This is not a textual record. This is used as an administrative marker by the Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder Title:</th>
<th>NATO/Europe - Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Office-Individual:</td>
<td>Speechwriting-Boorstin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original OA/ID Number:</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row: 48</td>
<td>Section: 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the Clinton administration gets its way, future American presidents will be obliged by international treaty to consider an attack on Warsaw or Budapest as a national security threat equivalent to an attack on Washington or Los Angeles.

The United States would make that pledge if the North Atlantic Treaty Organization expands eastward, a historic step that some U.S. officials expect by the turn of the century. In theory, it could cause the United States to send American troops to defend Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and perhaps other new allies against external attack—from a disgruntled former Soviet bloc neighbor, or perhaps from a resurgent Russia.

Instead of expiring with the Cold War that it was partly designed to fight, NATO may instead undergo a dramatic metamorphosis. With little public debate, NATO governments have agreed in principle to enlarge the coalition to at least some of the countries on the vast plain between Germany and Russia, historically an unstable and undemocratic region that has been the flash point for two world wars.

Over the past year, the U.S. administration has been remarkably successful in persuading its West European allies to use potential NATO membership as a tool to help consolidate democracy in former communist countries. U.S. officials argue that expanding NATO will promote political stability in central and Eastern Europe and ensure that the United States remains a power in Europe.

Now comes the hard part: selling the plan to American and West European publics and legislatures increasingly preoccupied with domestic problems, and soothing the concerns of a newly assertive Russia whose leaders fear a new East-West division of Europe directed against them. So far, Russian leaders have strongly opposed any NATO expansion, and hinted it could cause the collapse of Moscow's fragile attempt to build a cooperative relationship with the West.

"This is an important psychological and strategic moment. We can either seize it or not," said Anthony Lake, President Clinton's national security adviser and one of the administration's earliest proponents of NATO expansion. "I genuinely believe it will not be necessary to create a new curtain [dividing Europe]." In the end, I think the Russians will understand that it is in their interest to accept the inevitability of NATO enlargement."

The goal of an expanding NATO is stability in central Europe," said Assistant Secretary of State Richard C. Holbrooke, a key player in the bureaucratic juggling over the issue that wracked the administration late last year. "We must expand the zone of security and stability into this very unstable region. NATO membership will tie the security establishments of these countries together as well as binding these peoples together with a common set of democratic values and security commitments."

Based on interviews with dozens of American and European officials, this series of articles will describe how policymakers in NATO's capitals came to the decision that the alliance should be expanded. Today's article focuses on the policy debate that has gone on in Washington for the last two years, and describes how the Clinton administration overcame its initial caution—and the Pentagon's continuing skepticism—about expanding NATO. Thursday's article explores the views of NATO's European members. A concluding article on Friday will preview the public debate over NATO expansion that are likely to precede the admission of new members.

Under article five of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, which created NATO, the United States and its allies agreed that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." This broad commitment was understood to mean that the United States accepted the obligation of defending Germany against a Soviet tank invasion, or responding in kind to a Soviet nuclear attack on London or Paris. Soviet power was the enemy NATO was created to thwart.

AbseTime the Soviet Union, NATO's role...
used the formula: "The question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members, but when and how." At first, few people paid much attention to such rhetoric. As long as "when" and "how" went unaddressed, the issue could be postponed.

During the spring of 1994, the NATO expansion lobby gained an influential new ally in Talbott. The evolution in his views coincided with his nomination in February 1994 to deputy secretary of state. Previously, as the administration's leading Russia expert, he had tended to look at the problem through the prism of U.S.-Russia relations. In his new position, he was obliged to pay much more attention to security problems in the heart of Europe.

Some administration insiders attribute Talbott's change of heart partly to the beating he took during confirmation hearings, where he was accused by Republican senators of being "soft" on Russia. They depict him as a man of fiery but political instincts who felt a need to protect his friend, the president, from being outflanked by the State Department. His advisers were beginning to push the idea of inviting countries such as Poland to join NATO.

In an interview, Talbott said that he had always been in favor of NATO expansion, provided it took place in a "calm and measured" way. In October 1993, he was still pressing for "full membership." In June 1994, he was saying that the plan would take place in stages, and that there were still "some issues we need to discuss." Talbott shot back: "That sounds like obstructionism to me. We need to settle this right now. Either you are on the president's program, or you are not."

