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Kent R. Meyer

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US Support for Baltic Membership in NATO: What Ends, What Risks?

KENT R. MEYER

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The questions of whether the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should be enlarged and, if so, to what degree have been among the most difficult and sensitive issues facing the Alliance since the end of the Cold War. In shaping the US National Security Strategy regarding US interests in Europe and US NATO policy, President Clinton has declared his support for NATO membership for well-qualified democracies regardless of geography or history, including those in northeastern Europe.

US policy regarding NATO enlargement should seek to strengthen the Alliance as well as to bolster democratic advances, deter potential threats, and increase regional stability throughout Europe. However, by promoting a policy that supports NATO membership for the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the Administration is jeopardizing vital US national interests and undermining NATO's collective defense mission.[1] This article examines US strategy regarding NATO enlargement, assesses its strengths and weaknesses, and recommends changes to protect vital US interests in Europe while providing the Baltic republics with a security alternative to NATO membership.

NATO's Strategic Concept and Enlargement

Beginning in 1989, unexpectedly rapid political, military, and social changes resulted in the end of the ideological and military stalemate in Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Those changes and the regional instability caused by ethnic and religious conflict occurring within Europe prompted NATO to examine and adjust its policies, missions, and structures. NATO's new strategic concept, approved at the Washington Summit in April 1999, reflects the new security challenges and dangers extant in Europe. It also reflects the Alliance's increased commitment to coordinate and cooperate with other international institutions in supporting "out of area" operations (those conducted outside the territory of NATO member states).[2] However, despite NATO's increasing involvement in nontraditional operations, the Alliance's essential and enduring mission is to guarantee the territorial integrity, political independence, and security of its members.[3] It is that mission that has resulted in a flood of Central and Eastern European applicants seeking NATO membership.

Article 10 of the Washington Treaty provides that "the parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty." [4] This commitment was reaffirmed by NATO leaders during the 1994 Brussels Summit, where they declared that membership in the Alliance remained open to those nations who could further the principles established in the Washington Treaty.[5] The strategic goals served by enlargement and the methods used to achieve enlargement were examined the following year. The product of that examination was the "Study on NATO Enlargement," wherein the Alliance's principles for accessing new members were documented.

The study concluded that the enlargement of the Alliance contributes to the stability and security of the Euro-Atlantic area. It also addressed the selection and accession of new members and confirmed that accession would occur in accordance with the provisions of Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, with new members receiving all the rights of Treaty membership.[6] However, when addressing the rights of new members, the study also designated their obligations by declaring that new members must be prepared to contribute to NATO's budget and support the Alliance's evolving missions and its fundamental collective defense role.[7] To ensure that new members are able to contribute to NATO's collective defense as well as benefit from it, the study states that before accessing new members, the Alliance will evaluate the effects of their admission to ensure that enlargement will not diminish NATO's military credibility.[8]

In addition to delineating NATO's military expectations for new members, the study established political guidelines for membership. To be considered for accession, prospective members must have established democratic and civilian control of their military forces, and they must have resolved ethnic or external territorial disputes. They also must demonstrate a commitment to the basic principles of democracy, to individual liberty and the rule of law, and to adequate funding to fulfill the obligations incurred by Alliance membership.[9]

US Policy Regarding NATO Enlargement

Before the US Senate's 1998 vote on the admission of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, President Clinton declared,

Let me be very clear: NATO's core mission will remain the same--the defense of the territory of its members. The addition of new members will strengthen and enhance that mission. In pursuing enlargement, we have made sure not to alter NATO's core function or its ability to defend America and Europe's security.[10]

But is the defense of Euro-American security the goal sought by the United States in supporting NATO enlargement, and does Baltic republic membership in NATO help achieve that end? The answer to both questions seems to be no. If the objective of additional NATO enlargement is to enhance the Alliance's mission to defend the territory of its members against Russia, then additional enlargement is unnecessary. NATO already possesses sufficient strategic depth.[11] The contradiction between the reasons for NATO enlargement detailed by President Clinton's comments and those contained in the US National Security Strategy (NSS) is apparent. It reveals that the maintenance of NATO's traditional defense mission is not the primary objective sought by the Clinton Administration in promoting the Alliance's continued expansion.

