

“NATO Enlargement and Effectiveness”

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Mr. Chairman, it is an honor to testify today before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the state of the NATO alliance in the run up to the Bucharest summit April 2-4, 2008. It has been a privilege to working closely with you as well as Senator Lugar and the Committee more generally on NATO enlargement issues since the early 1990s. Your leadership on these issues has been essential. Bucharest looks like it could become an exciting and potentially controversial summit. The agenda is full and includes difficult issues such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, NATO enlargement, missile defense and relations with Russia. While I will focus my comments today on NATO enlargement, I would first like to touch briefly on two other critical issues – the overall health of the Alliance and Afghanistan.

NATO’s Overall Health

The first is the overall health of this Alliance and the trans-Atlantic relationship more generally. To be honest, it is not good. NATO today is weaker and less central and relevant than it was a decade ago. That is disturbing because I believe the need for trans-Atlantic cooperation is actually going up, not down. As I look out at the world we face, I see more challenges and problems where the US and Europe need to find a common approach. They don’t all involve NATO but many do, at least in part. That is why I am worried about the very real dramatic decline in public support for the Alliance and the United States more generally, especially in countries that have historically been among our closest allies. As an American currently living in Brussels, NATO’s relative marginalization and decline are striking. I know full well that I am not the first person to testify before this Committee that NATO is in crisis. But reversing the decline in support for the United States and the Alliance will be a key challenge facing the next President. I am glad you are holding this hearing so we can start to shed some light on what is wrong and what needs to be done.

Afghanistan

The second issue is Afghanistan. Mr. Chairman, I know you recently returned from a trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan. I have had the chance to read your thoughts on that trip. I,

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too, had the chance to visit Afghanistan for a week last fall with NATO. I came away with three impressions I would like to share as well, in part to reinforce the message that a number of Senators on this Committee have been trying to send.

The first one is that this is indeed a make or break issue for this Alliance and for the Western world more generally. This conflict was not a war of choice, but of necessity. It has every conceivable form of international and multilateral legitimacy. My impression is that the vast majority of the Afghan population wants the international community, including NATO, to be there helping them end this conflict and rebuild their country. In short, many of the prerequisites that were or perhaps still are not in place in Iraq do exist in Afghanistan. Yet, one cannot help but come away from a visit there feeling that we are fighting this war with one hand tied behind our back, without sufficient attention, priority or resources. If we were to fail in Afghanistan – especially if such a letdown were to follow on the heels of failure in Iraq -- the consequences for Western security would be devastating. So the stakes are extremely high.

Second, the fate of Afghanistan and Pakistan are linked. They are two sides of the same conflict. That means we need a much more integrated strategy – and not just for the border region but more generally. We are currently not set up to do that well. NATO is deeply involved in Afghanistan, for example, but it has little knowledge of and no role in Pakistan -- even though events there play a key role in determining the Alliance's success or failure. Our own policies vis-a-vis both countries need to be better integrated and then coordinated with our closest allies.

Third, NATO can do everything right as a military alliance but we can still lose this war. As important as military and security forces are, NATO and the Afghan army cannot by themselves prevail in this conflict for the simple reason that the equation determining success is not just, or even primarily, a military one. The key challenge is providing better governance. That is how we will eventually defeat the Taliban. Visiting Afghanistan, I think we are all struck by the vast discrepancy between our ability as Western governments to marshal and deploy military power on the one hand, and our limited ability to do the same when it comes to the task of reconstruction and helping to provide better governance. Yet the latter are essential to winning the peace in Afghanistan. Our armed services are doing a terrific job but where we are falling down is in our ability to organize and deploy experts to help in areas like development, agriculture, narcotics, etc. Mr. Chairman, I know that you and others have proposed legislation to strengthen our national capacity to do so and I strongly support such steps.

Last but not least, I want to offer a thought on why it has been so hard to get our allies to increase their commitment to Afghanistan. Clearly we missed the chance to forge a new coalition and common strategy after September 11th when NATO declared Article 5. While we eventually realized we had made a mistake, we have been playing catch-up ever since. Allies have come on board in a piecemeal fashion with different understandings of their mission they were signing up for. Making the shift from peacekeeping to a counterinsurgency mission is a political difficult step for many allies.

