NATO Enlargement: Will Warsaw Deliver?

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INTRODUCTION

In a completely new security context after Russian agression against Ukraine NATO is reviewing all fundamental principles, which has driven its decisions over the last two decades. Enlargement, the Alliance's primary policy to realise the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace, should be — and has been — no exception.

With the first post-Cold War enlargement in 1999, which included Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, NATO acted on its commitment to the Open Door Policy. Based on Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, the new policy was launched in 1994 in parallel with a new Partnership Policy. Since then the Alliance has grown to 28 members, overcoming the post-Yalta divisions of the European continent into spheres of influence.

JUSTIFYING ENLARGEMENT: EVOLVING ACCENTS

All NATO nations remain committed to the Open Door Policy. The policy is defined as a process by which a) European nations that are not members of NATO, if willing to do so, can move closer to the Alliance and eventually, b) upon fulfillment of the membership criteria and c) based on a political judgment by NATO nations, are allowed to become members of the club. The relative value of these considerations has evolved over time.

While the first post-Cold War round of enlargement was driven by political motivations, all subsequent rounds were based on a more systematic approach. This was embodied in the elaborate structure of the Membership Action Plan (MAP), which was inaugurated at the very 1999 Washington summit that marked the entry of the first three nations of "new Europe": the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The MAP, covering political, economic, defence, resource, security and legal aspects, reflected the understanding that the growing number of applicants had to be better prepared for membership, particularly in reforming the defense sector and enhancing interoperability, based on a systematic feedback from NATO.

In the technical logic of the MAP, the political aspect, while present, was less clear. Perhaps it was also perceived as less necessary in a more benign strategic environment, which called for out-of-area "wars of choice" rather than territorial wars of survival.

All rounds of NATO post-Cold War enlargement — or "expansion" as the Russians prefer to call it — were accompanied by debates on Russia's potential reactions and the enlargement's possible effects on European security in the long term. NATO tried to overcome the difficulties in close cooperation with Russia through an institutionalised and substantial partnership by not placing significant forces in new member states and promoting a space of cooperative security in Europe, with Russia as its part.

Nevertheless, the limitations of cooperation between NATO, an alliance of democratic states ready to support and defend common values, and Russia, which perceives those values as a threat to its security interests, has revealed itself already in 1999, when NATO, acting on moral grounds but without UN approval, launched its first out-of-area operation in the Balkans against Serbia, a Russian ally. Less than a decade later, in 2008, the Russian-Georgian war served as a warning sign that Russia was ready to use force to support frozen conflicts, undermine the territorial integrity of neighbours and pre-emptively counter potential NATO expansion.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and support for the separatists in Eastern Ukraine was the most blatant evidence so far that Russia perceives the post-Soviet space as its own sphere of influence and views the extension of Western institutions as a potentially existential threat. Russia not only demonstrated it was ready to use its military might against the neighbours but also undermined the legal framework which served as the basis for cooperation in Europe during the Cold War and afterwards.

Additionally, Russian aggressive opposition to deployment of U.S. missile defence systems in new member states, offensive capabilities deployed close to NATO borders, ability to quickly mobilize forces and open threats against NATO and EU nations send a clear message that Russia may be ready to escalate tensions or even to exploit its regional military supremacy if its security interests are not taken into consideration.

Hence, before the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, the allies are confronted with a new security paradigm and face a strategic dilemma: how to reconcile the commitment to the Open Door Policy with the political and military reality in which Russia remains an important partner for many Western countries but at the same time may pose a grave threat for NATO.

OLD CRITERIA, NEW CONTEXT

The current debate over NATO enlargement has seen a full-scale renaissance of the third condition for membership, the political-strategic question of whether the accession of new countries would benefit the security of the Alliance. Thus, NATO has come full circle not only in refocusing on its original mission of collective defence with a strong emphasis on territorial defence, but also in thinking about its future enlargement.

