

Open NATO's Door Carefully

At its Madrid Summit in 1997, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took the important decision to invite three new members—Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—to join the alliance. This landmark step will help stabilize an historically unstable region and bring major security benefits to all of Europe. But it also raises a number of difficult questions for the alliance and the Clinton administration. How should NATO's open door policy be managed? Should a second tranche be admitted soon, and who should join? What should be the standards for selecting new members? How far can NATO enlarge without weakening itself and damaging Europe? Above all, what is NATO trying to achieve?

We have strongly supported NATO enlargement from the onset. But with the Washington summit of April 1999 fast approaching, we believe that it is time to take a hard look at the future process of enlargement. Enlargement is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end. It needs to serve the alliance's vital interests and Europe's security as a whole. The present enlargement serves both goals; any further steps must do so as well.

The standards for future membership, however, remain vague. NATO currently is embracing not only an open door policy but also a loose set of political standards that will potentially allow many countries to qualify for membership in the coming years. Admitting all or most of them could have a detrimental impact on both NATO and Europe. But drawing the line may prove difficult.

In our view, future enlargement policy needs to be guided by a more explicit strategic rationale. Membership should not be granted simply as a re-

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ward for democratic conduct. This is a necessary but insufficient condition. Enlargement should occur only when it enhances NATO's core competency as a credible military alliance and produces compelling security benefits. New members must demonstrate an ability and willingness to carry out both NATO's old and new missions. Their inclusion must strengthen the alliance's ability to meet the new challenges it is likely to face in the twenty-first century.

A more explicit strategic rationale would keep the door open but would also help ensure that if further enlargement occurs, it will have a clear purpose and take place in discriminating, limited ways. This would maintain NATO's effectiveness and contribute to a stronger overall security architecture designed to consolidate peace in Europe.

Giving Enlargement a Strategic Rationale

Giving enlargement a more explicit strategic rationale would help to ensure that future expansion continues to receive strong Congressional support. The recent debate on ratifying the first tranche of new members made it clear that the Senate will not write a blank check for further enlargement. Many senators—even several who supported enlargement—expressed deep concerns about the impact of enlargement on NATO's effectiveness and cohesion. More than forty percent supported Senator John Warner's call for a legislated pause before further enlargement. The Senate will carefully scrutinize further enlargement proposals, and any effort to push through a hasty second round could face widespread opposition.

In addition to building stronger Congressional support, a more explicit strategic rationale would help to ensure that when further enlargement takes place, it is carried out wisely and with positive effects. For the United States, enlargement should be one part of a strategic policy aimed not only at stabilizing Europe, but also at adapting NATO to the new threats on Europe's periphery and beyond. The decision to admit the three new members served this agenda. So must any future enlargement.

Admitting the first tranche is already accomplishing a strategic purpose. Central Europe is becoming increasingly stable and secure. The countries of the region are developing market democracies, establishing civilian control over their militaries, and downsizing their force postures while upgrading their military quality to meet NATO standards. Historical disputes over borders are giving way to growing cooperation across the region. The new members are contributing to military missions on NATO's periphery. In short, the three new members are producing more security than they consume. NATO now needs to decide whether admitting additional members

will accomplish similarly worthy goals—and if so, which ones. It will be unable to make this critical calculation if it fails to make clear the strategic purposes that should be pursued by further enlargement.

In its September 1995 “Study on NATO Enlargement,” NATO proclaimed that enlargement must serve the alliance’s security interests. But the first round of enlargement has created a dynamic that tends to discount strategic purposes and increasingly emphasizes looser, less discriminating political standards. These standards imply that virtually any European country can qualify for admission if it presents its credentials as a budding democracy with a free market economy, civilian control of the military, a responsible foreign policy toward its neighbors and a credible track record in the Partnership for Peace program. To be sure, these standards keep the door open, but they also deny NATO a strong and consistent rationale for saying “no” when its own security interests and strategic purposes are not served.

Four years ago, the architects of enlargement did not foresee the extent to which joining NATO would become a widely popular goal across Eastern Europe. In response to the open door policy and their newfound freedom to choose, 12 countries have signaled their desire for NATO membership, most of them proclaiming it a key to national salvation. When the first tranche is admitted, nine others will be left banging on the door, many offering plausible arguments that they meet—or will soon meet—NATO’s political standards. Three of these countries are located in or near Central and Eastern Europe, the geographic focus of current enlargement policy. Three others are located in the Baltic region, and the remaining three are situated in the Balkans. Moreover, the list of potential candidates does not necessarily end there. Austria, Sweden, and Finland have not yet applied but at some point they might, and all of them already meet most NATO political standards. Ukraine—and even Russia—could also decide to apply some day.