But I think the fundamental problem we face is that our allies do not really believe the United States has a strategy to win this conflict – and thus are reluctant to take the political risks involved in doing more. If they were convinced the US was serious and had a credible comprehensive strategy to prevail, and if the President of the United States was directly involved in personally selling this to his counterparts, then I believe we would be having a different and more productive conversation. With all due respect to Secretary of Defense Bob Gates who has been working hard to increase allied contributions in Europe, in Europe this issue requires Presidential engagement with his counterparts. But I suspect that task will unfortunately fall to the next Administration.

Getting NATO Enlargement Right

This brings me to the focus of my testimony today which is NATO enlargement and effectiveness. I have been a strong supporter of NATO enlargement dating back to the early 1990s. It has been one of our great success stories of the last decade. After the Iron Curtain lifted, Western leaders seized a historic opportunity to open the doors of NATO and the European Union (EU) to central and eastern Europe. By consolidating democracy and ensuring stability from the Baltics to the Black Sea, we redrew the map of Europe for the better. As a result, the continent today is more peaceful, democratic, and free. All one need do is imagine what Europe today would look like today if NATO had not enlarged. I suspect there would be instability in central and eastern Europe and more tension with Russia. The continent would be even more self-absorbed with its own problems and we would thus have even fewer allies willing and able to work with us to address crises around the world.

That success came about because a lot of people worked hard to make sure we got NATO enlargement right. That brings us to the question we are here to discuss today – what does it mean to get NATO enlargement right at the upcoming summit in Bucharest? In my mind, there are two central questions we need to answer. The first is whether this is the right time to extend invitations to the so-called Adriatic 3 – Albania, Croatia and Macedonia -- to join NATO. That requires us to assess whether these countries are qualified and meet the minimal standards we set for new members a decade ago in NATO and in close consultations with the US Senate, as well as to decide whether such a move now would enhance the stability of the Western Balkans and serve NATO's interest in further consolidating stability in Europe.

The second key question we need to address at Bucharest is the future of our vision of enlargement. Do we as an Alliance have a consensus to go beyond the original vision of the 1990s - an expanded NATO from the Baltic in the north to the western edge of the Black Sea in the south - and take real and meaningful steps to extend the Alliance deeper into Eurasia to Ukraine and across the Black Sea to the Southern Caucasus by reaching out to Georgia? Bucharest can either be the last enlargement summit which addresses the Western Balkans and completes the vision of the 1990s, or the summit where NATO takes the first real step in sketching out a new and bigger vision of enlargement for the next decade. We need to be clear that taking such a step, which I support, will have far-reaching political and strategic ramifications for NATO, Europe and our relations with

Russia. It is not just ‘more of the same’ but a bold new strategic move that would again redraw the map of Europe. In my view, the potential strategic benefits of such a step would be considerable. But we should have no illusions. It will be difficult and require a new strategic narrative, sustained US political attention and diplomatic heavy lifting by this country with close allies and with Moscow if it is to succeed.

Why Performance Matters

Mr. Chairman, in an op-ed in the Washington Post last month entitled “A Better Way to Grow NATO,” I expressed my skepticism about the Administration’s current approach on enlargement for Bucharest. That skepticism was and still is rooted in three factors. The first is performance. As a veteran of these NATO enlargement debates, I am worried about how performance has become less and less of a factor in our deliberations. I am not yet convinced the Adriatic 3 – Albania, Croatia and Macedonia – are qualified for membership. While I do not claim to be the world’s leading expert on these countries, I am skeptical whether they really meet the minimal standards we set a decade ago. I have spoken to experts in and outside the Alliance who share that skepticism. If we are honest, these countries are probably weaker and have received less scrutiny than any of the new members we have brought into the Alliance since the end of the Cold War. I therefore commend the Committee for holding this hearing and insisting that the Administration report on these countries’ qualifications before the President makes a final decision on enlargement

I am often asked why I am so focused on performance. Can’t or shouldn’t we just bring these countries in “as is” and fix their problems later? Isn’t that the job of the State Department, OSD and JCS do – to fix those problems? Unfortunately, the real world is a bit more complicated. A decade ago we debated how high or low we should set the bar for new members. We consciously set the performance bar higher than it had been during the Cold War. We adopted this “tough love” approach because we felt that their internal reform was an essential building block of European security and because there was no immediate external threat to these countries. Nowhere is this more true than in the Western Balkans today where the real risks to instability are largely internal and due to the lack of reform. That is why I believe strongly that it would be a mistake to lower NATO’s bar for these countries. We should ask no more but also no less of them than we did for previous countries like Poland, the Baltic states or Romania.