In the new age of confrontation with President Putin and the regime elites the "Russia factor" permeates NATO's discussions with renewed vigour. It is inevitable that the impact of NATO's enlargement will have a negative influence on the relations with Russia. The opponents, vocally represented by Germany, are concerned that taking in new members or moving candidates closer to membership, especially from the post-Soviet area, would provoke Russia and cause unforseeable countermeasures on the part of Moscow, whose impact on NATO might be more severe than in the past. The argument goes that the Alliance should take a double-track approach to Russia. On the one hand it should stick to values and be ready to defend itself, but on the other it should avoid confrontation which would affect border states; and at the same time maintain the ability for pragmatic cooperation with Russia in areas of common interest. Today's "Russia first" camp has narrowed its arguments when compared to the past. Avoiding Russia's negative reactions on the international stage is a prime concern,

while the enlargement's potential impact on internal Russian politics, such as weakening the opposition, have not featured much in the current debate.

The proponents of enlargement, including Poland, point to the fact that delaying progress on enlargement, far from placating Russia, may actually validate its policies and invite more aggressive behaviour. At the same time, the "NATO efficiency" argument, which has traditionally militated against hastive enlargement, has gained renewed currency. Apart from an interest in having sufficient capabilities to deter and neutralise the full spectrum of threats including from Russia, this school of thought is reinforced by the reality of defence austerity and the rather disappointing performance of some new members such as Slovenia or Albania, which may remind of earlier criticism on some of the new members because of their failure to meet the NATO suggested level of defence spending after the accession.[1]

It seems quite natural, that NATO's necessary rebalancing from crisis management and cooperative security towards collective defence, will require clear political will and operational ability to defend any new member state. It will also require that new member states are security producers, not consumers. Overextension must be avoided: an overly ambitious enlargement may deepen the already diversified threat perceptions within the Alliance and in time of serious crisis will make it even more difficult to assure smooth and timely political decision making based on consensus. This could be further aggravated if countries are allowed to join the Alliance despite the opposition from public opinion and the lack of political consensus.

While serious in their nature and laudable in their intention, these arguments should be weighed carefully in each case. It is therefore useful as a next step to study the candidates as they have lined up ahead of NATO's next summit in Warsaw, as well as the political and military realities in the regions which they find themselves in.

MONTENEGRO

NATO Heads of State and Government agreed at the Newport summit that Foreign Ministers will assess Montenegro's progress no later than the end of 2015 with a view to deciding on whether to invite Montenegro to join the Alliance. The prospect looks realistic now that Montenegro's bid was recently conditionally supported by the United States.[2]

Montenegro has only 2000 active military personnel, relies on outdated equipment and spends 1.2% GDP on defence. However, it has put peace support operations high on the agenda to increase its chances for membership and demonstrate it can be a security provider. It contributed up to 45 soldiers to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and symbolic numbers (1-3 individuals) to EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) and EU Force in Central African Republic.

But still after six years (since 2009) of intense interaction in the MAP, lingering uncertainties remain in NATO about Podgorica's candidacy. Its intelligence and security

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[1]Welch, D. „Suspend NATO membership", The Budapest Sun, 18.01.2007. http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1769779/posts

2 *„Readout of the Vice President's Call With Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic"*, The White House, 19.09.2015. https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/14/readout-vice-president%E2%80%99s-call-montenegrin-prime-minister-milo-djukanovic

apparatus has been under intense scrutiny for possible infiltrations by Russia. Could it become a Russian Trojan Horse inside NATO? Will it provide a meaningful military contribution or with NATO taking care of its airspace will it remain a free rider as it has been the case with some smaller members? Will Montenegro's divided political class and insufficient public support complicate Alliance decision making?

These arguments certainly have their weight. NATO must try to make sure that the positive dynamics created by pre-accession efforts continue. It did so with the past candidates by requiring government-approved reform action plans and other political commitments. Indeed, the White House also called on Podgorica to ensure that reforms continue and public support rises further.

