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Mr. Donald Baer  
OEOB Room 197  
Office of Speechwriting  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Don:

I thought you might be interested in the enclosed article, which will run in the July/August issue of Foreign Affairs. In it, I take issue with those who have claimed that NATO enlargement could never be ratified in the U.S. given the current political environment. I argue, to the contrary, that with sufficient White House leadership, ratification is entirely likely, and that there is generally more political room for an activist U.S. foreign policy agenda than many observers realize.

I would welcome your comments on this article, and look forward to talking with you about this issue as the NATO enlargement debate proceeds.

Sincerely,

Jeremy D. Rosner  
Senior Associate

Enclosure
As the debate over the merits and implications of extending NATO to include Central and Eastern Europe rages on, a critical question has largely been ignored: will Congress and the American people support the initiative? Adding new members requires the unanimous approval of the current allies, and the hurdle for ratification is highest in the United States. The other 15 alliance members need to muster majorities in party-disciplined legislatures, but American consent requires two-thirds of the notoriously independent Senate. With hardly a dissenting voice, the Senate approved membership for Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1982, but those votes were cast in the Cold War's shadow. With that looming menace gone, it is worth leaving aside for the moment the advisability of enlargement and asking simply whether enlargement is possible given the shifting terrain of U.S. domestic politics.

Like many post-Cold War foreign policy initiatives, NATO enlargement has scrambled traditional partisan and ideological blocs. Supporters of enlargement include balance-of-power conservatives apprehensive about rising Russian nationalism and intent on further embedding Germany in Europe's security edifice, idealists who seek to bolster democratic and economic reform in Central and Eastern Europe, and natophiles who see enlargement as a way to preserve the alliance and its unique military structure. The anti-enlargement faction is equally diverse. It embraces isolationists opposed to further security commitments, internationalists who see enlargement as antagonistic to Russia and unnecessary for the region's political and economic development and security, and hawks who worry that the...
additional states will weaken the alliance's defenses, strain the current members' shrinking military resources, and risk leaks of sensitive information.

Even more striking than these motley coalitions are their antithetical predictions for the proposal's fate in Congress. Opponents have generally concluded that a new tide of isolationism dooms the idea. European security expert Charles Kupchan writes that U.S. ratification would require a “feat of magic” given “skin-deep” political support among a public and Congress that were reluctant to deploy troops in Bosnia or spend taxpayer dollars to rescue the Mexican peso. Meanwhile, enlargement's proponents cavalierly disregard the question of ratification, as if compelling arguments alone would produce the required 67 votes. Rather than join forces to battle the proposal's opponents, they have trained their fire on each other. Republicans included pro-enlargement provisions in the Contract With America to reprove Clinton for his slow pace on the initiative. When the provisions came to a vote, the administration weighed in against them, on the grounds that they restricted the president's ability to conduct foreign policy.

Both sides cannot be right. American approval of NATO enlargement cannot be both impossible and inevitable. In fact, while ratification will be difficult, with energetic White House leadership, it is also likely. The enlargement debate ultimately reveals that many observers dangerously overstate the strength of isolationist sentiment and underestimate what kind of foreign policy the United States can sustain after the Cold War.

FALSE ANALOGIES

Pointing to widespread opposition to the U.S. military interventions in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, critics of enlargement argue that Congress will not extend U.S. security guarantees to the distant Visegrád states—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. But this comparison is specious. Resistance to these missions resulted from policy reversals, the inherently ambiguous objectives of peacekeeping, and above all the fact that the U.S. security interests at stake were either minuscule (Somalia and Haiti) or limited (Bosnia). By contrast, NATO protects a vital American national interest—the security of all Europe—and benefits from the memory of its clear, successful Cold War military mission, even if that mission is now changing. Thus, even as Congress objected to U.S. operations in Haiti and Bosnia, it passed pro-enlargement resolutions.

Moreover, enlargement represents a commitment, not a deployment into a hot conflict, and Congress tends to be bolder in sanctioning the former. Veto-proof majorities voted to require the president to lift the Bosnian arms embargo, even though that step might have obligated the United States to send troops to evacuate U.N. forces, whereas the deployment to enforce the Dayton accord garnered only lukewarm support. Extending nuclear and conventional guarantees to the states of Central and Eastern Europe would involve higher risks, but the possibility of hostilities would be far more remote.