Balkan Stability

This brings me my second concern with the Administration’s approach to Bucharest. It seems to me that the crux of the Administration’s argument is that we need to do this round of enlargement now to shore up Western Balkan stability in the wake of Kosova independence. I agree with the Administration on the need for Balkan stability. If anything, I fault this Administration for not paying enough attention to the Western Balkans earlier. I feel the Administration is trying to compensate for its past inattention by now accelerating the enlargement debate. But I am not convinced by the argument that

we should lower our performance standards because of the potential instability generated by Kosova.

Mr. Chairman, I also want these countries to join NATO and the European Union. But I want them to do it in the right way when they are truly ready. Enlarging NATO entails logrolling. There are pressures to include more countries to keep all allies happy. The temptation to bend criteria is real. But what is good politically can be bad strategically. I get a bit nervous when I hear the argument that if we don't bring this or that country in now, it or the region may be destabilized. I remember a conversation we had in the spring of 1997 in the run-up to the Madrid summit. You had just met with the president of a country that was pushing hard for an invite but which we did not consider fully qualified. That country's president had told you that if it did not receive an invitation to join NATO, its government would fall and reform would fail.

In short, the argument was that if we did not invite them to join NATO, they would essentially commit political suicide. You told him – correctly in my view – that this was the worst argument you had ever heard for enlargement and that if the reform project in his country was that fragile you would oppose his country's candidacy. What happened? We stuck to our guns on the performance issue. That country survived not getting an invitation, it actually accelerated its reform efforts and when it joined NATO a few years later, it did so without controversy because it was a stronger candidate and with fewer doubts about its qualifications.

I also think we need to keep our eyes on the key strategic issue in the region which is the future of Serbia. As important as they are, it is not Albania, Croatia or Macedonia which hold the key to future Balkan stability. That key lies in Belgrade. There is a real danger at the moment that Serbia is moving in an anti-Western direction. That is what we need to change but this enlargement move now could actually reinforce the wrong trend in Serbia. I worry that the Administration's proposal is strategically shortsighted. Coming after a messy declaration of independence by Kosova, the admittance of weak, not-yet-qualified candidates could actually bring regional instability into NATO rather than the other way around. It ignores the real prize – getting Serbia to embrace a westward course.

Ukraine and Georgia

Mr. Chairman, my third concern about the Administration's approach at Bucharest has to do with Ukraine and Georgia. I am worried that the Administration's approach does not connect the Western Balkans and the wider Black Sea region and countries like Ukraine and Georgia. I believe that how NATO addresses the aspirations of these countries is every bit as important as what it does in the Western Balkans. If we are honest, Ukraine and Georgia are more vulnerable strategically than the Adriatic 3 today. They are vulnerable not only because of their internal problems and the lack of reform but also because they are subject to external pressure from Moscow. They face repeated Russian efforts to interfere in their internal affairs and prevent them from anchoring themselves to the West.

As I mentioned earlier, the Alliance is at a critical turning point in terms of our future vision of enlargement. The challenge of the past decade was to secure democracy in Europe's eastern half, from the Baltics in the north to the western edge of the Black Sea in the south. The challenge today is to extend security further east -- into Ukraine and across the wider Black Sea to the southern Caucasus which is caught between an unstable Middle East and an increasingly assertive Russia. Bucharest can either be the last summit in completing the original vision of the 1990s or the first summit where the Alliance embraces a bigger and more ambitious vision. In the current issue of Foreign Affairs, I have argued that NATO must make this second strategic leap. But I also underscore just how challenging it will be and what it will take.