Most of the actual and potential European applicants view NATO membership as a step to advance their own interests. They want to belong to the Western club as an end in itself, but they also have tangible security goals in mind. Few perceive themselves as threatened in the near term, but they are uncertain of the long term, and knowing Europe’s troubled history they want an insurance policy. Facing the need to plan their military postures for a decade or two, most realize it would be difficult to defend themselves on their own if the security environment deteriorates.

Future NATO enlargement policy needs to be guided by a more explicit rationale.

Nor do they want to spend large sums on military preparedness, which would detract from their economic recovery. Membership in NATO provides strong protection and a means to meet unfulfilled defense requirements on the cheap. While they want to participate in NATO, many are not strongly committed to protecting other countries or to contributing to other NATO missions in significant ways.

This self-centered approach is understandable, but it could have a negative impact on NATO's cohesion and effectiveness. NATO's approach needs to reflect a stronger strategic calculus. Deliberations to date—at least those made in public—have tended to focus too much on the political merits of individual countries rather than on NATO's own goals and strategy and the regional and theater-wide implications of admitting clusters of new members. Discussions about the next round of enlargement often seem propelled by the countries that plead the loudest and the candidates that are most effective at mobilizing a political constituency within NATO. Faced with this growing barrage of external pressures, there is a danger that NATO will engage in log rolling and will admit many countries to satisfy the wishes of the alliance's biggest powers and largest internal factions.

Toward a Bigger but Less Effective NATO?

Swift movement to a vastly bigger alliance could alter NATO's political and military character. Populating the North Atlantic Council—NATO's supreme decisionmaking body—with a large bloc of new members could significantly increase the number of countries with veto power over council decisions, thus making consensus and decisions all the harder to achieve. The effect would be compounded if some new members do not share NATO's strategic priorities. A vastly bigger NATO could come to resemble the less effective Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In such a case, NATO might still be able to perform some missions such as peacekeeping in cases in which a widespread political consensus exists. But its ability to perform other critical functions could be undermined in ways that erode its traditional character as an effective military alliance.

A weakened NATO resembling the OSCE would no longer serve as a reliable instrument of U.S. policy and commitments in Europe. American leadership and influence would decline. NATO's support for U.S. interests in Europe and elsewhere would also likely diminish. Owing to both changes, the transatlantic bond would erode. Militarily, the United States would make defense guarantees to NATO's members with less confidence that the necessary allied forces and support assets would be available. Nor could it count on allied help in carrying out other military operations in Europe and

beyond. The growing technology gap between U.S. and European forces could widen to the point that combined operations were no longer possible. In this setting, the rationale for continuing to station large U.S. forces in Europe and make other military commitments would weaken.

If NATO enlarges indiscriminately, it will acquire a steadily growing number of functions that could diminish the emphasis on other bodies, including the OSCE. In essence, NATO would become Europe's entire security architecture rather than merely one part of it. In all likelihood NATO could not perform all of these new functions effectively. In the process, it could lose its current core competency to conduct major military operations when they are needed. If this happens, European security will be weakened not only because other institutions are doing too little, but because NATO is trying to do too much while becoming increasingly unable to do what is still essential.

NATO's well-honed ability to forge unified defense policies among its European members is also likely to erode. The Defense Planning Committee and the Military Committee already have trouble monitoring the military preparedness of 16 nations. They would have far greater trouble if NATO expands to embrace a significantly larger number of members. NATO's force planning process could become so encumbered with managing the military affairs of new members that it could lose its capacity to meet requirements and carry out improvement programs for current members, which still provide the alliance's main military muscle. An alliance of many more nations would be hard-pressed to achieve the consensus needed to pursue a coherent long-term defense. It could be diverted from launching such new initiatives as better power projection and counterproliferation. NATO might continue defending current members, but it is not likely to develop the better forces needed to perform other operations.

Nor would a significantly larger alliance necessarily produce a more stable Europe or even render all the new members secure. If NATO itself is weakened, new members could find themselves deprived, ironically, of the credible security guarantees that led them to seek NATO membership in the first place. This unsatisfactory result could leave them still searching for security in other ways—a destabilizing trend that enlargement was originally intended to avoid. Moreover, potential rogues would be unimpressed by a bigger but sclerotic NATO that was steadily losing the political will and military power to contest aggression.