Senators will also note that the treaty's security pledges are contingent on each state's "constitutional processes," a caveat the Senate demanded in 1949 to ensure that Congress would have a say before troops were sent into combat. Some may
question the value of security guarantees that come so highly conditioned, but NATO has always been plagued by such doubts; Truman administration Secretary of State Dean Acheson lamented "the weakness of words to bind." Only the course of events can prove whether these new pledges are credible, and such doubts are unlikely to derail ratification.

The issue of American credibility will, in fact, increase support for enlargement. At a January 1994 press conference in Prague, Clinton promised to pursue enlargement, and the longer the prospect of membership sits on the table, the more hesitant Congress will be to yank it away. Stopping the process now would bitterly disappoint states that have anticipated joining the alliance and would send a signal of inconstancy to friends and foes. Pressure on Congress not to renege on America's commitments led key leaders like Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) to back the mission in Bosnia despite misgivings, and similar pressures will play an increasingly important role in the enlargement debate.

The cost of enlargement is often cited as another reason it is not politically plausible. To add new members, NATO would need to extend its military infrastructure, upgrade these states' military capabilities, and perhaps improve the forces of the current allies to make the security guarantees more meaningful. Critics contend that with both polit-
ical parties committed to a balanced budget, Congress will balk at paying the U.S. share of these improvements, which will run into the “tens of billions of dollars,” as one House member has claimed. But cost is not likely to be as large an obstacle to ratification as critics assume. RAND analysts Ronald Asmus and Richard Kugler recently estimated that the expenses associated with enlargement would amount to between $10 billion and $50 billion over 10 to 15 years, depending on the force posture adopted. They conclude that the most likely figure is approximately $42 billion, with a U.S. slice of about $1 billion annually. This is a large sum, but it is less than one-half of one percent of the current U.S. defense budget and only a fraction of the $7 billion Congress added to this year’s Pentagon budget.

Cost concerns may affect implementation of NATO enlargement more than ratification. It is one thing to make commitments and another to pay for them. Shortly after the Senate approved the North Atlantic Treaty, which created NATO, Truman sent Congress a request for $1.4 billion in military assistance for the new allies. Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.), who had delivered the Republican support for the treaty, suddenly came out against the funding package, and Truman had to modify his request. Today, cost might not derail enlargement, for Congress may choose to acknowledge deficit pressures by reducing the accompanying military assistance.

The higher defense appropriations that NATO enlargement would entail may even become the basis for a broader coalition in favor of ratification. This year congressional hawks coerced Clinton into acceding to their demand for a higher Pentagon budget by making funding for the Bosnian mission contingent on it. In a recent speech endorsing enlargement, House Speaker Newt Gingrich hinted that the G.O.P. might seek a similar exchange in the future: “If you are going to think that [enlargement] through,” he said, “you are not going to cut the defense budget.”

MISLEADING POLLS

Critics of enlargement have also maintained that the American public, scarred by the deaths of U.S. soldiers in Somalia, is unlikely to countenance extending NATO and its security guarantees eastward in the absence of a revived Russian threat. To bolster this argument, they cite survey results, such as a 1994 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations poll, which found that 50 percent of respondents from the general public would oppose using U.S. troops to defend Poland were Russia to invade, while just 32 percent would.

Yet the polling data, on balance, provide stronger evidence that ratification of NATO enlargement is politically achievable. Both the general public and elites continue to express support for NATO, with only a modest falloff since the end of the Cold War. According to the Chicago Council’s poll, 61 percent of the public and 63 percent of opinion leaders favor a sustained or increased commitment to NATO, while only 26 percent of the public and 37 percent of elites call for a decreased commitment to or withdrawal from the alliance. The Chicago Council also asked whether NATO should expand to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic; 42 percent of the public responded affirmatively, with 32 percent opposed,
while among elites, the margin was 58 percent to 37 percent. An ABC/Washington Post poll at the beginning of 1994 showed even stronger public support—a 64 percent to 21 percent margin in favor of admitting these three states. Although the latter poll did not inform respondents that membership would obligate the United States to defend these states against attack, the preference for enlargement in both polls is clear.