My concern is that Bucharest will produce be a round of enlargement to underqualified candidates in the Western Balkans along with little or nothing for Ukraine and Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I know and applaud the fact this Committee has sent an important signal to allies by passing Senate resolution 342, which supports MAP for both Ukraine and Georgia. But I also think we need to be realistic. Many of our allies do not believe the enlargement process should be continued, or even if these countries are truly part of Europe. Many doubt the solidity of the democratic and Western orientation of Ukraine and the commitment of the leadership of that country to NATO. Others doubt the solidity of Georgia's democratic experiment or how we are going to resolve the so-called "frozen conflicts" on Georgian soil. Many have concerns about the reaction of Russia and whether we have a strategy to manage a more assertive Russia that is likely to be more determined in its opposition to further enlargement.

These are really issues and concerns that we need to address. The odds of sorting them out by Bucharest are low. Extending NATO to Ukraine and Georgia is not just more of the same process of enlargement as we have known it over the last decade. It would be a new and fundamental strategic move with potentially far-reaching consequences. Giving these countries MAO would not necessarily mean a commitment to full NATO membership but it certainly is an important step in that direction. We also have a complicated doctrinal debate within NATO as to what MAP actually means. Initially, MAP was indeed intended for countries that were only a few years away from an invitation and was designed to help them in essence complete their final round of preparations. Neither Ukraine or Georgia are at that point today. But I think we can and should redefine MAP to loosen this linkage for countries like Ukraine and Georgia which still have a longer way to go but which clearly need a closer Alliance embrace.

I believe that would such a result -- enlargement to a weak set of Adriatic countries plus little or nothing for Ukraine and Georgia -- would not be a policy success. I have argued that a better approach would be wait or to do a small round of enlargement, perhaps limited to Croatia, to give the other candidates more time to bolster their credentials, for the West to sort out regional security in the Balkans after Kosova, and to work toward a second big bang round of enlargement down the road that would stretch from the Western Balkans and embrace Ukraine or Georgia.

I would point to the historical parallel with the Baltic states in the 1990s. The United States fought a dramatic political battle at the Madrid in 1997 summit to limit that initial round of enlargement, in part because we did not think that Romania and Slovenia were qualified but also to protect the Baltic states. We knew that some of our allies wanted to make this first round the last and to exclude the Baltic states. We wanted to keep the door open. The result: Romania and Slovenia, while disappointed, redoubled their reform efforts; the Baltic states grabbed their chance to catch up and qualify and did so; and we laid the foundation for a later but ultimately successful enlargement that redrew the map of Europe in 2002. Being firm on criteria and thinking strategically about the long term paid off.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, nothing has happened since I wrote my op-ed in the Washington Post a month ago to alleviate the concerns I expressed then. I remain concerned that we are going to invite countries from the Western Balkans that are not yet qualified, that such a step will not necessarily stabilize the region and that Bucharest will do too little to support Ukraine and Georgia or make the shift to this bigger vision of NATO that I am calling for. To be honest, I hope I am wrong. I hope that in the weeks and months ahead the Administration can show that these candidates are better qualified than I think they are, and that allies will come together in Bucharest and in the end achieve a positive result on Ukraine and Georgia.

I am also a realist. This Administration has made up its mind to go forward with invitations to the so-called Adriatic 3 countries at the Bucharest NATO summit in spite of the concerns people like me have raised. I am occasionally asked whether I will then oppose the accession of these countries. I have concluded that I will not for the simple reason that I do not want NATO or these countries to fail. For the US Senate to vote down a candidate country that the Administration has invited would, in my opinion, do grave damage to our standing in the Alliance and potentially kill the enlargement process. But we do need to guard against the risks I have pointed to. Our Constitution envisions a key role for the US Senate in this ratification process. I believe this Committee should assume a leadership role to reduce those risks I have pointed to today by considering several steps.

First, we should actively use the period between possible invitations at the Bucharest summit and an eventual Senate accession vote to scrutinize these countries' performances and to maximize their incentives for making additional progress. These candidates have thus far received less scrutiny than any previous candidates since the 1990s, even though they are weaker and potentially less stable. We should ask no more but also no less of them than their predecessors. As in the past, the Administration should be asked to testify and report -- in open and classified hearings -- on how well they are performing and whether they fulfill the requirements laid down for membership. I am glad that the Administration has now been asked to report on these qualifications before a final decision on extending invitations is made, in accordance with previous Senate resolutions on ratification.