Acknowledging that NATO is the anchor of American engagement in Europe, the NSS states that the Alliance is instrumental in helping to "build" an integrated, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Europe.[12] By emphasizing the Alliance's role of "building" rather than its traditional role of "safeguarding," Euro-American freedom, the NSS signals US expectations that NATO is to take a more active and nontraditional role in European affairs. The use of NATO enlargement to promote democracy, political stability, and economic development is turning NATO away from its collective defense role and using Alliance enlargement policy as a form of geopolitical social work.[13] By using NATO enlargement to spread democracy, stability, and prosperity throughout Europe rather than as the means for providing its members collective defense, the Administration confuses the benefits of NATO with its purpose.[14] This may appear to be an artificial distinction in those situations where NATO expansion enhances European stability while promoting the Alliance's collective defense mission; however, it becomes a critical distinction when enlargement results in a reduction of the Alliance's ability to protect its members. It is this conflict of ends that makes the issue regarding Baltic membership in NATO so complex. While Baltic membership in NATO may help spread democracy and prosperity to those nations, it will seriously undermine the Alliance's ability to perform its Article 5 mission. These divergent results and the uncertainty of US policy regarding NATO enlargement become even more evident when US Baltic policy is considered.

US Baltic Policy

Before the end of the Cold War, the Baltic region of Northeastern Europe was an area of little political action or interest for the United States. Although the United States refused to recognize the Soviet Union's claims of sovereignty over the Baltic republics, America never seriously challenged Soviet interests or influence over the region. However, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Northeastern Europe has become an area of significant American interest where three critical areas of US regional policy (Russia, the Baltics, and the Nordic regions) intersect.[15] Recognizing the opportunities presented by the end of the Cold War and Baltic independence, the United States has worked to strengthen Baltic integration with the West while lessening Russian influence in the region. A politically significant first step occurred when the US Department of State created the Office of Nordic and Baltic Affairs and placed it under the control of the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs. This change sent a clear and resolute signal to Russia that the United States considered the Baltic republics an integral part of Europe and no longer within Russia's sphere of influence.[16]

Seeking to improve bilateral relations between the United States and the Baltic republics, and to encourage political, economic, and security cooperation, the State Department presented a "Baltic Action Plan" in the autumn of 1996. The plan consisted of three tracks designed to integrate the Baltic republics into the West.[17] The first track seeks to strengthen Baltic sovereignty and promote internal reforms by integrating the three republics into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. The second track promotes the use of bilateral and multilateral efforts to encourage the development of good relations with Russia. And the third track addresses American efforts to demonstrate our commitment to the Baltic republics and to promote political, social, and economic development within those states.[18]

Following the "first round" of enlargement talks at the Madrid Summit in 1997, the United States took another step in addressing the security concerns of the Baltic republics. The Charter of Partnership (Baltic Charter), signed in January 1998 by the United States and the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, built on the Baltic Action Plan. While the Baltic Charter did not specifically provide a US guarantee of Baltic security or NATO membership, it did confirm the Baltic republics' inherent right to choose their own security arrangements. It also declared that the ultimate goal of the signatories was to incorporate the Baltics into European and transatlantic political, economic, security, and defense institutions. Although the Baltic Charter did not specifically guarantee that the Baltic republics would become members of NATO, Clinton Administration statements left little doubt that the United States was committed to helping create the conditions for Baltic membership within NATO's ongoing enlargement process.[19]

Administration support for Baltic membership in NATO was confirmed during the Baltic Charter signing ceremony when President Clinton declared, "America is determined to create the conditions under which Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia can one day walk through [NATO's] door." [20] Deputy US Secretary of State Strobe Talbott provided a more recent statement of support for Baltic republic membership during the Washington Summit in April 1999 when he declared that although continued NATO expansion is not inevitable, Baltic membership in the Alliance is desirable, and the Baltic republics should be confident of future admission.[21] The Administration's message is clear: the United States supports Baltic membership in NATO.

Unfortunately, that message is also unsound, because every endorsement of Baltic membership in NATO takes the United States farther away from being able to effectively implement the sensible and measured policies contained in the Baltic Action Plan, it gives the Baltic republics false security hopes, and it unnecessarily alienates Russia. Notwithstanding the Administration's support for Baltic republic membership in NATO, those nations are not yet ready for NATO membership, and neither the United States nor NATO has a vital interest there or the military means to protect the Baltic republics.

Russian Perceptions and Reactions

Many Russian leaders perceive that NATO is taking advantage of their country during its difficult transition from communism to democracy and a market economy. They view the eastward expansion of the Alliance as a direct threat to Russian security, and Russians of all political backgrounds are implacably opposed to NATO membership for the Baltic republics.[22]

Russian opposition regarding any expansion of NATO into the Baltic republics should come as no surprise. Historically, a fundamental objective of Russian national strategy has been to ensure that a buffer of weak nations, held firmly within the Russian sphere of influence, protected their frontiers.[23] The creation and maintenance of this protective shield has consistently remained a vital Russian interest throughout the past century. Even with the end of the Cold War and the voluntary withdrawal of Russian troops from Eastern Europe, it is doubtful that Russia expected to lose this buffer. However, Russian plans to replace the Warsaw Pact with a shield of neutral or nonaligned nations held within their sphere of influence failed to develop when those nations began to look to the West for protection.[24] Thus, instead of having the Baltic republics serve as a buffer between Russia and the West, NATO's expansion into the region has threatened to place a militarily united Europe at Russia's border. Russians see this prospect as the realization of their worst security nightmare. However, Russia's concerns are not solely caused by NATO's eastward expansion; they are also the result of NATO's evolving "out of area" operations within Europe.