However, passing up on the opportunity to invite Montenegro in time for the Warsaw summit would be a major error. The Podgorica government has a history of standing up for its interests: it gained autonomy from the Serbian Orthodox Church in the late sixties and early seventies; claimed sovereignty from Serbia; and most recently, supported EU sanctions against Russia despite pressure from Moscow. It is the region's only nation without border disputes. Pre-accession talks with the EU are ongoing, which should be helpful in tackling rule of law and corruption issues. Montenegro's solidifying democracy is the region's beacon of hope. Even if Montenegro offers little military added value for NATO, its accession would have a significant and positive political effect. Podgorica's successful bid for NATO is of strategic regional importance in that it can attract Serbia closer to the European Union, strengthening the long term stability of the whole Western Balkans. Without such a move, Russia is sure to fill the vacuum, which will sooner or later bring further instability to a region that in the past has repeatedly undermined the security of the whole continent.

GEORGIA

Georgia is NATO's most passionate and most controversial candidate. It was one of the first former Soviet republics to join NATO's Partnership for Peace programme in 1994. Although at their 2008 Bucharest summit NATO leaders were unable to find consensus on granting Georgia MAP status, they nevertheless made a political commitment that it will become a member of the Alliance in the future. Just a few months later, in August 2008, Moscow's blitzkrieg left Georgia with one fifth of its territory occupied by Russia. Georgia's case thus illustrates NATO's long-term dilemma perfectly: Will the accession of Georgia enhance or jeopardize NATO security? Many countries in NATO remain totally cold on providing Article 5 guarantees to any government without total control of its territory. Even with the potential exclusion of the separatist regions from Article 5 guarantees, the new security environment would require an extensive NATO infrastructure and possibly a military presence in Georgia to deter or to defend against Russia.

The issue at hand, however, is whether or not to graduate Georgia into the Membership Action Plan. By the Warsaw summit in 2016, Tbilisi will have spent 10 years in the Intensified Dialogue, a precursor to the MAP. It has passed the democratic elections test, reformed its military and provided major support to ISAF, becoming the largest non-NATO contributor (1560 troops) and demonstrating that it can be security provider. It also maintains a rather substantial military force with 37,000 active personnel (more than Finland), of which 10,000 are trained to the highest NATO standards, and earmarks a hefty 2.3% GDP on defence (more

than most NATO members in terms of GDP percentage). It also reformed its command and control systems and invested in new types of armaments, thereby significantly enhancing its ability to defend national territory, which by itself should have a certain deterrent effect against Russia.

Some allies want to have none of the idea of a MAP for Georgia. They argue that Russia will intensify its provocations against the West, increasing the risk of a serious incident that may trigger an escalation which can turn into a war. Russia is working hard to make the West believe that this scenario is likely. Is it enough to deprive Georgia of the hope that it can become a full member of the Euro-Atlantic community? There are at least three reasons to stay on course. First, the MAP today does not automatically mean membership tomorrow. The larger questions can be addressed on the go. Second, backtracking on Georgia would embolden Russia to pursue the same strategy in Ukraine.

Most importantly, Georgia needs a vision, a qualitative improvement over the "substantial package" it received at the Wales summit, which included defence capacity building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison, and enhanced interoperability opportunities. The summit in Warsaw should address the issue of the MAP for Georgia proactively; it is questionable whether any other compensation measure, such as a new NATO military training and evaluation centre, would provide the momentum that is necessary.

UKRAINE

Ukraine, which in peacetime maintained a 130,000-strong military, is not only strategically positioned to strengthen the stability of the post-Soviet space and the Balkans but also to contribute to international security at large. Since 1992 more than 35,000 Ukrainian servicemen have been on peace and crisis management operations around the globe, initially under the UN flag but with a growing contribution to NATO operations. In 1996 it participated in the NATO-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with later commitments including KFOR in Kosovo (184 personnel), Iraq NATO Training Mission (37), ISAF in Afghanistan (26), Resolute Support in Afghanistan (10) and NATO's naval operation *Active Endeavour*. Given such involvement Ukraine gained recognition as the Alliance's only partner nation involved in all major NATO stability operations. It has also offered invaluable help by providing a strategic airlift capability and other air transport capabilities for crisis management operations.

