

## Russia in NATO?

In 1993 I proposed that NATO draw up a clear road map for expanding the alliance eastward to include not only the states of Central and Eastern Europe but also a democratic Russia. “Otherwise, the most successful alliance in history is destined to follow the threat that created it into the dustbin of history.”<sup>1</sup> The alliance did, of course, expand eastward and survive. Today, following the admission of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, nine other countries either have asked for membership consideration or have signaled an interest. By engaging in air missions and peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, NATO has enlarged its military mission to include out-of-area operations in a region whose troubles did not directly threaten the members’ security, but did threaten European stability. Now, with the invocation of the North Atlantic Treaty’s mutual defense obligations under Article 5 in response to the September terrorist attacks on the United States, the alliance is serving a more important role in Western security than at any other time since the end of the Cold War.

Russia, however, still waits outside the door. The idea that Russia could even be eligible for membership has been met with opposition and indifference, mainly because Russia has never been ripe for membership—because it has embraced democracy and free markets only rhetorically, without creating the institutions or exercising the political will necessary to commit itself fully. Accordingly, unwilling to consider marriage, the West has offered cohabitation arrangements—first the Partnership for Peace, then the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council—that have served useful functions without offering a satisfactory long-term solution. Then in 1997, over strong

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Russian objections, NATO admitted three former allies of the Soviet Union, without making it clear that Russia, too, would be eligible for membership if it embraced democracy and free markets. Meanwhile, Russia's historic distrust of NATO and of the United States, which had dampened at the beginning of the 1990s, flared back alive when NATO, a defensive alliance, took up arms in an offensive action against Russia's Slavic kinsmen and political allies in the 1999 Kosovo conflict. When the fighting ended, 96 percent of Russians either agreed or totally agreed with the proposition that "NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia is a crime against humanity," and 77 percent either agreed or totally agreed that "[t]here is nothing stopping NATO from getting involved in Russia as it did in Yugoslavia."<sup>2</sup> Those propositions are wrong, of course, but the poll results demonstrated the depth of Russian public antipathy toward the intervention. As the old millennium ended and the new one began, the never-strong possibility of Russian membership in NATO appeared to be dead.

Times have changed. Both Russia and the United States have new presidents. Russian president Vladimir Putin revived the NATO issue in a news conference in July, shortly before he met with President George W. Bush. "Putin challenged the Western alliance to either enroll Russia or disband, calling NATO a Cold War relic that will only continue to sow the seeds of suspicion in Europe as long as it excludes its onetime archenemy."<sup>3</sup> Bush also reportedly had "asked advisers ... about the wisdom of such an approach." The September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States are almost certain to accelerate discussion of the issue.

## **How Can Russia Join NATO?**

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The affirmative case for Russian eligibility for NATO membership is fairly straightforward and easy to make. The alliance has at least two implicit and at least five explicit criteria for admission. The first implicit requirement is that the candidate be a member of the Atlantic community—that is to say, the West. The second is that the candidate share important security concerns with the other members. Russia surely qualifies on both counts. Since the end of the Cold War, it has repeatedly declared its identification and wish to align with the West, a region that, for NATO's purposes, already extends eastward to Greece and Turkey. As for common security concerns, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington rattled nerves in Moscow as much as they did in Paris, Berlin, and other European capitals. Furthermore, we may assume this aggression will not be the last such challenge to Western security. Of course, the question of what constitutes "the West" cannot be answered satisfactorily by reference to maps. The term also carries large po-

litical, economic, and cultural meanings. One cannot imagine inviting into NATO a new member that opposes the fundamental values that serve as the foundation of the peace and prosperity of Western Europe and North America and as a basis for their shared culture. This notion helps explain why NATO, while denying it was adopting a “fixed or rigid list,”<sup>4</sup> in 1995 advised possible new members that they would be expected to conform with certain criteria, summarized as follows: (1) an established democracy (with individual liberty and the rule of law), (2) respect for human rights, (3) a market-based economy (with social justice and environmental responsibility), (4) armed forces under civilian control, and (5) good relations with neighboring states (with the resolution of internal ethnic disputes). These requirements more or less define what it means to be part of the West. They also make clear that NATO is something more than a military alliance. We are not agnostic about our allies’ domestic politics, economics, and cultural values, as a cold-eyed realist might be, because an essential purpose of the alliance is, and always has been, to promote one specific set of values—those associated with the West. What is most striking about these five criteria is that only one—good relations with neighboring states—is strictly relevant to the costs and benefits of admitting a new member to a military alliance. All the others are, by contrast, “soft” criteria that measure the character of new members as expressed by their domestic arrangements.