NATO's survival after the end of the Cold War is due in part to the Alliance's evolution that expanded its mission from

one of collective defense to missions that are increasingly responsible for maintaining peace and stability in Europe. In conducting "out of area" peace operations, NATO has assumed offensive objectives in addition to its traditional collective defense mission.[25] These more offensive-oriented operations, particularly when conducted in areas of Europe formerly under the control of the Warsaw Pact, reinforce Russian perceptions that NATO intends to interfere in their national internal affairs and those of their "allies." NATO's new missions, when combined with its eastward expansion, are also viewed by Russia as a betrayal of Western assurances, given during the German unification negotiations, that NATO would not "move to the east by a single inch, and not a single Warsaw Pact country will be admitted to NATO." [26]

Although Russia was not able to prevent NATO enlargement into the Visegrad, its leaders have informed the West with unmistakable clarity that they view Baltic membership in NATO as a "red line"[27] that should not be crossed and will consider any NATO expansion into that region as a direct threat to Russia's vital national interests. The "first round" of NATO enlargement has already resulted in a hardening of Russian attitudes and an increasing movement to block US and NATO policies and programs in Europe. Any NATO movement into the Baltic region is likely to aggravate those attitudes and create an irreconcilably suspicious and hostile atmosphere between Russia and the West—one that could result in a Russian return to Cold War postures and policies. And, unless Russian leaders receive what they perceive is an appropriate response to their concerns regarding NATO expansion and operations, they will resist what they believe is a Western attempt to marginalize Russia's role in Europe.

Baltic Failure to Meet NATO Admission Guidelines

Russian opposition to Baltic membership in NATO is a major factor in the Alliance's reluctance to access the Baltic republics; however, it is not the only reason. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry's assessment regarding the Baltic states' suitability for NATO accession made in 1996 remains equally valid today: "The Baltic states are not ready to join NATO. These countries simply do not meet the alliance's standards." [28] The Baltic republics have not created the conditions necessary to achieve the political and military criteria that the "Study on NATO Enlargement" established as a guide for accessing new members.

The accession guidelines creating the greatest obstacle to NATO membership for the Baltic states are those that require prospective members to have resolved ethnic or external territorial disputes and be capable of contributing to the Alliance's collective defense. While not all of the Baltic states have failed to achieve adequate standards for every condition, all have failed to meet accession standards in at least one of the territorial, ethnic, or military guidelines established for membership.

Territorial Disputes

The "Study on NATO Enlargement" requires prospective members of the alliance to have "demonstrated a commitment to . . . the resolution of . . . external territorial disputes . . . by peaceful means." [29] This is a sound policy when adding new members to an alliance that has as its fundamental purpose the preservation of the peace and security of its members through collective defense. While NATO is understandably reluctant to add any member with an existing border dispute, this issue becomes even more sensitive with the Baltic states because their border disputes involve Russia.

Lithuania is the only Baltic republic that has signed a border treaty with Russia. The disputes involving Russia's borders with Estonia and Latvia are still unresolved for two reasons. First, unlike Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia are seeking to reestablish the borders that existed prior to their annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940. Second, Russia, knowing of NATO's accession policies, has delayed reaching a border agreement to force Estonia and Latvia to adopt more favorable citizenship policies for Russian minorities within those countries. Realizing Russia's tactic to keep Estonia and Latvia out of NATO by prolonging negotiations, it is debatable whether NATO members would deny those nations admission solely for that reason. The more challenging issue to NATO would be whether to admit a member with such a large and volatile number of ethnic Russian "non-citizens" as both Estonia and Latvia now possess.[30]

Ethnic Unrest

The Alliance also expects that prospective members demonstrate a clear commitment to resolving ethnic disputes within their countries. This is not an issue in Lithuania because of its relatively small ethnically Russian population.[31] Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for either Estonia or Latvia, which have ethnically Russian populations of 30 and 34 percent, respectively.[32] Many Estonians and Latvians see their Russian neighbors as colonizers whose loyalties are uncertain and whose presence in such large numbers threatens the political security and ethnic identity of their nations. As a result, both countries adopted policies granting automatic citizenship to very few of their ethnic Russian residents and making the naturalization process lengthy and difficult.[33] These and similar policies have caused a great deal of resentment among ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia and have prompted Russia to exert pressure on those nations in an attempt to gain more favorable treatment for those minorities.[34]

