with arriving at an appropriate role for Russia in European security consultations.

In response, Dr. Brzezinski felt that it was important to differentiate between activities that would take place regardless of NATO enlargement and arrangements with Russia discussed specifically in the context of

enlargement. The latter should depend on the achievement of NATO enlargement, especially if they are to enhance Russia's status. Otherwise, an alliance with Russian participation might be transformed into a looser, vaguer alliance, but one without the minimal compensation of enlargement. Such an imbalance in outcomes would stimulate political repercussions domestically and elsewhere.

In response to a question concerning the current ambiguity regarding possible Russian membership in NATO, Dr. Brzezinski felt it unwise to tell Russia that it could in time become a member, given that this is unlikely and undesirable in the foreseeable future. There is nothing to gain by saying no, and we cannot say a flat yes. He noted that some of our allies, such as German Minister of Defense Volker Ruehe, have been more intellectually honest and opposed Russia's admission, yet there is really not much to be gained by such a position. A member of the working group noted that creative ambiguity is the current policy of the Administration toward Russia.

Turning to the various policy positions of our allies, a number of participants commented on the reluctance in some European capitals to pursue a second round of enlargement. Brzezinski noted that there is some uncertainty among allies concerning whether to move beyond the first round. In this case, enlargement should be looked at in terms of stages. Once the first round has taken place, there will likely be a realization that the tremendous fears and dire predictions voiced by the Russians did not materialize. At this point, Europeans will question whether they can afford to exclude from NATO countries with which they have significant links and ties. For example, there are strong emotional ties between the Germans and the Latvians and Estonians. Even today there is strong Danish pressure to include the Baltic states in NATO, and some positive signals from non-NATO members, such as Finland and Sweden.

However, Brzezinski cautioned that there is no need to "overload the circuits" by discussing in official circles specific countries and dates for subsequent rounds of enlargement. A better strategy would be to accept no more than three new members at Madrid in July, and, after a few years, invite additional members. This would establish credibility that the enlargement process is moving forward, and that a third enlargement of NATO might include the Baltic states. If the alliance accepts four or five new members this year, it might be assumed in Baltic capitals that a secret American-Russian agreement exists to effectively exclude them from NATO.

Brzezinski was asked if anything could be done in the short term to reassure the Baltic countries and other aspirants not selected in the first round that their security is important to the United States. In response, he applauded programs already under way such as the Partnership for Peace, but stated that they are no substitute for a clearly articulated intention to continue to expand in the reasonably foreseeable future. In his opinion, this intention should be stated explicitly by the president, not the secretary of state. While President Clinton said this in a meeting with the three Baltic presidents in July 1996, he should reiterate this vision again and again.

When asked about the increasing opposition to enlargement in the U.S. media and much of academia, Dr. Brzezinski acknowledged that the debate lately has been dominated by the critics in an almost concerted campaign. What should be done to offset this criticism? According to Dr. Brzezinski, the Administration should do more. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has shown clearly that she is committed to enlargement; President Clinton made a good reference to it in his State of the Union Address. However, this matter cannot be left entirely to the secretary of state to support, or this support may come to look more like a personal crusade than administration policy. The president should consider delivering a major speech discussing the broad strategic and historic significance of this initiative.

At the close of the meeting, Stanley Roth, director of research and studies at the Institute, discussed topics for future sessions, such as the NATO-Russia Charter, enhancing the Partnership for Peace, and the Ukraine-NATO special relationship. The results of the discussion sessions will be summarized in an Institute Special Report.

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