For a long time, Ukraine travelled on a parallel path to Euro-Atlantic integration with Georgia. The signing of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1997 gave formal recognition to the importance of Ukraine to the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. It was also promised membership but there is very little clarity about how to go forward with this commitment. Ukraine is now fighting Russian forces on its soil; Moscow seems bent on achieving the same objective it did with Georgia, namely to block the nation's integration with the West by taking or destabilising a part of its territory.

Since Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Ukraine's East, Western governments have resisted calls to provide Ukraine weapons to defend itself against Russia. NATO pretends it does not hear the occasional call by President Poroshenko or Prime Minister Yatsenyuk to grant Ukraine membership in NATO. The message from the West is that Ukraine must help itself before it can expect help from anyone else.

From a NATO perspective, Ukraine's membership is a distant prospect. Russia already demonstrated that it is ready to use military force and change borders to block Ukrainian integration with the West. Prominent thinkers including Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski and François Heisbourg[3] suggested that Ukraine should be "Finlandized" as a core element of a new relationship with Russia. According to Wolfgang Ischinger, rather than remaining a frontline, Ukraine should become a bridge between Russia and the West. Whatever the description, in practice it seems even more unlikely than before that NATO will be able to agree consensus on Ukrainian membership anytime soon. Additionally, with full implementation of the Minsk II agreements offering a quasi-autonomy for the eastern regions the country itself would be unable to agree on the accession.

But being a key nation in Russia's global strategy, Ukraine must take a more central place in NATO's strategy as well. Western nations must seize the moment and ramp up bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation with Ukraine, not excluding upfront the provision of lethal weaponry if needed to defend its territorial integrity.

The fact that after years of training and support by NATO, Ukraine's armed forces in Crimea crumbled without Russia firing a shot, is a memento about the effectiveness of NATO cooperation and scope of investments, which should translate into the new, more effective Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative. Ukraine's (as well as Georgia's) direct experience with Russia's New Generation Warfare should also influence NATO's own planning. The Alliance urgently needs a new strategy for hybrid warfare (while remembering that Russia may not use the same tactics twice to achieve strategic surprise). Both nations have important contributions to make in order for NATO to learn from the current conflict and adapt for the future.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Unfortunately, in the words of a senior Slovak diplomat, both Bosnia and Macedonia find themselves in "the corner of the cellar you don't visit anymore to look for marmalade".

Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a military of 10,000 troops on active duty, has been increasing its contribution to UN, EU and NATO peacekeeping and crisis management operations. It deployed up to 80 people to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and participates in three UN missions in Africa and Europe (UNFICYP, UNMIL, UNMISS). While spending a meagre 1% GDP on defence, Sarajevo works hard to present itself as a security provider and not a consumer reliant on international support.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose accession to the MAP is conditioned on the legal control of military property by the state, has struggled to overcome the constitutional limbo of the Dayton Agreement, which makes all policy decisions dependent on the three ethnic entities - Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. The nation continues to be politically fragile, requiring the presence of EU forces with an executive mandate. It is symptomatic that EU operation ALTHEA in BiH territory remains one of the few things the three entities can agree on, as repeatedly pointed out by former High Representative for Bosnia Miroslav Lajčák. Republika

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[3] F. Heisbourg "Preserving Post-Cold War Europe" Survival: Global Politics and Strategy 57:1, 5 February 2015, p. 31-48.