**Russia should be eligible to apply for admission to NATO.**

This stress on the importance of domestic arrangements—and the values they embody—can be found in the London Declaration of 1990, the foundational document for the post-Cold War transformation of NATO. “The walls that once confined people and ideas are collapsing,” the declaration said. “Europeans are choosing their own destiny. ... As a consequence, this Alliance must and will adapt.” The most important of those adaptations was the commitment found in this text:

[O]ur Alliance must be even more an agent of change. It can help build the structures of a more united continent, supporting security and stability with the strength of our shared faith in democracy, the rights of the individual, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. We reaffirm that security and stability do not lie solely in the military dimension, and we intend to enhance the political component of our Alliance as provided for in Article 2 of our Treaty.

Article 2, of course, expresses the economic, political, and social aspirations of the alliance and serves as something of a counterweight to the more famous defense commitments in Article 5. Among other things, the signato-

ries pledged to promote “peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles on which those institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being,” particularly through economic cooperation. I cannot imagine a better way to “enhance the political component” of the alliance than for NATO to consider the possibility that Russia, if and when it qualifies, be eligible for membership.

I do not argue that Russia now qualifies for NATO membership under the five above-mentioned criteria. Considering the problems that communism left behind, progress since 1991 has been great. Still, it is fair to say that the question of democracy is not entirely settled and that human rights—at least as embodied in press freedom, religious freedom, and due process—are less than totally protected. In addition, the economy does not meet Western standards. It lacks most of the legal and institutional elements of a free market that the West takes for granted, among them, private property; reliable contract laws; good corporate governance; and honest and efficient regulatory agencies, banks, and courts.

My point, however, is not that Russia should be admitted to NATO today, but that Russia should be eligible to apply for admission, with a firm commitment to membership if and when Russia has substantially satisfied the five explicit criteria. I believe this engagement would benefit both NATO and Russia. As I wrote in 1993:

NATO membership is not to be given easily. It entails serious responsibilities and real commitments. By offering the possibility of membership, the West creates powerful incentives for democratic reform at home and responsible behavior abroad. The leaders and peoples [of Russia] know NATO can offer them security assurances and provide an institutional context for preventing conflict. They know the vital role NATO membership played in anchoring West Germany to the West after World War II. They know the alliance can help achieve in [Eastern Europe] what it accomplished in postwar Western Europe: security for member states and stability for the region.<sup>5</sup>

## Why Not?

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If Russia wishes to join NATO and at some point in the future satisfies all of the criteria for membership, what is the problem? The problem is, of course, that many participants in this process impose one more condition for membership that Russia can never satisfy—namely, that the candidate not *be* Russia. To some extent, this sentiment reflects historical bias. NATO was formed to resist the threat of Soviet aggression against the West. Russia es-

entially controlled the Soviet Union. QED. Why admit to the alliance the very adversary against whom the alliance was formed?

Yet the policy reflects something more. Many in the West still regard Russia as a potential geopolitical rival. As they see it, NATO is an insurance policy against resurgent and possibly virulent Russian nationalism. No one, to my knowledge, suggests that this development is imminent; but at some point in the future, they believe, Moscow may come to regard expansion as the best answer to perceived threats or opportunities along its borders or elsewhere in what it regards as its area of influence. Although saying so may be impolitic, this theory of Russia's potential for mischief is the simplest explanation for NATO's apparent willingness to expand up to Russia's western border but not beyond.

In my view, however, keeping Russia out of NATO increases the risk of Russian expansionism, while making it clear that Russia would be eligible for admission to NATO (if it satisfies the criteria mentioned above) reduces that risk. I believe we degrade Western security by keeping Russia ineligible for admission to NATO, regardless of what it might do to meet the criteria. What largely goes unnoticed about NATO is that it is, in essence, a coalition of former adversaries. Only 10 years after the end of an extraordinarily destructive hot war, not a cold one, between Germany and most of the other current NATO members, West Germany was admitted in 1955. For France and Great Britain, embedding West Germany into a Western security structure was clearly one of the main reasons for supporting the creation of NATO. They were not only looking forward, toward a possible war with the Soviet Union, but back as well, to two very real wars with Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. Less noted, but perhaps even more astonishing, is that Germany's wartime ally, Italy, was one of the 12 original members when NATO was formed in 1949. Despite centuries of animosity and conflict with each other and with other NATO members, Greece and Turkey both joined in 1952. Indeed, if one looks back far enough, all sorts of historic rivalries have been submerged into NATO, involving, among others, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. More recently, all of the members admitted since the fall of the Berlin Wall—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and (through unification) East Germany—were members of the Warsaw Pact and so, by definition, were adversaries of the West. (Although Japan is not a member of NATO, it is an important ally of the West—democratic and free-market oriented—thanks to postwar reconstruction and the resulting diplomatic and military alliances with the United States.)