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The same judgment applies doubly to the daunting task of forging a new NATO southern strategy and preparing for new security missions both inside Europe and beyond its borders. Growing threats from the South mean that in the coming years NATO may need to prepare defenses against weapons of mass destruction to better protect its interests in and around Europe. If NATO enlarges too quickly, it may be unable to carry out this important strategic shift.

In the worst case, NATO thus could be transformed into a big but diluted and ineffective alliance that can neither consolidate Europe's peaceful unification nor meet the new challenges to common Western interests, many of which come from the South. This danger does not argue against further enlargement or the maintenance of an open door policy *per se*. But it does mean that if enlargement proceeds beyond the first tranche, it must do so in ways that are prudent and strategically make sense.

Establishing a Strategic Purpose

To avoid these dangers, further enlargement needs to be informed by a clear strategic purpose. This requires establishing firm priorities so that NATO's security focus is not lost amidst a welter of secondary concerns. A clearer strategic purpose would not replace NATO's existing political standards for admitting new members. Instead, it would supplement them with firm strategic standards that enhance, not undermine, NATO's security needs.

A strategic purpose would be neither loosely political nor threat-based. NATO would not admit new members simply because they are aspiring democracies that want to join, nor would it enlarge to prepare for a renewed threat to Europe. Thus a strategic purpose is neither anti-Russian nor narrowly military. It views Russia as a budding democracy and partner, not as a future threat. It wants to preserve an effective NATO because this kind of alliance is needed to consolidate Europe's peace while defending common interests elsewhere. It calculates that the future will be better served by a NATO that is still effective and can truly generate power and security than by a big but diluted NATO that no longer can perform this critical function. Rather than denying the continuing centrality of security affairs, it seeks to orchestrate their evolution in ways that advance Western interests, strengthen NATO, and help create a peaceful and unified Europe.

A strategic purpose would focus on enhancing NATO's own capacity to handle future security challenges. It would aspire to create a new and better NATO for the twenty-first century, a NATO that still provides collective defense but can also perform new European missions, project power outside Europe, and work with the United States to help defend common interests

in distant regions. It would not call upon NATO to abandon its traditional functions so that it can perform new functions. NATO must preserve its established character as an effective military alliance for two reasons. The alliance's borders must always be safeguarded against unexpected surprises, even in a peacetime era when old threats no longer exist and are not anticipated to return. In addition, NATO's new function of projecting power and stability outward can be performed only if NATO maintains its ability to provide for the collective defense of its members. The best way for NATO to be able to carry out new missions is to remain good at performing traditional, still important missions in ways that respond to Europe's new security situation.

A strategic purpose would also support a conscious external security strategy inside and outside of Europe and would use further enlargement to help carry it out. A strategic purpose would be anchored not in containment and deterrence but in a new, forward-looking NATO strategy aimed at shaping the peacetime environment, responding to a wide spectrum of contingencies, and preparing adaptively for an uncertain future. It would pursue two fundamental goals. The first goal would be to consolidate NATO's already successful eastern enlargement by taking prudent steps to promote integration and stability and to prevent competition and conflict in Central Europe. The other goal would be to configure NATO so that it could pursue a robust southern strategy in Europe and beyond, defending both borders and common interests. Enlargement would not be viewed as an enterprise unto itself but as an instrument for supporting this strategy and set of goals. It should be coordinated with other policy instruments, including NATO's internal adaptation and efforts to create a more effective European security architecture.

Accordingly, a strategic purpose would establish firm standards for guiding further enlargement, so that the door is kept open but new members are admitted only when this step makes strategic sense and furthers NATO's security interests. These standards would permit admission of new members when:

- Admitting them directly supports NATO's own interests, strategy, and security goals.
- NATO can effectively absorb and integrate new members and truly offer them collective defense protection.
- Candidates are willing and able to contribute significantly to performing

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the alliance's new and old security missions; that is, be able to produce security for NATO as a whole, not just consume it.

- NATO's own cohesion, decisionmaking, and military effectiveness at carrying out old and new missions is enhanced, not diminished.
- Admission will meaningfully enhance Europe's stability as a whole and not trigger new instabilities.
- Alternative measures will not produce similar positive effects at less risk of overextending NATO.

