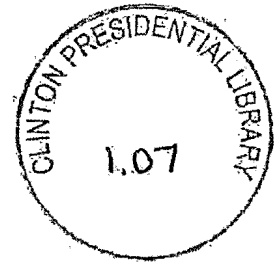


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NATO Expansion

Views of Richard Schifter



I agree that we should, as promised, proceed with a discussion within NATO of the manner in which the organization may be enlarged. I recommend, however, that before this discussion is initiated, we arrive at a tentative conclusion as to what we would consider a desirable result. That does not mean that our minds are closed as we enter into an exchange of thoughts. It does mean, however, that we develop a plan of our own which we shall advocate in the course of the talks.

The decision to give serious consideration to NATO expansion was taken in light of political rather than military factors. In 1993 we had witnessed the stand-off between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament, the violent clash between Yeltsin, on one hand, and Rutskoi and Khasbulatov, on the other hand, and the substantial vote, in December 1993 for Zhirinovskiy and the Russian Communists. We thought it might be desirable to send a clear message to those who were once again dreaming of Russian expansionism that the West was prepared to defend Central and Eastern Europe. We also thought that it was necessary to reassure the governments and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe that the West was indeed prepared to defend them. We may also have been influenced by domestic pressures: from the Polish American Congress, from Henry Kissinger, from other critics who argued that what they called "another Yalta" was in the making.

Some of these political concerns seem less urgent today than they did a few months ago: (a) a take-over in Russia by advocates of territorial expansion beyond the "near abroad" seems less likely now; under these circumstances, publicity on the subject of NATO expansion will do more harm than good in Russia's domestic politics; a message which might be appropriate for delivery to expansionists who are poised to take power is inappropriate if sent to the group when it is politically weakened and would use the message in its propaganda campaign to regain political strength; (b) precisely because Yeltsin and the moderates seem to be more secure now the concern over Russian expansionism has lessened among the governments and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe; while still interested in joining NATO in the long run; their immediate preoccupation is with membership in the EU; the only CEE leaders who continue to press hard for NATO membership are Walesa and Olechowski; (c) our domestic critics should be answered with sound policy arguments, which call for the deferring of a decision on NATO membership for the CEE states.

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2016-140, document no. 6
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: March 05, 2018

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Let us assume for the sake of argument that we were indeed prepared to come to a conclusion in 1995 that the Visegrad Four will be admitted to NATO in 1997 or 1998. The consequences are likely to be the following: (a) Russian nationalists will argue that the West is clearly preparing for an early confrontation. (b) The governments of Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states as well as the Russians will read this decision as placing the non-Visegrad CEE states beyond the NATO defense perimeter. (c) Prompt action would have to be taken to incorporate the military forces of the Visegrad states into NATO and to make concrete preparations for the defense of the new NATO borders. (d) As the Visegrad countries do not have sufficient funds to make adequate preparations for their own defense, the cost of NATO expansion will have to be borne by the present NATO members. What would that cost be and which countries are prepared to assume it? (e) In light of the recent election result in Slovakia, should that country really be taken into NATO at this time?

Given this downside of an early decision to expand NATO, and the reduced validity of political considerations for moving forward at this time, we should instead focus on purely military concerns. The following factors should be borne in mind: (a) The Russian military is not an immediate conventional threat to the CEE region. Russia's conventional military capability has declined sharply. There is no indication that this decline is now being reversed. It would take years to rebuild a Russian conventional military capability which would be a threat to the CEE countries. Such rebuilding would be obvious to us and could then elicit an appropriate response. (b) The effort at integrating those CEE military forces which we want to integrate into the NATO structure can begin now, under the umbrella of the Partnership for Peace, without sending the ostentatious signal which an announcement of early admission to NATO membership would constitute. (c) Not pressed by a 1997 or 1998 deadline, the effort at integration and interoperability could take place at a more leisurely pace under significantly reduced financial pressure. The effort which would be undertaken would be part of a comprehensive program to integrate the entire CEE region into a European Zone of Peace. (d) The effort in which we would thus engage could be related to the Partnership for Peace. It could significantly reduce the political pressure for NATO membership.

When the Partnership for Peace was first announced, there were those who thought it was little more than a charade. We have begun to create some reality through the liaison offices set up at NATO headquarters and the Partnership exercises. Our proposed allocation of \$ 100,000,000 per year for five years beginning FY 1996, with an additional \$ 30,000,000 made available in FY 1995, should provide a basis for the initial efforts to achieve interoperability.

How this money should be spent should be guided largely by military considerations. I would recommend that it be allocated only to those countries which have exhibited a desire to become members of the Western family, which can play a significant military role, and where the money expended by us could make a significant difference. I believe, therefore, that it should be allocated in FY 1995 and 1996 largely to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, with Bulgaria receiving careful consideration in light of political developments in that country. The program should focus principally on developing close working relationships between NATO and the officer corps of the selected PFP countries, including the teaching of English and extensive mil-mil exchanges. Some funds should also be allocated to the purchase of communications equipment. Clearly, the effectiveness of this program would be significantly enhanced if as many allies as possible engaged in parallel activities.

To sum up, we should enter into the NATO expansion discussions with the following desired outcomes in mind:

- I. No immediate decision on admission to NATO of any country. No effort at setting standards for accession.
- II. Without making any major announcements to that effect, agreement on the rapid intensification of efforts to develop close relationships between NATO and the officer corps of NATO and those of selected PFP countries.