Talbott's undiplomatic language shocked the 30 or so generals and foreign policy thinkers who had been shunted off into the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russian" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton

... wanted timetable for expansion

in response to a variety of political pressures. Foreign policy thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry A. Kissinger were writing articles, drawing attention to the potentially destabilizing security vacuum in central Europe. Unhappy that Poland had been shut off from the halfway house of PFP, Polish Americans and the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russia" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton

... wanted timetable for expansion

in response to a variety of political pressures. Foreign policy thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry A. Kissinger were writing articles, drawing attention to the potentially destabilizing security vacuum in central Europe. Unhappy that Poland had been shut off from the halfway house of PFP, Polish Americans and the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russia" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton

... wanted timetable for expansion

in response to a variety of political pressures. Foreign policy thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry A. Kissinger were writing articles, drawing attention to the potentially destabilizing security vacuum in central Europe. Unhappy that Poland had been shut off from the halfway house of PFP, Polish Americans and the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russia" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton

... wanted timetable for expansion

in response to a variety of political pressures. Foreign policy thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry A. Kissinger were writing articles, drawing attention to the potentially destabilizing security vacuum in central Europe. Unhappy that Poland had been shut off from the halfway house of PFP, Polish Americans and the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russia" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton

... wanted timetable for expansion

in response to a variety of political pressures. Foreign policy thinkers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry A. Kissinger were writing articles, drawing attention to the potentially destabilizing security vacuum in central Europe. Unhappy that Poland had been shut off from the halfway house of PFP, Polish Americans and the White House with letters, calling for it to be granted full NATO membership. In July, Republicans were beginning to use the issue of NATO expansion as a stick to beat the administration for its allegedly "pro-Russia" tilt.

In December 1993, Polish Foreign Minister Andrej Olechowski came to Washington and made an emotional case for full integration into NATO, pointing his first on a State Department table to make his point. During White House brainstorming sessions in the Cabinet Room and the nearby Roosevelt Room, Clinton expressed worries about the "security lurch" in central Europe. According to one participant, his advisers recommended that he address the expansion issue at a NATO summit in January 1994. To deal with the Russian problem, the administration began to think about the "parallel track" approach, originally proposed by Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser. The Polish-bom Brzezinski was obsessed with how to move toward long-term stability in central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He discussed his ideas in detail with Lake and other administration officials in late 1993 and early 1994.

"From the very beginning, Lake was more sympathetic to other members of the administration," Brzezinski recalled. "I did not have to do any protostyling with Tony."

Lake and his allies persuaded the president to make a specific reference to the inevitability of NATO expansion at a meeting of central European leaders in Prague in January 1994, immediately after the NATO Summit, which had endorsed the idea of enlargement in principle. This was the first time that Clinton
SECURING THE NEW EUROPE
MILITARY ALLIANCE OR ECONOMIC COMMUNITY?

East Looks to NATO To Speed Unification

By Rick Atkinson and John Pomfret
Washington Post Foreign Service

BRUSSELS—Every morning, in fair weather or foul, two sets of flags are hoisted above Brussels, symbols of the Western Europe that evolved after World War II, and the 21st-century Europe still struggling to be born.

The first set of 15 stands in a neat row outside European Union headquarters, emblematic of the economic strength and political unity that are the goals of the four-decade-old common market movement in Western Europe. The second set of 16, arranged in a tight circle around a rose garden at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters, represents the military power of Western democracies and Europe’s bond with the United States and Canada. Both the EU and NATO have vowed to add more flags in the future, bringing in the former states of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact that lie in the geographic heart of the continent. Eventually, West European governments have said, countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary will be included in the EU’s borderless economy, its parliament and its quasi-governmental bureaucracy. The aim is to overtake the continent’s age-old national divisions and speed the East’s recovery from the economic problems caused by decades of Communist rule.