Such general support for NATO and enlargement reveals more about the prospects for ratification than does the expressed resistance to sending U.S. forces to defend Poland. With the chances that Russia would invade Poland so apparently remote, it is hardly surprising that respondents would not favor using U.S. troops in that case. More important, polls indicate that the public would not favor deploying U.S. forces even in some circumstances in which the United States has long-standing commitments and in which the use of its troops would be almost automatic. For example, the Chicago Council found that the public would, by a margin of 48 percent to 39 percent, oppose dispatching U.S. troops if North Korea attacked South Korea.

In the end, it is wise to discount all these polls. The relationship between public opinion and official action on specific foreign initiatives has always been complex, and with concern over foreign affairs at historic lows, the relationship has often been downright nonlinear. In 1993 Congress voted for major increases in aid to the former Soviet states despite public opposition, and it has slashed the U.S. contribution to the United Nations even though public support for that organization is high (it gets better ratings than NATO or Congress itself). With so little public attention devoted to foreign policy and with the public's knowledge of NATO limited—throughout the Cold War, between 40 and 50 percent of Americans did not even know Russia was not a NATO member—elected officials have little fear of retribution through the ballot. Presidential leadership, the views of foreign policy elites, and the highly motivated voters of Central and East European descent will be the keys to American approval of enlargement.

Critics of enlargement argue, oddly, that this ethnic bloc—there are almost 10 million Polish-Americans and nearly 20 million Americans with origins in the region—is both extremely powerful and very weak. They claim the ethnic vote has been influential enough to trigger a bidding war between the administration and congressional Republicans over which is more pro-enlargement, yet they also contend that this bloc, less than six percent of the electorate, is too small to force enlargement through Congress, especially once the cost becomes clear. This analysis shows little understanding of how ethnic groups have historically influenced American foreign policy. If ethnic population figures were all that mattered, the United States would give Africa five times as much aid as Israel.

In fact, Central and East European ethnic voters will have a significant impact on the NATO enlargement debate. The low salience of the issue makes the politics of ratification vulnerable to the sway of ethnic interest groups: the less the general public cares about an issue, the greater the influence of those who care a great deal. Moreover, Central and East European ethnics are concentrated...
in 14 Midwestern and Northeastern states, which include key battlegrounds this fall and account for 194 electoral votes.

The most important variables affecting an ethnic group's influence on foreign policy are the intensity of its political efforts and the degree to which its goals align with U.S. security interests. The disparity between aid to the Mideast and Africa, after all, derives largely from the passion the Jewish community brings to Israel's cause and the different stakes for U.S. security in the two regions. In the case of NATO enlargement, U.S. security interests are extensive; Central and Eastern Europe played a key role in triggering both world wars as well as the Cold War. And although many ethnic voters will, no doubt, cast their ballots based on the security of their jobs rather than the security of their homeland's borders, major ethnic organizations, such as the Polish American Congress, have devoted great attention to enlargement. On the hustings, both Clinton and Bob Dole, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, can be expected to stress their commitment to extending the alliance eastward.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS
Yet ratification of NATO enlargement is hardly a foregone conclusion, as many of its advocates assume. The stumbling block will not be America's allegedly isolationist mood, the favorite scapegoat of frustrated internationalists these days. That mood is a myth. Two-thirds of Americans, the same as during the Cold War, want the United States to play "an active role" in world affairs. In fact, the greatest political danger to internationalist initiatives comes from fellow internationalists. Some contend that adding new states to NATO in the near term will isolate Moscow, inflame Russian nationalism, unhinge strategic and conventional arms control agreements, create a security vacuum among those states not initially invited into the alliance, and renew Cold War divisions. Only if signs of Russian revanchism become clear should NATO pursue enlargement, they argue, and some urge the transatlantic community to replace NATO with a pan-European collective security system.

The main proponents of this view in the Senate will be liberal-to-moderate Democrats. In a 1994 Senate vote on provisions offering military supplies to the Visegrád states, 21 Democrats joined one Republican in voting against the amendment. Voicing a sentiment common among enlargement skeptics, internationalist Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) explained his opposition: "I am concerned by any attempt to draw unnecessary lines in a newly undivided Europe."