**Keeping Russia out of NATO increases the risk of Russian expansionism.**

What this history tells us is that, besides its stated purpose of maintaining common security against external aggression, NATO also has the less-noted but equally important function of dampening and mediating conflicts among its own members. That role is why the first Bush administration invested so much diplomatic capital in keeping a reunified Germany inside NATO, despite extreme misgivings by both the Soviets and a number of Western allies. The same historic fear of resurgence of foreign adventurism that shadows

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Russia today also clouded prospects for German reunification. Our argument was that a unified Germany inside NATO was less threatening, both to other members and to the Soviet Union, than a unified Germany outside the alliance, or even a neutral Germany outside the alliance but in the heart of Europe. Our arguments were credible because of the historic evidence that NATO

has promoted stability among alliance members.

One sad lesson of the twentieth century is that refusing to form alliances with defeated adversaries is more dangerous than forming such alliances. The Treaty of Versailles solved the “German problem” in exactly the wrong way—by sealing the defeat with territorial and economic retribution. This resolution certainly demoralized Germany in the immediate aftermath of war, but the resulting grievances fueled something unimaginably worse and more dangerous. One hesitates to stretch historical analogies too far, but little imagination is required to see something similar happening in Russia. The end of the Cold War was certainly not settled by anything like Versailles, but from Russia’s perspective, the results have been much the same—a humiliating loss of territory, prestige, and power. Russia’s economic and political problems have stemmed largely from Russia’s own failure to implement the necessary reforms to encourage the creation of a market economy, but it would not be difficult—indeed, it has not been difficult—for Russian demagogues to blame the West for the troubles ordinary Russian men and women have experienced during the past decade. Couple all these developments with the expansion of NATO up to Russia’s doorstep and the use of NATO as an offensive (as opposed to defensive) alliance to bomb Russian allies, and you have a recipe for disaster. By continuing to treat Russia like a potential adversary, we may encourage it to become our enemy, the very thing we fear. The best way to find an enemy is to look for one, and I worry that that is what we are doing when we try to isolate Russia. The same principle would apply, of course, if we were to embark on a policy to try to isolate China.

China might respond with concern to Russia’s eventual membership in NATO. To hardliners in Beijing, for instance, it might smack of a Washing-

ton-inspired effort to “encircle” China. I believe on balance, however, that those concerns can be satisfactorily addressed, not least by stressing to the Chinese that a democratic Russia firmly linked both economically and strategically to the West will represent a more stable and responsible neighbor across the long Sino-Russian border. In any case, we cannot allow Beijing, for whatever reason, to have veto power over our policy toward Russia.

Our current policy relies on words to assuage Russian fears triggered by our deeds. As I explained in negotiations over the liberation of Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany, as the Clinton administration explained in justification of NATO expansion, and as the new Bush administration explains today, NATO is not an anti-Russian alliance; NATO enhances Russian security by maintaining stability in Western Europe and between Western Europe and the United States. These points are absolutely true; but Russian leaders can be forgiven, I think, for maintaining at least a degree of skepticism, particularly about the long-term reliability of those commitments. The Partnership for Peace and NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council were designed to ameliorate Russian concerns by creating halfway houses between full NATO membership and full exclusion from NATO. They have had undeniable benefits, but Putin’s comments of last July make clear they do not satisfy Russia’s concerns:

“The simplest [solution] is to dissolve NATO, but this is not on the agenda,” Putin told reporters. “The second possible option is to include Russia in NATO. This also creates a single defense and security space. The third option is the creation of a different, new organization which would set itself these tasks and which would incorporate the Russian Federation.”