Five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, it is NATO—the U.S.-led military alliance created to contain the now-defunct Soviet Union—that has become the vehicle selected by governments on both sides of the Atlantic to make the unification of Europe. Prodded by the Clinton administration and by Germany, West European governments have agreed to an accelerated timetable for NATO expansion that could make Poland and possibly other countries full members by the end of the 1990s. Meanwhile, EU expansion has been postponed to an indefinite date in the next century.

The decision to give precedence to military rather than economic moves for unifying Europe has caused doubts in Western Europe, where policymakers see the EU as the primary tool for erasing the continent’s national borders. But officials and policymakers say they have agreed to go along with accelerated NATO expansion for two main reasons. First, extending the military alliance appears easier in both political and practical terms than extending the economic community. At the same time, NATO expansion gives the United States a central role in the next phase of European expansion, and a means of continued leverage in the new Europe—something that both Washington and key European states, including the former Warsaw Pact countries, see as essential. NATO, European leaders believe, is the guarantee that the United States will continue to regard itself as a European power. So, the argument goes, it is necessary to make NATO bigger to preserve it as an institution capable of operating effectively in the post-Cold War world.

From the perspective of the former Eastern Bloc states, NATO has become both the path of least resistance in the push to join the West and the certificate of full partnership in that community. “NATO is the only organization with a credible force of deterrence that could stabilize the region as a whole,” Hungarian Foreign Minister Laszlo Kovacs said recently at a security conference in Munich.

In the West, a sense of urgency about NATO expansion represents a significant shift in policy from the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the United States and its allies planned to move slowly and cautiously in expanding NATO to the East, as so not as to antagonize Russia.

“Europe is going to be a new family,” German Defense Minister Volker Ruehe, the most forceful Western European advocate for NATO expansion, said in an interview. “What is the alternative? To say we’re a closed club, we don’t accept you? That’s the policy of Stalin, and it will invite lots of trouble.”

Germany’s enthusiasm for broadening the alliance has been accepted only reluctantly by several West European countries, especially along the alliance’s southern flank. Both Italy and France, worried that an eastward expansion of NATO would needlessly antagonize Russia, believe former Soviet Bloc countries should be added only if NATO also forges stronger ties with Moscow. In France, which has never been an enthusiastic NATO member and does not participate in its military command, prominent officials continue to argue that NATO expansion should be delayed until the EU is ready to add members.

European critics argue that NATO addresses a problem former Warsaw Pact countries do not have, since neither Russia nor any other state now poses a credible security threat. The problem that former Communist states do have, economic backwardness, will only be relieved when the larger integration promised by the European Union unfolds, the critics say.

Several senior European leaders publicly—and some senior NATO generals privately—wonder if preoccupation with expansion has given the West an excuse to sidestep a broader debate on the future of transatlantic institutions such as NATO. British then-Defense Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, for example, writing in the journal NATO Review this spring, argued that Europe’s “security needs are smaller than any purely military arrangement” and require “a new framework.” Former EU chief Jacques Delors openly rebuked the United States last winter for being “overhasty” in pushing NATO enlargement as “a premature initiative which was badly timed.”
A Tough Choice

The widening of Western Europe's core institutions is part of an immensely complex negotiation that is inextricably linked to stability, cultural bonds, national allegiances, and strategic interests. There is widespread fear among European leaders that an associated process is not handleable properly, with luck and an exiguous sense of timing. Europe could again pitch into one of the profound processes that have characterized the region's history.

Europe faces a thorny policy dilemma in choosing when to admit new eastern members. France worries "Poland simply must overcome national forms of governance," former Prime Minister Jozef Ponte. "But such a decision would be a political minefield that could be used by the opposition to undermine President Belaazdi's mandate." Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke observed that the "new EU states would have to bear a heavy cost," and "the issue is uncontrolled migration or plutonium smuggling," it is widely agreed that German reunification is a major national security concern.

In the end, the decisionwhether to attack first priority to NATO or the EU has been driven by a shrewd practice among east European leaders. While most east European countries seek inclusion in both NATO and the EU, yet a "question which goal is easier to achieve, and that is probably NATO," Czech Finance Minister Jan Fuhr further said in an interview.

Both east and west European leaders argue that there are few practical and obvious obstacles to including new members in NATO, in including new nation-states in the European Union. That is because the European Union is not just an international accord about free trade, like the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has shown how economic barriers to the movement of goods, services, and investment are low nearly halfway of the EU's annual budget. The EU could never afford to grant elements like those that destroyed the former Soviet Union. The EU could never afford to grant those kinds of subsidies to the hundreds of thousands of foreign workers.