Western efforts to temper Estonian and Latvian policies regarding the treatment of their Russian minorities have been only moderately effective. Significant work must be done before the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia are truly integrated into the fabric of Baltic society in those nations. Although some proponents of immediate Baltic membership in NATO contend that the problem can be solved after admission, the resolution of this issue is essential to the internal stability of those states and must be addressed before NATO accession occurs. The Baltic republics must be internally stable before they can be allowed into NATO. However, they will never achieve internal stability if they contain a large, alienated, and embittered Russian minority.[35]

Military Capability

A key criterion for NATO membership "is the capability of each member state to come to the defense" and aid of the other Alliance members as provided by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.[36] This should come as no surprise to any nation seeking to join an alliance whose fundamental purpose is to provide security for its members through collective defense. Unfortunately, none of the Baltic republics currently possesses a credible military force capable of adequately defending its own territory or of effectively contributing to NATO's collective defense. The Baltic republics would be security recipients rather than mutual security providers as NATO partners.

The Baltic republics are struggling to establish capable, reliable armed forces. Their task is daunting. The combined strength of the armed forces in the Baltic republics is fewer than 18,000 members, and the Russians left little usable equipment or infrastructure when they withdrew from the region, having wrecked what they could not remove.[37] Although most Western governments have assisted the Baltic armies by providing them with training, small arms, and light vehicles, they have not been willing to provide the Baltic states with the items essential to defend against a Russian invasion: anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons.[38]

The Baltic republics have sought to demonstrate their commitment to NATO membership by ensuring that adequate resources are dedicated to defense. Although each nation set a goal of increasing defense expenditures to two percent of its gross national product (GNP), none has reached that level of spending. Lithuania's defense budget was 1.45 percent of its GNP in 1998, with the Lithuanian State Defense Committee recommending that it be raised to two percent in 2000. Estonia's defense budget has fallen sharply from 1996 levels (far short of two percent of GNP), and Latvia's defense forces are critically underfunded, with spending at a level barely adequate to maintain its present poor defense posture.[39] Baltic difficulty in reaching the two percent spending target does not indicate a lack of commitment. Rather it reflects the economic difficulties associated with the transition of these countries from communism to a free-market economy and the pressing social needs that compete with defense spending for scarce government funds.

Proponents of Baltic accession point to the combined Nordic-Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT) as evidence of the Baltic states' defense capability and readiness to join NATO. Unfortunately, their confidence in this manifestation of multinational military cooperation is overstated. Although the Nordic-Baltic Battalion is effective in conducting peace operations, it is not designed to assume a defense mission in the Baltics, and in that role it is militarily useless.[40] That is because there is little connection between the peacekeeping mission of the battalion and the defense mission of the remaining armed forces in each of the Baltic states.[41] Thus, the combined battalion creates a false impression that the Baltic armed forces have achieved a greater defense capability than they actually possess. The battalion is also costly. For example, Estonia spends more than ten percent of its annual budget to support only 412 peacekeepers, including those assigned to the combined battalion.[42] The result of Baltic efforts to field forces capable of operating

with NATO in peace operations may actually be harming Baltic defense capability and development. The consequence of Baltic efforts to support NATO peace operations is the creation of a two-tier armed forces within the Baltic republics, one designed to engage in peace operations, and the other for national defense, with neither able to function well as a whole. Accordingly, for all of these reasons, the Baltic republics do not now possess a credible military capability worthy of NATO membership, and it is doubtful that they have the capacity to build one in the foreseeable future.

Baltic Membership in NATO: US Interests

In their ardor to use NATO as a means to promote the spread of democracy and free-market economies throughout Europe, US policymakers are ignoring the fundamental purpose of the Alliance. In a speech made prior to the Madrid Summit in 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared, "We must pledge that the first members will not be the last and that no European democracy will be excluded because of where it sits on the map."^[43] This policy may appeal to our hearts, but it should not appeal to our heads. Despite Deputy Secretary of State Talbott's contention that the end of the Cold War allows us to put aside "military and geopolitical considerations" and allow "other nonmilitary goals . . . to shape the new NATO,"^[44] geography and geopolitics still matter when inviting new members into the Alliance.

Article 5 of the NATO Charter should serve as a clear reminder that NATO is not a club but a military alliance. In the Administration's efforts to convince us that we must expand NATO to create a new Europe without lines, it forgets that military alliances are all about lines--lines that separate the territory that alliance members are sworn to defend from those areas that the members have no obligation to defend.^[45] The United States should not incur an obligation to defend the Baltic republics; we have neither a vital interest in those nations, nor the military means to effectively defend them.