Putin added that “we do not see NATO as a hostile organization,” but given the demise of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, “we don’t see why it is needed” anymore. If NATO turns away Russia while expanding to include other countries all the way up to its borders, “we shall continue to mistrust each other, although I think that everybody understands now that Russia is not threatening anyone.”<sup>6</sup>

The terrorist attack on the United States has revived talk about Russian eligibility for NATO membership. As I write, it appears that Russia is cooperating with the United States, not only on the diplomatic front and by sharing intelligence but also by not protesting the allies’ use of former Soviet bases in Central Asia. At the same time, Russia has reduced the heat of its rhetoric on NATO expansion<sup>7</sup> and called publicly for speedy consideration of Russia’s entry into NATO.<sup>8</sup> “There is no longer a reason for the [W]est not to conduct such talks,” Putin said.<sup>9</sup>

For obvious reasons, I have no concern about the Russia-NATO issue being on the table and would regard appropriate Western “concessions” on the

point as a win, not a defeat, for the West. Indeed, the level and consistency of Russian cooperation in the war against terrorism will tell us much about how closely Moscow identifies with the West and how serious Russia is about eventual NATO membership. In considering Russia's eligibility, NATO must not allow Russia to avoid complying with the five criteria. Nor should Russia have a right to veto further NATO expansion in the meantime. Of course, one happy consequence of a decision favoring Russia's eligibility for NATO membership after satisfaction of the criteria is that Russian opposition to further NATO expansion should diminish or disappear. Eventual Russian membership in NATO, after clearly satisfying all of the criteria, would not abrogate the Western orientation of the alliance. Instead, it would recognize a new geopolitical reality.

As an aside, at some point consideration should be given to amending the NATO charter (1) to provide that one accepted or agreed goal or purpose of the alliance would be "the maintenance of peace and stability on the Eurasian continent" and (2) to provide that the alliance could act with less-than-unanimous consent—that is, a stated percentage might be required, but nations could opt out of actions in which they did not want to participate. (Enlargement of NATO has already exposed serious difficulties in governing the alliance, because of its requirement of consensus before action can be taken, for example, in decisions on targets in the Balkan conflicts.)

## **An Idea Whose Time Has Come**

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As important as Putin's NATO initiative may prove to be, it is not entirely new. An interesting historical footnote: then-President Mikhail Gorbachev raised the possibility of Soviet membership in NATO three times in 1990. The first occasion was when I met him in Moscow in mid-May of 1990 to talk about reuniting Germany inside NATO. Gorbachev said he would think it over, but "let me just add that, if in the end we aren't able to persuade you of our argument, then I will say to President [George H. W.] Bush that we want to enter NATO. After all, you said that NATO wasn't directed against us, you said it was a new Europe, so why shouldn't we apply? ... Well, it's not such a hypothetical question. It's also not so far-fetched." He repeated the idea to Bush at the four-plus-two negotiations in Washington, D.C., on May 31. "NATO is an open organization," he said. "Maybe we will join too. ..." Then at the July summit, he raised the issue for the third and last time. "Perhaps any country could join either alliance," Gorbachev said. "Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, after all, had been one coalition." Maybe the Soviet Union could join NATO.

At the time, I deflected Gorbachev's suggestion, and Bush teased a general on the Soviet negotiating team, asking how he would like to have a U.S.

commander. In any event, the idea was clearly premature and overly ambitious (insofar as it covered the Soviet Union collectively, instead of Russia alone) and could not have been allowed to confuse or derail the already difficult negotiations regarding German reunification. As I look back, however, I think Gorbachev was more serious than we gave him credit for at the time. He correctly understood the implications of our arguments about NATO—that it promoted European stability, that it was no longer directed against the Soviet Union, and that it was open to new members—and took them to their obvious conclusion. Like a good chess player, he was looking several moves ahead.

Putin has now played the NATO chess piece, and the great thing about good diplomacy is that, unlike with good chess, it is possible for both sides to win. It is time for the West to answer.

**Russia should not have a right to veto further NATO expansion in the meantime.**

## Notes

1. James A. Baker III, "Expanding to the East: A New NATO Alliance," *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1993, pt. M, p. 2.
2. "What Do Russian Voters Think?" *Russian Election Watch*, no. 4, November 4, 1999, p. 3.
3. Peter Baker, "Putin Offers West Reassurances and Ideas on NATO," *Washington Post*, July 18, 2001, sec. A, p. 1.
4. *Study on NATO Enlargement*, September 1995, chap. 5, pt. A, para. 70.
5. Baker, "Expanding to the East."
6. Baker, "Putin Offers West Reassurances and Ideas on NATO."
7. William Drozdiak, "Putin Eases Stance on NATO Expansion," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2001, sec. A, p. 1.
8. Michael Wines, "Tying Russia to West, Putin Unveils Strategy, but Risks Backlash," *New York Times*, October 9, 2001, sec. B, p. 8.
9. July Dempsey, "Disarray in Nato over Russia Entry Prospects," *Financial Times*, September 28, 2001, p. 4.