These standards are meant to create flexible guidelines, as called for by NATO's enlargement study, rather than rigid strictures that make it nearly impossible for any country or group of countries to join NATO. In applying them NATO should be guided by common sense. In special circumstances exceptions to some specific standards can be made. The intent of these guidelines is not to bring enlargement to a screeching halt, but to help discipline what otherwise could become an unruly process that admits too many countries, and the wrong countries, in ways that ultimately damage NATO and European security.

In the long run, U.S. interests and European stability will be better served by a reliable NATO that can produce security rather than merely talk about it. Moreover, a still cohesive NATO will be better able to turn its attention outward and southward. If NATO meets these challenges effectively, the transatlantic bond will be strengthened rather than weakened and the alliance will remain the main instrument for addressing challenges to common U.S. and European interests.

Enlarging in Slow, Limited Ways

Rather than closing the door, further enlargement should unfold slowly, in a selective and discriminating manner. A slow enlargement will give NATO breathing room to digest its initial new members, to survey Europe's situation, and to make its judgments in a judicious manner. True, a slow and deliberative process may frustrate some prospective candidates. But over the long haul, they will be better served by a NATO that enlarges one step at a time, taking care to make sure that each phase is handled well.

For the near future, the top priority should be to ensure that the first tranche of new members is integrated into NATO effectively. This step is critical to making enlargement a success. Integrating the three new members will require a concerted effort to carry out the military dimensions of enlargement. The new members must be brought into the integrated command. Their forces must be downsized and endowed with a higher degree of readiness and modernization so that they meet NATO's standards for com-

patibility and interoperability. At the same time, NATO's current forces must be strengthened so that they can carry out new reinforcement commitments in Eastern Europe.

All of this will take time. But it is essential that it be done and done right. If it is not, it may be difficult to get Congress and the public to support future rounds of enlargement.

Some may argue that because the first tranche will fulfill NATO's top strategic priorities, there is no compelling need to enlarge further. But even though further enlargement may not be mandatory, this does not mean it fails to make strategic sense. The key point is that NATO enjoys the luxury of flexibility. It can choose for itself, depending upon how it assesses the tradeoffs of enlarging further. A strategic purpose argues that when the political, military, and economic costs outweigh the benefits, NATO should refrain. But when the benefits exceed the costs, NATO should admit new members, on a schedule that ensures they can be absorbed effectively. Much depends on not only the number of countries admitted but on their identities and surrounding circumstances.

Appraising the Candidates

One of the main problems regarding further enlargement is that there are no clear and obvious candidates for inclusion in a second round. Sweden, Finland, and Austria all qualify on democratic and economic grounds. They also have established strong civilian control over their militaries. But neither Finland nor Sweden presently feels a strong urge to join NATO or make the type of defense commitments that membership implies. This could change in the future, but for the moment NATO membership is not a top priority for either government.

The situation in Austria is quite different. The present ruling coalition is split, with the Peoples Party supporting NATO membership and the Social Democrats opposed. Public opinion polls indicate that a majority remain opposed to joining NATO. But Hungary's inclusion in NATO may accelerate the security debate in Austria and intensify pressure for Austria to join the alliance. Indeed, NATO could expect an application from Austria within the next three to five years.

Austrian membership would have important strategic advantages for NATO. It would provide access to Hungary in a crisis. It would also make rapid deployment of NATO troops to the Balkans easier. But favorable geography alone is not enough. Austria spends less than 1 percent of its gross domestic product on defense—well below the NATO average. Given our strategic standards, Austria would have to increase its defense spending and

restructure its military forces before it could seriously be considered for NATO membership. NATO cannot afford free riders.

In Central and Eastern Europe the picture is mixed. Slovakia provides a land corridor to Hungary, and the results of the September 1998 elections are a first step on the road to political rehabilitation. But its military, which had to be built from scratch after independence, is small and weak. Slovenia meets the economic and political criteria and also provides a land corridor to Hungary. But its military forces are also small and have no capacity for power projection.

A strong case can be made for Romania on strategic grounds. Romania occupies an important position in the Balkans and Black Sea region. It has

the potential to be the "Poland of the South" and could serve as an important staging area for peace support operations in the Balkans. But it needs to make more progress in political, economic and military reform before it can be considered for membership.

Like Romania, Bulgaria occupies an important strategic position in the Balkans. It

has also made some important strides toward creating a viable democratic system and market economy since the May 1997 elections. But it still has only begun the process and needs a fundamental restructuring of its military.