Defining US Interests in the Baltics

The NSS defines as "vital" those interests of "broad and overriding importance to the survival, safety, and vitality of our nation."^[46] Vital interests are of such importance to our national well-being that we will defend them, when necessary, with unilateral and decisive military force. Through our membership in NATO, the United States has declared that the territorial security of the member nations is a vital US national interest, an interest that we are committed under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty to defend by military means. However, although the NSS declares that European stability is vital to our security,^[47] we should recognize that not every part of Europe is of equal significance to the United States or to the advancement of our national interests.

Many Americans acknowledge that Western Europe is vital to US security and an area that should be protected by explicit security guarantees. Few Americans, however, will agree that the Baltic states constitute an area that is vital to US strategic interests. Even fewer Americans are likely to be willing to use military force to defend the Baltic republics against Russian aggression. Proponents of Baltic membership in NATO contend that Russia is incapable of resorting to a military response due to its present state of decline. However, such grave risks, even if unlikely, should never be incurred except to defend vital US interests.^[48] And while neither the United States nor our NATO allies possess vital interests in the Baltic republics, Russia does, and has declared that it will act to protect them.

Russia's concept of national security states, "The prospect of NATO expansion to the east is unacceptable to Russia since it represents a threat to its national security."^[49] Russia has clearly signaled that Baltic accession to NATO could lead to serious consequences. If one of the consequences of Baltic accession into NATO is a Russian invasion of the Baltic republics, NATO could find itself committed to protect an area that it has neither the desire nor the ability to effectively defend.

Baltic Defensibility

NATO is first and foremost a military compact designed to protect its members from armed aggression. Extending membership and its concomitant security guarantees to the Baltic states would send the clear message that NATO is no longer a serious military alliance.^[50] Geography, the Baltic republics' lack of significant military capability, and the proximity of Russian military power^[51] underscore NATO's difficulty in providing a security guarantee to the Baltic

republics and cause most Western military experts to believe that the region cannot be defended by conventional NATO forces.[52]

Proponents of Baltic accession contend that although the Baltic states may be incapable of preventing a Russian invasion, they could attempt to buy time until reinforcements from NATO could arrive by improving their armies and acting in concert.[53] Unfortunately, Baltic military experts estimate that they could maintain only four days of active defense in the event of an attack from Russia,[54] far too little time for significant and effective NATO reinforcement. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the nearest usable NATO forces are stationed in western Germany, more than 700 miles away. In addition, NATO currently has only minimal power-projection capability, and depends heavily on the United States for airlift capability.[55]

Proponents also contend that although the Baltic states may not be defensible, they can nonetheless be "protected" by their inclusion under NATO's defense umbrella. As an example, they point to NATO's preservation of freedom in West Berlin and Copenhagen, both cities claimed to be as indefensible as the Baltic states.[56] It is true that NATO likely deterred Russia from taking military action against those cities, but enlargement proponents fail to recognize that the Russians possessed no vital interest in those cities. The Russians do possess and have clearly announced their vital security interest in the Baltic region. Accordingly, it is doubtful that any amount of NATO protection that lacks a credible military foundation will be adequate to deter Russia from using whatever means necessary to preserve those interests.

NATO should admit members only when they can be credibly defended by the Alliance and when accession will benefit the Alliance. Baltic state membership would accomplish neither. Instead, it would weaken the Alliance, alienate Russia, and provide the Baltic states with a false sense of security--results that could be a prelude to calamity.

A Proposed US Baltic Policy

A review of US Baltic policy yields a contradictory and unclear picture. Although the Baltic Action Plan provided the United States with a sound and measured policy, the Baltic Charter and the frequent public statements made by senior members of the Clinton Administration have left the goals of US Baltic policy in a state of uncertainty. That uncertainty is harmful because it gives the Baltic nations an expectation of imminent NATO membership, fuels Russian anxieties and hostility, and confuses our NATO allies. The United States should resolve this uncertainty by adopting, in consultation with our NATO allies, a sound and unambiguous policy regarding the Baltic republics.

The United States should adopt an expanded Baltic/NATO policy that has as its core the objectives of the Baltic Action Plan. The objectives of an expanded Baltic policy should be to:

- Assist the Baltic republics in establishing closer ties with Western Europe.
- Encourage and facilitate improved relations between the Baltic states and Russia.
- Improve US-Russian relations and increase US assistance to northwestern Russia.
- Establish conditions for NATO membership based on strategic and geopolitical criteria.