"Europe's eastern neighbors are fellow democracies, but they are also fellow states," former NATO chief Elie Hurewitz observed in a recent interview. With Europe's eastern states as fellow democracies, it is imperative that the EU take a lead role in the process of incorporating the eastern nations into the EU. With the EU, there is no question that there is no problem that I'm so sure that it is clear.

A Determined Germany

While the former Eastern Bloc countries have been moving toward NATO membership, it is Germany that has decisively moved Europe toward acceptance of the former Warsaw Pact states. Led by Defense Minister Peter Scheue, Germany has overcome the skeptics elsewhere in Western Europe. And many in Bonn believe Scheue played an influential role in helping to persuade American President-elect John F. Kennedy to change the U.S. policy toward the former Eastern European states.

In the end, the decisionwhether to attack first priority to NATO or the EU has been driven by a shrewd practice among east European leaders. While most east European countries seek inclusion in both NATO and the EU, yet a "question which goal is easier to achieve, and that is probably NATO," Czech Finance Minister Jan Fuhr further said in an interview.
The administration responded to political pressure from Polish and other ethnic groups," said Charles Gati, who worked as a senior adviser in the State Department until mid-1994, and is himself of Hungarian origin.

Republican members of Congress, such as Rep. Benjamin Gilman (N.Y.), who represents an estimated 28,000 Polish Americans, also have paid a good deal of attention to the ethnic vote. Following intensive lobbying by the Central and East European Coalition, a commitment to fast-track NATO expansion was included as part of the GOP's "Contract With America" prior to the midterm elections last November. By outbidding the administration in supporting expansion, the Republicans have sought to portray Clinton as soft on Russia.

The East European lobbying groups have discovered that it does not take a great deal of effort to create an electoral issue, particularly if they are united and there is no obvious price tag. Lobbying groups for Ukraine and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia have supported Poland's aspiration to join NATO, on the understanding that nations will be next in line.

While the NATO expansion coalition is broad, it is also fragile. Politically, it is extremely diverse, bringing together some unlikely bedfellows, ranging from ardent Cold Warriors like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to liberal Democrats like Sen. Paul Simon (Ill.), who represents a state with a large concentration of Polish voters. Internationals have lain down beside isolationists; liberals have made common cause with conservatives. If the costs of NATO expansion prove too high, this coalition could well fall apart.

How France May React

Although other NATO members went along with U.S. wishes last December in agreeing to an enlargement study, there also is continuing skepticism in the alliance about expansion. During a visit to Washington last month, newly elected French President Jacques Chirac suggested at a lunch with U.S. foreign policy analysts that European security problems might be better handled through some expansion. During a visit to Washington last month, newly elected French President Jacques Chirac suggested at a lunch with U.S. foreign policy analysts that European security problems might be better handled through some unilateral steps, ranging from ardent Cold Warriors like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to liberal Democrats like Sen. Paul Simon (Ill.), who represents a state with a large concentration of Polish voters. Internationals have lain down beside isolationists; liberals have made common cause with conservatives. If the costs of NATO expansion prove too high, this coalition could well fall apart.

How France May React

Although other NATO members went along with U.S. wishes last December in agreeing to an enlargement study, there also is continuing skepticism in the alliance about expansion. During a visit to Washington last month, newly elected French President Jacques Chirac suggested at a lunch with U.S. foreign policy analysts that European security problems might be better handled through some unilateral steps, ranging from ardent Cold Warriors like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to liberal Democrats like Sen. Paul Simon (Ill.), who represents a state with a large concentration of Polish voters. Internationals have lain down beside isolationists; liberals have made common cause with conservatives. If the costs of NATO expansion prove too high, this coalition could well fall apart.

How France May React

Although other NATO members went along with U.S. wishes last December in agreeing to an enlargement study, there also is continuing skepticism in the alliance about expansion. During a visit to Washington last month, newly elected French President Jacques Chirac suggested at a lunch with U.S. foreign policy analysts that European security problems might be better handled through some unilateral steps, ranging from ardent Cold Warriors like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to liberal Democrats like Sen. Paul Simon (Ill.), who represents a state with a large concentration of Polish voters. Internationals have lain down beside isolationists; liberals have made common cause with conservatives. If the costs of NATO expansion prove too high, this coalition could well fall apart.