Albania and Macedonia, two other Balkan candidates, do not qualify on economic, political, or military grounds. They are major consumers of security, not producers of it. Bringing them into NATO in the foreseeable future would not strengthen NATO but would overextend and weaken it. Moreover, the security problems faced by these countries are largely ethnic and internal in nature and thus would not be resolved by NATO membership. This does not mean that NATO should not strengthen ties to these countries—only that NATO membership is not the best way to address their security problems.

The three Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—pose perhaps the most difficult dilemma. The Western community faces a moral imperative to ensure that these democratic countries are made secure. Militarily they are too poorly prepared to defend themselves, much less perform other NATO missions. Their forces may improve, but even so, NATO would be hard pressed to rush reinforcements to them in time to ward off major aggression. NATO needs to avoid making hollow Article 5 commitments that cannot be carried out when needed.

The Baltic issue is also a highly sensitive one for Russia. Although Russia

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has lately begun to pursue a more cooperative policy toward the Baltic region, it remains strongly opposed to the membership of the Baltic states in NATO. While NATO should not give Russia a *droit de regard* over its enlargement policies, as a practical matter NATO needs to be sensitive to Russia's concerns and work to reduce Russian anxieties. Early Baltic membership could create unintended instabilities in Europe.

Admitting the Baltic states is not out of the question, but NATO should do so only if its strategic purposes are served by such a move. In the meantime, NATO can enhance their security in other ways and at a lower risk of European instability. Helping them build strong governments, viable economies, and better military forces is an obvious step. Encouraging them to develop security ties with their Nordic neighbors, the United States, and other European powers is another sound step. Bringing them into the European Union would also give them not only enhanced economic prosperity but also closer ties to European democracies and a greater sense of security. If these measures were fully pursued, NATO membership could become less important because these countries will be secure without it.

The evolving security debate in Sweden and Finland will also have an important impact on the Baltic membership debate. Sweden and Finland have yet to express official interest in NATO membership. But there are those in both countries who seek to reverse that position. If Finland and Sweden at some point opt to join NATO, this would intensify pressure for an early decision on the Baltic States. So for now, having Sweden and Finland outside of NATO has some advantages. It leaves the Baltic states less isolated and makes the Baltic issue easier to manage.

This brief survey suggests that few of the applicants and potential applicants have indisputable merits across the board. If there is a case for admitting them, it originates in NATO's strategic interests, strategy, and goals in each region. But before deciding which countries to admit, NATO must first decide how enlargement helps achieve its broader strategic objectives. Once it defines its new purposes, deciding who should be invited will be easier.

Managing Relations with Russia and Ukraine

NATO also needs to be clear-headed about how Russia, Ukraine, and other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States fit into the enlargement calculus. Russia grudgingly accepted the first round of enlargement, but it is worried about further enlargement, especially if it is to bring NATO even closer to Russian territory. A slow and deliberate enlargement policy would help to defuse these concerns and give time for both sides to develop the Permanent Joint Council, which was established in May 1997 by the

Founding Act on Mutual Relations as a mechanism for deepening cooperation. Some commentators have worried that the council will give Russia a veto over NATO's decisionmaking. The real danger, however, is the opposite: that the two sides will fail to exploit the council's potential to the fullest and that it will languish. Both sides, therefore, need to work to make the council more effective or the future enlargement process will become more tumultuous.

Western states want a good partnership with Russia but this goal does not translate into the conclusion that Russia should join NATO in the foreseeable future. Because Russia is capable of defending itself, it does not need NATO's military protection. It is unlikely that the Russian military would be willing to accept NATO scrutiny over its forces and defense plans, especially in the nuclear area. NATO would be reluctant to accept legal responsibility for helping defend Russia's borders with China. Moreover, many NATO members—especially the new members—would be reluctant to have any security guarantee from Russia because in the past that guarantee served as the excuse for intervention. If Russia makes a full and successful transition to democracy, it should be welcomed as a member of the Western community and its institutions. But for the foreseeable future, the main task for NATO is to develop a more cooperative partnership with Russia through the Permanent Joint Council.

Ensuring Ukraine's sovereignty and independence is a key Western interest. Although this goal calls for NATO partnership with Ukraine, admitting Ukraine into NATO is not now a viable choice. Inviting Ukraine to join would enrage Russia even more than admitting the Baltic states. As a practical matter, NATO could not readily carry out Article 5 guarantees to Ukraine against a major military threat. NATO could defend Ukraine only by building a large military infrastructure in Eastern Europe that was configured for major power projection missions eastward. This step would further unsettle Russia.