Srpska, who once flirted with approving NATO entry, has conditioned its support on Serbia's move in the same direction. This underscores the importance of NATO's relations with Serbia, whose gradual improvement is likely to unlock the stalemate in Bosnia as well. Bosnia's MAP status also represents a paradox given NATO's reticence vis-à-vis Georgia, an apparently much more viable candidate in terms of preparedness for membership whose accession to the MAP, as described earlier, is being blocked on political grounds.

MACEDONIA

Macedonia's efforts to join NATO date back to 1993, when the national assembly adopted a declaration on accession, arguing that potential membership would strengthen the fragile state and help promote stability in the volatile Balkan region. Macedonia's 10,000-strong military contributed 150 troops to ISAF and the EU's ALTHEA operation in Bosnia. It also participates in the EU Battle Group concept to enhance its chances of accession both to EU and NATO. Unfortunately, Macedonia should be a powerful memento of how a country can fall apart after losing its prospects for a European and Atlantic future.

A nearly unbelievable conflict with Greece over its constitutional name has plagued its candidacy. Although there seemed to be a chance to resolve the issue after Macedonia made a number of concessions, in 2008 Greece started to block Macedonia's accession to both NATO and the EU. NATO nations, for their part, have failed to exercise enough pressure on Greece, a NATO member, to remove this only hurdle to Macedonia's membership. It is thus partly NATO's collective fault that the multi-ethnic, fragile nation, now in the 16th iteration of the MAP, has progressively disintegrated as a functioning political entity. This was epitomized when people took to the streets in May this year over government wiretapping and police brutality. Macedonia has fallen very far from EU and NATO standards. This evolution may well be in Russia's interest. Indeed, Moscow came out in defence of the regime during the protests. Economic interests may influence broader geopolitical calculations: Macedonia's territory seems to have unique value for the southern expansion of Gazprom's pipeline system. Although it has been orthodoxy that Macedonia will join NATO as soon as the name issue is resolved, this maxim may no longer be true.

SWEDEN AND FINLAND

And then there is the issue of the potential accession of Sweden and Finland, which are not officially candidate countries but need the Open Door Policy to better balance their relations with Russia. Both countries run the policy of non-alignment, although the understanding of the status has evolved substantially as they are members of the European Union, which developed its Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Both have been very active in CSDP perceiving it as the main vehicle to strengthen international stability. Sweden also made a unilateral "declaration of solidarity", indicating that it will not be passive if any EU or Nordic state is attacked.

Sweden has 14,000 personnel and spends 1.2% GDP on defence. Finland has 36,500 active military personnel and spends 1.3% GDP with modern equipment and power projection capabilities. Swedish and Finnish military and civilian capabilities have been regularly used in UN, EU and NATO operations with almost 600 and 200 personnel committed to the NATO-

led ISAF mission respectively. Both nations have had a standing invitation to join NATO, pending a national decision. Russia's actions around Ukraine have led to closer military collaboration with NATO, which has included the recent signing of host nation support agreements, which would facilitate the reception of NATO troops on their territory. They have also moved national debates towards a greater openness on the idea of joining the Alliance, with public support in Sweden now reaching historical highs.[4]

Both Finland and Sweden have a vital role to play in securing the Baltic Sea area in general and in closing NATO's vulnerability on the defence of its three Baltic members in particular. Moreover, both nations have a proven expertise in peace operations as well as in building the capacity of local forces, which is a booming dimension of NATO business. Therefore, the Alliance has an important interest in deepening the integration of both nations in all aspects of NATO planning. It must also be ready to initiate discussions on their potential membership as soon as these nations express an interest in doing so.

THE WAY FORWARD

There is a new geopolitical situation in Europe, with Russia openly and stubbornly rejecting the idea of partnership with the Euro-Atlantic community and demonstrating that it is ready to use force to block EU and NATO enlargement. Russia perceives it as a threat not because of fairylike offensive capabilities close to her borders but because of the positive, stabilizing power of the enlargement, which brings transparency and predictability. What is perceived by majority of European countries as a peace building mechanism, for Russia means the disappearance of her destabilizing potential, which it tries to employ far beyond the post-Soviet space. This is what is often described as a zero sum game, and where the democratic states sharing the same values and undemocratic Russia will have conflicting interests.