That final Senate vote should not be scheduled until this Committee is confident they fulfill those requirements. If I look at the legislative calendar, it seems unlikely a Senate vote on enlargement will happen before the end of this Administration. Thus, this vote is likely to take place under the next President. Given the time required for the next President to assemble his or her team, one could imagine it taking place in the summer or fall of 2009. We should use this delay to our advantage. It provides us with another 18 months to engage these countries, identify their weaknesses and maximize the incentives for them to address those weaknesses. In my view, the Committee should ask for another progress report on these countries early on in the next Administration before a final vote. Using this period in this manner can focus the attention of these countries and help ensure they will be effective allies. I would hope they would view this as an opportunity to strengthen their candidacies and erase any doubts about their qualifications. If they have done their homework and meet those standards, they have nothing to fear from such scrutiny.

Second, we should also consider establishing clearer benchmarks for new members to continue to meet *after* they joined the Alliance. We need to understand that these countries joining NATO does not actually mean they are ready to be full members. We are asking them to meet a set of very minimal standards – with the expectation that the lion’s share of reform and work will still take place *after* they join. It is increasingly clear that many of these countries continue to need guidance and support – as well as political scrutiny – after they have become members. While the NATO system seeks to provide that guidance, it doesn’t work as well as it should. I am sometimes asked whether there are new members I regret seeing join the Alliance. I do not. But I do also regret not having pushed some countries harder. And I am disappointed at how reform has dissipated in some new members. I know from talking to Ambassadors and senior officials in these countries fighting for reform that they, too, have often wished we had at times been tougher with them – precisely because the voice from Washington can be so critical.

We should recognize this larger problem of the performance before it gets any worse. In part, it is the challenge of bringing in successive waves of new members who are weaker than their predecessors. But it is amplified by the disappointing performance of some new members from previous classes of enlargement. With the addition of these three new members in the Western Balkans, NATO will now have 30 members, nearly half of whom have been members for a decade or less. All of these countries are still going through difficult reform processes. There is clearly one group of countries who aspire to be premier allies and who have become real contributors in a very short period of time. But there is a second group of allies who are not where we want them to be and who seem content to do as little as possible. This of course undermines the credibility of the whole enlargement process.

Therefore, I would like to recommend that the Committee call for a thorough assessment, of the political and military performance of the two enlargement classes of 1997 and 2002. Such an assessment should review the promises made by these countries as well as

the testimony and estimates of our own Department of Defense – both the Office of the Secretary of Defense as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We should compare those pledges and estimates with actual military capacities and performance. This would give us a clear baseline to determine the size of the gap between past pledges and actual subsequent contributions – and how well or poorly these members are doing. It will also help us determine realistic benchmarks for these countries as well as potential new members going forward.

The lessons from such an exercise should be incorporated into an amendment to this round of enlargement. Such an amendment could set clear benchmarks for these countries to fulfill *after* they join NATO. These benchmarks would augment the NATO system. Our goal would be to use the influence and expertise the United States enjoys to help ensure their reforms stay on track. We could set a time limit of, for example, five years, with an option for a further extension. I believe such an amendment will help those leaders in the region who are serious about reform. We also need to consider what we do about the poor performance of some of our poor performers from the enlargement classes of 1997 and 2002, as well as so-called older or traditional allies whose performance is also lacking.

Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to work with the Committee to develop such an amendment to ensure that enlargement can continue to be a success story. Taking such steps now can help ensure that down the road we have more effective allies who can perform in places like Afghanistan and whose forces can fight without national caveats. I would also urge the Committee to stay fully engaged in and providing leadership on the issues of Ukraine and Georgia. If the Bucharest summit produces a weak outcome on these issues, it will be of critical importance that we find other ways for the US and NATO to step up our engagement with them to provide the kind of political and strategic reassurance that can reduce their vulnerability and send the signal that we are serious about our efforts to anchor them to the West over time.