Other internationalists worry that the initiative will drain money from an already underfunded and overextended Pentagon. Some Armed Services Committee members will raise this objection, and tepid support for enlargement among senior military officials would bolster their argument. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed both types of internationalist concerns last year: "By forcing the pace of NATO enlargement at a volatile and unpredictable moment in Russia's history, we could place ourselves in the worst of all security environments: rapidly declining defense budgets, broader responsibilities, and heightened instability."

Such comments hark back to the alliance's creation. Despite the lopsided
NATO Enlargement's American Hurdle

82-13 Senate vote in favor of ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Truman administration faced opposition from three elements: isolationists, defense hawks, and liberal internationalists. This political triangle shows signs of forming again, possibly more potently than in 1949. In a debate on the Senate floor last October, Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Tex.), a member of the Armed Services Committee, noted the impact of enlargement on the Pentagon, while Nunn joined moderate Republican Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas and fellow Democrat J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana in raising questions about the plan's impact on international relations. Nunn, Kassebaum, Johnston, and Pell will all retire this year, and defense-oriented senators may rally behind ratification if the vote comes to be seen not as a limited policy decision but as a broader referendum on whether the United States should continue to lead NATO or even remain a member. Still, it does not take much speculative math—perhaps 20 Democrats plus 14 G.O.P. defense hawks or isolationists—to conclude that the 34 votes needed to kill NATO enlargement are not beyond reach.

Those in the administration and elsewhere who believe the debate is over and ratification assured are fooling themselves. Their inattention to the emerging political environment could give opponents an early and possibly decisive jump; the same error nearly defeated the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993. Conversely, those who would blames isolationism for threatening enlargement are pointing a finger in the wrong direction. Although foreign capitals might interpret the rejection of enlargement as a repeat of the 1920s, the decisive negative votes would come not from the descendants of those who sank the League of Nations, but from the heirs of its authors.

DANGEROUS STORIES

The final hazard for the ratification of enlargement stems from Congress' greater assertiveness, partisan fervor, and volatility on foreign affairs issues since the end of the Cold War. More peace on earth has always meant less peace on foreign policy matters down the length of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the 104th Congress has produced post–World War II lows in bipartisanship and congressional support for the White House on key national security votes. The new mood has less to do with isolationism than with oppositionism, since Congress now often calls for more activism when the White House seems hesitant, as when it insisted on an end to the Bosnian arms embargo and a stronger commitment to Taiwan's defense.

The atmosphere in Congress is also increasingly volatile. When the Contract With America's provisions advocating immediate NATO enlargement came before the House in February 1995, second-term Representative John Linder (R-Ga.) supported them. Last December, however, responding to the argument that NATO's credibility depended on a U.S. presence in Bosnia, Linder said, "It is time to recognize that NATO expired in August 1989. It is time for us to give it a decent burial, with full military honors." This dramatic reversal on NATO—from enlargement to interment in just ten months—should serve as a warning to all who think they can take congressional support for granted. If Clinton is reelected, many Republican supporters may defect from the enlargement effort.
Jeremy D. Rosner

citing their concern that it would transform NATO from a shield for collective defense into a peacekeeping morass.

The challenge for a Dole or Clinton administration will be to hold on to as many members from the opposing party as possible. Certainly, many other factors will influence the U.S. politics of NATO enlargement: European views, the progress of reform in Central and Eastern Europe, events in Russia and Bosnia, and the reaction of Ukraine, the Baltic States, and others not likely to be among the first welcomed into the alliance. However, while the admission of new NATO members faces pitfalls, it is politically feasible, especially if the next president embraces it as a personal project and works closely with congressional leaders of both parties. All this does not prove that enlargement is the right policy for the United States; we do not choose a path simply because we can. But there is little reason to refrain from pursuing it out of a fear that the national mood cannot support it.

That conclusion has implications beyond NATO enlargement. The stories we Americans tell ourselves about our national will powerfully shape the security policies of the United States and countries around the world. But false stories are dangerous and must be corrected early. By misjudging its political will, the United States narrows its options and undermines its interests. A good foreign policy must begin with the command, "Know thyself."