How France May React

Although other NATO members went along with U.S. wishes last December in agreeing to an enlargement study, there also is continuing skepticism in the alliance about expansion. During a visit to Washington last month, newly elected French President Jacques Chirac suggested at a lunch with U.S. foreign policy analysts that European security problems might be better handled through some unilateral steps, ranging from ardent Cold Warriors like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to liberal Democrats like Sen. Paul Simon (Ill.), who represents a state with a large concentration of Polish voters. Internationals have lain down beside isolationists; liberals have made common cause with conservatives. If the costs of NATO expansion prove too high, this coalition could well fall apart.
Balancing Domestic Political Costs After the Rhetoric Is Spent

SECURING THE NEW EUROPE
NATO EXPANSION: A 'CHERRY PIE' ISSUE

then a whole different set of players will get involved. These issues haven't been seriously discussed yet.

Until now, proposals to extend NATO membership to former Soviet bloc nations have been treated as a "cherry pie issue" on Capitol Hill. Nobody has wanted to offend the influential lobby of ethnic voters with roots in countries, especially Polish-Americans. But there could be a significant shift in congressional sentiment as the date for admitting new members approaches, and questions arise about such issues as whether NATO could ever be dragged into a war between Hungary and Romania, and whether Poland is able to contribute significantly to the defense of the United States.

Even though the Clinton administration is formally committed to the eastward expansion of NATO, numerous obstacles remain before new members are admitted. Any enlargement decision will require ratification by two-thirds of the U.S. Senate, and the remaining 15 members of NATO will have to give unanimous approval.

"Politically, the administration can't back down now, but I still don't think this is a done deal," said Michael Mandelbaum, a foreign policy analyst at Johns Hopkins University. "Neither the Congress nor the country has looked at the fine print. We haven't yet answered the question: Are we prepared to defend the Polish-Belorussian border with the American nuclear arsenal?"

"There are signs that the NATO expansion debate is breaking out of the bureaucratic ghetto. Beginning this spring, editorial writers, columnists and foreign policy

pundits have weighed in with opinions about whether Americans should be ready to "die for Bratislava" and the risks of provoking a nationalist backlash in Russia, if NATO expansion goes ahead.

The domestic debate about NATO expansion is one about America's role in the world. Opponents argue that it is foolish for America to assume unprecedented new security obligations at a time when the country is turning inward and is increasingly preoccupied with economic problems. Supporters see NATO enlargement as critical to preserving the institution that has guaranteed an American presence in Europe for the past half-century.

One Estimate: $20 Billion Plus
Both sides agree, however, that both the U.S. Congress and the American public have been woefully uninformed about what is at stake.

"The administration has consulted with NATO allies, and initiated a study of the 'why' and 'how' of expansion, but there has not been any real consultation with Congress or the public," complained Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.), a leading supporter of expansion.

So far, the administration has deliberately avoided announcing a dollar cost for expanding the alliance, on grounds that it is premature. The Rand Corp. has estimated a total cost of $229 million originally down from $229 million originally requested.

Two months later, Congress passed a little-noticed amendment slashing the funds set aside for upgrading NATO equipment and facilities. Although the House had endorsed an eventual expansion of the alliance that could end up costing billions of dollars, it voted to cut a routine U.S. payment for NATO infrastructure to $66 million, down from $229 million originally requested.

There has long been a contradiction between the rhetorical enthusiasm of American politicians for promoting the cause of freedom around the world and a penny-pinching reluctance to foot the bill. The clash is likely to become particularly acute as Congress debates extending the NATO security umbrella to cover former Warsaw Pact countries such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

"As long as there is no price tag attached to them, resolutions about NATO expansion will pass overwhelmingly," said Sen. Sam Nunn (Ga.), the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, who has emerged as a leading critic of the Clinton administration's support for NATO enlargement. "When you have a price tag, and start talking about NATO infrastructure and the deployment of American troops, the whole debate is going to change."