Baltic Integration with Western Europe

Instead of advocating Baltic membership in NATO, the next US Administration should assist the Baltic republics in establishing ties to the West through membership in the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP), the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Western European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union (EU). In particular, the Administration should work with the EU to develop a "fast track" association for the Baltic states. The negligible economic impact that the Baltic republics would have on the EU should allow that organization to provide the republics with a more rapid integration into the union than their economic condition would otherwise permit. Although EU membership will not provide the Baltic republics with the same hard security guarantees as would NATO membership, "in itself, EU membership and economic cooperation is an important security guarantee since any Russian intervention--or threat of intervention--in an EU member state would have serious consequences for its relations with Europe as a whole." [57] And, because most Russian leaders view the EU as a tool of economic rather than military cooperation, they do not oppose Baltic state membership in that organization.[58]

Proponents of NATO membership for the Baltic states claim that efforts to obtain "fast track" membership in the EU is unlikely to result because the EU will not act until NATO takes the lead.[59] If that is so, it is better that we discover that lack of resolve before we attempt to provide the Baltic republics with the security of NATO membership. For if the members of the EU are unwilling to provide the Baltic states with the "soft security" and economic benefits that result from EU membership, how can anyone believe that many of the same nations would be willing to protect the Baltic republics with the military guarantees provided by NATO membership?

Improved Baltic-Russian Relations

Baltic security also can be enhanced through US encouragement and support of programs that help to improve Baltic-Russian relations and draw Russia into closer cooperation with its Baltic and Nordic neighbors. US efforts to promote improved Baltic-Russian relations should focus on four major objectives:

- Encourage Estonia and Latvia to resolve their border disputes with Russia and to integrate their Russian minorities more fully into their nations' political and social communities.
- Enhance regional cooperation by promoting Baltic republic, Russian, and Nordic participation in regional and international organizations (PfP, Membership Action Plan, EAPC, Council of Baltic Sea States, Euro-Arctic Barents Regional Forum) that will engage Russia in pan-Baltic political, economic, and security processes.
- Provide additional resources to the Baltic nations to encourage regional cooperation between the Baltic states and Russia in the areas of crime prevention, energy use, commercial cooperation, and education to help the Baltic republics focus on the integration of their Russian minorities into the social and political fabric of their countries.[60]
- Encourage the Nordic states to continue to provide economic, political, and military assistance to the Baltic republics.

US-Russian Relations

The Administration should continue to undertake economic, political, and military efforts to promote improved US-Russian relations and to encourage Russia to continue its integration into the European community of democratic nations.

Although it is doubtful that improved US-Russian relations will make Baltic republic membership in NATO any more acceptable to Russia, it would be beneficial in two substantial ways. First, it might reduce Russian anxiety regarding the United States and our NATO allies and lessen the likelihood of a hostile Russian reaction to the integration of the Baltic republics into Western Europe's non-NATO organizations. Second, the more completely Russia is integrated into the international community and is made a partner in the development of a new European security architecture, the greater its stake will be in preserving regional stability and the easier it will be for the West to calm Russian fears about NATO's role in Europe.

US Policy Regarding NATO Enlargement

The United States needs to lead NATO members in a serious consideration of the Alliance's strategic mission and the end state sought by continued enlargement. Although the "Alliance's Strategic Concept" and the "Study on NATO Enlargement" define the purpose and principles of enlargement and confirm the organization's fundamental mission, they fail to answer the more challenging and contentious issues facing the members: What is the ultimate end state of enlargement, and how will the members know when that goal has been achieved? How fast should NATO enlargement take place, and how far should it go?

NATO has declared that it has an "open door" to aspiring members. However, the Alliance should also clearly state that the decision to invite new members will be based on NATO's strategic interests, the qualifications of prospective entrants, and NATO's perception of threats to European security and stability. NATO must make it clear that it intends to remain a serious military alliance[61] and that enlargement will be a deliberate process undertaken based on the needs of the organization, the capabilities of prospective members, and with regard for a fearful and dangerous Russia.

The United States should also encourage NATO to undergo a considerable pause before accepting any new members. A lengthy pause (of approximately ten years) would allow NATO to more completely incorporate Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into the Alliance and assess the likely effects of continued enlargement on the organization.[62] It also would give Russia time to grow accustomed to an enlarged NATO and to adjust to the new political and strategic realities in Europe. Although some enlargement proponents contend that a delay in NATO's expansion is nothing more than an "apausement"[63] to Russia's threatening, it is a politically difficult[64] yet absolutely necessary step that should be taken.