Moreover, Ukraine has not yet demonstrated a convincing commitment to political and economic reform or established strong civilian control over its military. Thus for the foreseeable future other means short of membership need to be found to enhance Ukraine's security. The "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership" signed at the Madrid Summit in July 1997 is an important step in this direction. While it does not provide an explicit security guarantee, it contains provisions for increased cooperation in a variety of areas, including the military. The task in the immediate future is to give these provisions concrete content. At the same time, Ukraine should be encouraged to undertake a serious program of economic and political reform. Without the implementation of such a reform program, Ukraine's chances

of being integrated into broader Euro-Atlantic structures remain poor and its own internal security could be weakened.

Strengthening the European Security Architecture

Adopting a strategic purpose that produces a slow and limited NATO enlargement enhances the importance of building a better European security architecture. One reason is that NATO will not be growing to the point that it alone can become Europe's architecture. By being capable of projecting power and security, NATO can be a central part of this architecture but not a substitute for it. The second reason is that if a number of European countries are not likely to join NATO, alternative measures will have to be found to make them secure. This is especially the case for democratic countries that in the future find relations with their neighbors souring and have legitimate concerns about their own safety. These countries may be left outside NATO but they cannot be left out in the cold.

To operate effectively, the future European security architecture must be able to perform genuine security-generating functions rather than only peripheral functions. The best way to achieve this outcome is not to create new all-European institutions but to make better use of existing institutions. NATO already is exploring ways to broaden military exercises and collaborative programs under Partnership for Peace. An enhanced Partnership for Peace program can seek to upgrade the interoperability and overall quality of partner forces. Its members can also increase their work with NATO regional commands and combined joint task forces in preparing for a wide spectrum of operations, including non-Article 5 missions. If they are given a broader scope of new missions, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and OSCE can both be used to underscore the legitimate security concerns of countries not belonging to NATO and to promote those countries' cooperative multilateral ties with Western countries. In addition, the European Union and Western European Union (WEU) can increase their efforts to make other European countries feel secure through economic and military collaboration.

NATO could also do more to foster closer regional cooperation with non-NATO states. Such cooperation can serve to give non-NATO members a greater sense of security and provide reassurance. For example, in the Baltic region, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway have taken the lead in helping the Baltic states enhance their defense capabilities and integrating them into regional organizations such as the Baltic Sea Cooperation Council. Poland has established new defense links with Lithuania and Ukraine. In the south, Italy, Hungary, and Slovenia have created a joint peacekeeping

brigade and have begun conducting joint exercises. Turkey, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia have also recently set up a special multinational peacekeeping brigade. These regional security arrangements illustrate the ways in which NATO can enhance the security of countries without extending membership to them.

Finally, NATO could again consider creating a special associate status that would go beyond Partnership for Peace but would not involve an Article 5 security guarantee. NATO rejected the concept earlier, but the WEU's success with associate members calls for a reconsideration. Associate members could expect to become regular partners of NATO in a range of military operations. They would benefit from broader homeland military exercises with NATO forces and stronger consultative agreements than offered by Partnership for Peace or the "16+1" format. To date NATO has been unwilling to contemplate treaty relationships that fall short of full membership with its Article 5 security guarantee. During the Cold War this stance was the only viable approach for defending Western Europe against a theater-wide threat. But this is not necessarily the case in Europe today, where the threats are local rather than generic. Hence some sort of interim status that expands cooperation beyond Partnership for Peace but falls short of full membership may make sense in today's very different security environment.

Looking to the Washington Summit

At the Washington summit in April 1999, NATO will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The summit represents an important opportunity for NATO to set its strategic agenda for the next century. The main focus at the summit should be on revising NATO's strategic concept. The current concept, which was written before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Bosnia crisis, needs a major overhaul if the alliance is to adapt it to the new strategic environment. Preparing NATO to deal with the new strategic challenges it will face in the twenty-first century is the first order of the day. Enlargement should serve that larger purpose and be shaped by it.

At the same time, it is important for the administration to lay out the strategic rationale for further enlargement. This rationale should be directly linked to the nature of the new challenges NATO will face in the coming decades. Prospective new members should be selected not simply because they are building democratic systems and market economies, but because they strengthen NATO's ability to meet these new challenges. This is the best way to ensure that NATO remains the preeminent Western security organization in the coming century.