Although Moscow is probably more determined to defend the *status quo* on the post-Soviet space, it cannot be excluded that it will also resort to blackmail, coercion, hybrid or even conventional warfare to discourage any significant security changes close to Russian borders. In such a volatile environment the Euro-Atlantic community needs to tread carefully and focus on the following priorities:

1) Stop the war in Ukraine and help Kiev regain control over the Eastern part of the country,

2) Try to avoid escalation and a larger confrontation between NATO and Russia, which would first affect the Alliance's border states,

3) While it is important to limit the risks and build new relations with Russia, it is fundamental that the Alliance does not *de facto* approve of any new divisions in Europe by stalling the enlargement process.

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[4] O'Dwyer, G. „*New Poll Shows Sharp Shift in NATO Support*", Defense News, 17.09.2015, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/2015/09/17/new-poll-shows-sharp-shift-nato-support/32549641/

One of the strongest symbols that Western democracies do not follow the Russian logic of spheres of influence should be NATO's commitment to an Open Door Policy. The Policy serves a strong motivation for reforms based on the principles of the rule of law and civilian control of the military. In no way is it coercive: it reflects the non-members' sovereign decision on the future of their security arrangements.

In the run-up to the Warsaw summit and at the summit itself, NATO will have two practical and one conceptual imperative. One is to avoid losing Montenegro — and with it, the Western Balkans as a region — by inviting this country to membership. Another is to reconfirm the Euro-Atlantic perspective for Ukraine and Georgia. In the case of the latter, a further incentive to preserve a sense of forward movement is essential, ideally by giving Tbilisi the well-deserved MAP status. The conceptual challenge lies in making sense of the place of the enlargement policy in the larger agenda of NATO's strategic adaptation.

Will enlargement come to a standstill after Warsaw? If no technically viable candidates are left on the roster; if NATO and its nations fail to provide incentives to keep the candidates on board; if NATO's calculus vis-à-vis Russia elevates risk over advantage; if geopolitical realpolitik prevails over a values-based approach; if Russia succeeds in its massive disinformation campaign against the West; or if the parallel process of EU enlargement stalls — such developments could frustrate NATO's further enlargement in the near- to mid-term.

Ron Asmus's observation rings as true today as it did five years ago: "If the concept of enlargement is not to die, its supporters need to develop a new moral and strategic narrative for why further enlargement still matters and how policies should be modified to fit today's political realities." [5] It seems that allied debates since the Newport summit have brought some useful elements to support such a narrative. However, the policy framework is far from solidified. This should hardly come as a surprise as NATO as a whole struggles to adapt to a new, much more difficult geopolitical environment.

If this adaptation is to be successful, NATO policies cannot reflect the lowest common denominator of 28 members relations with Russia, which are often driven by short term interest rather than strategic vision. With Russia's attempts to reverse back history and with future of European order at stake it is absolutely necessary for Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, or the Visegrad Group, to continue their traditional support for Open Door Policy and set up a positive agenda for NATO ahead of the Warsaw summit in 2016. Together with other former Warsaw Pact members Bulgaria and Romania, supported by Baltic States directly occupied by the Soviet Union, they could send a strong message from the mini summit in Bucharest organized in November 2015. A voice of the countries, which were left behind the iron curtain losing chances for civilizational development for more than four decades, should be strong and clear.

In the view of the authors, enlargement and partnerships continue to have an essential role among the tools that in long term will allow to bring stability both to Europe as well as to the even hotter "ring of fire" right on Europe's borders. Refitting and resourcing these tools, as well as rearranging the whole toolbox, is an urgent policy challenge.

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[5] R. D. Asmus, "Is Enlargement Dead?" The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 10 May 2010, p. 2.

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