Conclusion

It is imperative that US policymakers establish a clear Baltic strategy that places US interests at its foundation. Although the Clinton Administration made a good beginning with the adoption of the Baltic Action Plan, subsequent statements and policies have left US objectives regarding the Baltic republics in a state of uncertainty. That uncertainty is harmful because it has created an unrealistic sense of expectation for the Baltic republics, unnecessary anxiety for Russia, and confusion among our NATO allies. It is a self-imposed policy weakness that we can and should correct now. By using the Baltic Action Plan as a focal point, the United States should act to encourage improved Baltic-Russian relations and work in conjunction with our NATO allies to establish a long-term Alliance strategy and conditions for membership based solely on NATO's strategic and geopolitical needs.

Implementing this strategy will not be easy. The strategy proposed here does not correspond to the desires and goals of the Baltic republics or to the promises made to them by the Clinton Administration. However, the Baltic nations are good students of their national self-interest, and they should not expect otherwise from the United States. The realities of the ancients remain equally valid today--the strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept.[65] Notwithstanding our promises and hopes that the Baltic republics may someday become NATO members, today is not the day, nor should that day come soon. The Baltic republics are simply not ready to become NATO members, and even if they were, NATO is not yet ready for them.

NOTES

1. The cornerstone of the NATO Alliance is the member states' commitment to defend one another as provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C. 1949. In that article, the members agree that an armed attack against one will be considered an armed attack against all.
2. NATO Summit, "The Alliance's Strategic Concept," 24 April 1999, p.10, available on the internet at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>, accessed 15 September 1999.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. North Atlantic Treaty, Article 10.
5. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The NATO Handbook* (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, 1998), p. 81.
6. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Study on NATO Enlargement," September 1995, internet, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/enl-9502.htm>, accessed 8 October 1999, ch. 1, paras. A.3 and B.4.
7. *Ibid.*, ch. 4, para. A.43.
8. *Ibid.*, ch. 4, para. A.45.
9. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.
10. William J. Clinton, "Remarks by the President on the National Interest for Enlarging NATO," 20 March 1998, internet, http://www.fas.org/man/nato/offdocs/us_98/980320-nato-wh.htm, accessed 6 January 2000.

11. Zbigniew Brzezinski, as quoted in Frank T. Csongos, "NATO: Expansion--How Far, How Fast?" 12 February 1999, internet, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/04/F.RU.990426145855.html>, accessed 23 October 1999.
12. William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Draft) (Washington: The White House, 1999), p. 29.
13. Stephen J. Blank, "Rhetoric and Reality in NATO Enlargement," in *European Security and NATO Enlargement: A View from Central Europe*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1998), p. 15.
14. Stephen J. Blank, *NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States: What Can the Great Powers Do?* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1997), p. 47.
15. Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), pp. 12-13.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
17. US Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Baltic Action Plan," undated, internet, http://www.nato.int/usa/info/baltic_action_plan.htm, accessed 1 January 2000.
18. A result of this effort is the Northern European Initiative begun in September 1997 that seeks to promote a socially and economically unified region. The initiative also seeks to create stronger regional cooperation (including the northwestern region of Russia) and cross-border relations. The efforts are not limited to reliance on government action but also include nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. The United States also has worked to support regional cooperation among the Baltic and Nordic states. The use of the Nordic nations to promote regional cooperation accomplishes two ends. It establishes a pattern of Baltic cooperation and reliance among regional neighbors, and it reduces US involvement and presence in the region. Any reduction of US involvement in the Baltic region is bound to allay Russian concerns that are certain to develop as the Baltic republics move from Russian influence to closer integration with the West.
19. The Baltic Charter (contained in the appendix to Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe*, pp. 78-79).
20. William J. Clinton, "International Political Figures on Lithuanian Integration into NATO," internet, <http://www.itembassyus.org/>, accessed 23 October 1999.
21. K. P. Foley, "NATO: U.S. Says No Geographic Exclusions," 19 July 1999, internet, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/07/F.RU.990719122314.html>, accessed 23 October 1999.
22. Charles Heyman, ed., *Jane's World Armies* (Surry, England: Jane's Information Group, 1999), section on Estonia, p. 1.
23. Gregory Hall, "NATO and Russia, Russians and NATO: A Turning Point in Post-Cold War East-West Relations?" *World Affairs*, 162 (Summer 1999), 25.
24. Daniel F. C. Austin, "NATO's Expansion to Northern Europe," *European Security*, 8 (Spring 1999), 84.
25. Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Folly of NATO Enlargement," 3 February 1997, internet, <http://www.cato.org/dailys/2-03-97.html>, accessed 7 February 2000.
26. Yevgeny Primakov, as quoted in Stanley Kober, "Russia's Search for Identity," in *NATO Enlargement: Illusions and Reality*, eds. Ted Galen Carpenter and Barbara Conry (Washington: Cato Institute, 1998), p. 130.
27. Boris Yeltsin, as quoted in S. J. Main, "Instability in the Baltic Region," Conflict Studies Research Centre, British

Army Doctrine and Development Directorate, Camberley, Eng., June 1998, p. 10.

28. William Perry, as quoted in Taras Kuzio, "The Baltic, Ukraine and the Path to NATO," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 9 (July 1997), 300.

29. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Study on NATO Enlargement," ch. 5, para. B.72.

30. Main, pp. 8-9.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 7. The ethnically Russian population in Lithuania is approximately eight percent.

32. Heyman, Estonia, p. 1, Latvia, p. 1.

33. Robert D. Asmus and Robert C. Nurick, "NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States," *Survival*, 38 (Summer 1996), 130. For example, in Latvia only 4,000 of the more than 700,000 ethnic Russians have been granted citizenship.

34. Anatol Lieven, "No Russian Spoken Here," *The New York Times*, 16 July 1999, sec. A, p. 19. In July 1999 the Latvian parliament passed, by an overwhelming majority, legislation that not only would have banned the use of the Russian language from public life in Latvia, it also would have placed severe restrictions on the use of that language in private life. Although the newly elected Latvian president refused to sign the legislation and sent it back to the parliament, the situation underscores the ethnic struggle within the Baltic region.

35. Asmus and Nurick.

36. William Perry, as quoted in Daniel F. C. Austin, "NATO Expansion and the Baltic States," Conflict Studies Research Centre, British Army Doctrine and Development Directorate, Camberley, Eng., February 1999, p. 1.

37. Heyman, Estonia, pp. 1-2, Latvia, p. 1, Lithuania, p. 1.

38. "NATO: Fault Lines in the Sand," *The Economist*, 24 April 1999, p. SN16.

39. Heyman.

40. Austin, "NATO's Expansion and the Baltic States," p. 1.

41. Austin, "NATO's Expansion to Northern Europe," p. 88.

42. Heyman, Estonia, p. 1.

43. Madeleine Albright, as quoted in John Hillen and Michael P. Noonan, "The Geopolitics of NATO Enlargement," *Parameters*, 28 (Autumn 1998), 22.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, p.2.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

48. Ted Galen Carpenter, "Strategic Evasions and the Drive for NATO Enlargement," in Carpenter and Conry, p. 28.

49. Russian Concept of National Security, as quoted in Main, p. 6.

50. Hillen and Noonan, p. 32.

51. Heyman, Russia. Although Russian military strength has declined both quantitatively and qualitatively since the end of the Cold War, Russia still maintains a potent military force in the areas adjacent to the Baltic republics. An estimate of army assets located in the Leningrad and Kaliningrad military districts includes more than 80,000 personnel, 1,900 tanks, 1,700 artillery pieces, 150 attack helicopters, and 2,600 armored infantry vehicles.
52. Ted Galen Carpenter, "Introduction," in Carpenter and Conry, p. 3.
53. Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe*, p. 25.
54. Heyman, Latvia, p.1.
55. Frederick W. Kroesen, "The Military Aspects of NATO Expansion," in *NATO After Enlargement: New Challenges, New Missions, New Forces*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1998), p. 53. See also US General Accounting Office, *NATO: Progress Toward More Mobile and Deployable Forces* (Washington: General Accounting Office, September 1999), pp. 12-18.
56. Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe*, p. 25.
57. Vladislav A. Vershinin, as quoted in Main, p. 4.
58. Asmus and Nurick, pp. 128-29.
59. Blank, *NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States: What Can the Great Powers Do?* p. 35.
60. Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe*, p. 46.
61. Council on Foreign Relations, *Russia, Its Neighbors, and an Enlarging NATO* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, December 1996 - March 1997), p. 10, internet, <https://www.cfr.org/publication/11471>, accessed 14 December 1999.
62. RAND, *Stopping the Decline in US-Russian Relations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1996), p. 2, internet, <http://www.rand.org/publication/P/P7986.html>, accessed 15 December 1999.
63. William Roth, as quoted in William Safire, "The Real NATO Issue," *The New York Times*, 16 March 1998, sec. A, p. 25.
64. Difficult because administration policies and statements have given the Baltic republics the clear impression that the United States will support Baltic membership in the near future. As a result of those actions, it is likely that our national credibility will be adversely affected if we now reverse our course and urge NATO to adopt a membership moratorium.
65. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Suffolk, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 402.

Colonel Kent R. Meyer is the Commander, US Army Claims Service, Fort Meade, Maryland. He earned a bachelor's degree in history from North Dakota State University and a law degree from the University of North Dakota, and he is a graduate of the Army War College. A member of the Judge Advocate General's Corps, Colonel Meyer has served in a variety of staff positions, including assignments as the Staff Judge Advocate, 2d Infantry Division, and as the Staff Judge Advocate, 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell.