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NATO's Global Aspirations

The dispute over enlargement reflects uncertainties about NATO's function

Henning Riecke and Simon Koschut | **Bucharest was initially dubbed the “enlargement summit.” But this epithet was soon obsolete, despite the go-ahead for Albania and Croatia to join. Western European opposition to Ukrainian and Georgian membership plans was too strong. Would enlargement necessarily increase NATO's capacity?**

The summit in Romania was designed to increase NATO's capacity for international action through the addition of new members and partners. But the admission of new members—for years an important means of creating stability in Europe itself—is just one strategy toward this end. Another point of debate in the run-up to Bucharest was the US initiative to enhance the partner status of states taking part in NATO operations. A third approach is the partnership programs that support reforms and stability in regions in which NATO is active. Finally, NATO is expanding relations with both the United Nations and regional organizations.

These measures have been spurred by different motives, and they serve primarily to protect and support democratic reform processes. However, in order to gain majority support and become permanent fixtures of NATO strategy, they must be aligned with the alliance's overarching goal of increasing its capacity for action in the international arena. Of central importance is the integration of states and organizations that themselves contribute resources and capabilities. NATO enlargement has implications for the future of these states—implications that do not please all NATO members. Initiatives that could actually strengthen NATO meet with opposition from members trying to avoid undesirable political consequences.



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Only Two New Members

The planned enlargement of the alliance led to visible tensions in Bucharest. Thanks to President Bush, an issue that initially seemed only mildly controversial was moved to the top of the summit agenda. The United States and Great Britain want to integrate new states into NATO in an effort to expand Western influence and create stability, and they are supported in this endeavor by the alliance members from East Central Europe. Part of their motivation is to assist troubled states in the democratic transformation process and to provide West-

Corruption, organized crime, and fragile constitutional structures are matters of concern for Macedonian and Albanian membership.

ern protection against an increasingly aggressive Russia. The Bucharest agenda included Membership Action Plans (MAPs) for Ukraine and Georgia and invitations to states in the Western Balkans to join NATO.

Weeks before the summit convened in Bucharest, it was clear that Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania would be offered membership. Like virtually every country in NATO, Germany supports the admission of Balkan states in the context of a stabilization strategy for the region. But Macedonia and Albania remain problematic: aside from economic issues, corruption and organized crime, as well as the slow introduction of constitutional structures, are matters of concern in both countries. Croatia and Albania received promises of membership in Bucharest. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) was unable to resolve a dispute over its name with its southern neighbor, Greece. The government in Athens rests on a weak legislative minority that would not have survived a Greek loss of face at the summit. This is why NATO showed solidarity with Athens and supported the Greek position and no offer of membership was made to Skopje.

Georgia and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine are also pushing to join the alliance with American support. Both countries are involved in numerous NATO operations and they hoped to finalize MAPs in Bucharest. NATO is currently engaged in intensive talks with Georgia as a kind of substitute process for the formal admission procedure. The Ukrainian government has strongly supported rapprochement with NATO, and through the NATO-Ukraine Council the alliance is pursuing a special partnership with this former Soviet republic. Even so, Germany has taken a critical view of attempts to admit the two former Soviet republics, and it was eager to prevent the MAPs in Bucharest. Together with France, Germany led a strong NATO minority against admission and was able to prevail against the US-led majority at the summit.

The critics cited serious reservations about the stability of the candidate countries and concerns about relations with Russia. Berlin fears that a MAP will worsen secession conflicts in Georgia. As for Ukraine, it is not certain that the majority of the population supports membership, which means it could only be pushed through at the cost of increased domestic tensions. What would the alliance do if, during the MAP phase, Russia retaliated bilaterally? Moscow could charge higher energy prizes or apply trade restrictions against the two countries, thus impeding reforms and development. The NATO admission pro-

cess is often seen as the first step toward EU membership. This is only a minor problem for the Balkan states, to whom the European Union has in principle promised membership—but it worsens Georgia’s prospects.

Numerous commentators accused the German government of using these reasons as a pretext, implying its real motive was the desire not to strain Russian relations. Indeed, Berlin sees no reason to provoke a conflict with Moscow. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier was more explicit on this issue than was the chancellor. Before the Bucharest summit, Russia vigorously opposed NATO’s new eastern enlargement plans. The German arguments—domestic coherence in Ukraine and crisis management in Georgia—are based on genuine stability concerns that are in line with German foreign policy priorities. They lose weight in the alliance, though, because they go alongside a policy toward Russia that some see as appeasement.

Even though NATO did not offer MAPs to Georgia and Ukraine in Bucharest, the final communiqué included an important phrase to appease the Americans: “We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.”¹ In reality, though, this statement has little value without a timetable. The meeting of NATO foreign ministers in December 2008 can make a decision about the MAPs, but participants are unlikely to broach the issue since the Americans will be in the midst of a change in government. It is also uncertain whether the domestic conditions in Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia will have changed to such a degree by NATO’s anniversary summit in Strasbourg that Berlin and Paris will rethink the issue.

Cooperation with countries in strategic neighboring regions has fallen short of expectations.

Stagnating Regional Partnerships

Expanding NATO’s capacity for international deployment is a central concern for all members, not only the Americans. Since the 1990s, NATO has used regional partnership programs as a vehicle to win over partner states to collaborate on missions. It is true that these programs primarily aim to encourage regional cooperation and to institutionalize both information exchanges and dialogue, but network-building with potential allies in the operations is also a key motivation. Nevertheless, cooperation with countries in strategic neighboring regions has fallen short of expectations.

One of these programs is the Partnership for Peace (PfP), established in 1994. PfP focuses on practical military and civilian cooperation, joint maneuvers, explosive ordinance disposal, and even participation in NATO-led peacekeeping missions. The program includes countries in Eastern Europe, neutral states in Western Europe, and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Potential NATO membership has always been a strong incentive for cooperation, particularly among European partners. Regular consultations on security

1) “Bucharest Summit Declaration,” April 3, 2008, No. 23, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html>.

policy issues in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) support the work of PfP. To its credit, the program has to a certain extent achieved its goal, as there is now a security environment in Europe that makes wars between states highly unlikely. Since the mid-1990s NATO has also been expanding regional cooperation to include the Mediterranean region. The dialogue with seven states abutting the Mediterranean, including Israel and Egypt, complements the Mediterranean initiatives of the European Union and G-8. Furthermore, through the Istanbul

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Cooperation Initiative, initiated in 2004, NATO has extended its cooperation with Arab and Muslim states to include the entire Middle East. This cooperation, which supplements the G-8's Broader Middle East Initiative, covers such issues as security policy collaboration in the war against international terrorism, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and border controls aimed at restricting the illegal trade in drugs, weapons, and human beings. Through this third partnership initiative, NATO is promoting a deepened understanding of security in a strategically important region.

There was little change in these partnership programs at the NATO summit in Bucharest. Malta announced that it would re-enter PfP after withdrawing in 1996. NATO partners also declared their willingness to carry out a more intensive dialogue with Serbia. Various projects to deepen PfP cooperation were introduced and more frequent meetings were called for in the Mediterranean dialogue, but there was no dynamic progress in the work of ICI. Only four countries agreed to cooperate in 2006. In view of the complex security problems in the "crescent of crisis," closer cooperation would be highly desirable for NATO.

On the one hand, these partnership strategies have been effective and successful in strengthening NATO capabilities—as can be seen by the contributions made by non-members to the alliance's peacekeeping missions in regions such as the Balkans. On the other hand, the cooperative potential of regional partnerships has yet to be fully exploited. This potential includes deeper involvement of partner states in the operative decision-making processes of NATO, possibly in the framework of the EAPC. The partners could also be consulted more frequently on their experiences with energy security and other difficult issues. Moreover, the partnership approach could be extended into additional strategic regions such as sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, providing the alliance with potential new partners and courses of action.

Modest Offers to "Contact Countries"

In 2004 Washington placed a new partnership concept on the NATO agenda: the "privileged partnership" project, which focuses on the integration of the democratic states that contribute to NATO operations. Ties are meant to be closer than in existing partnership programs. At the NATO summit in Riga in 2006, participants approved a partnership concept that envisages stronger military and political cooperation with so-called "contact countries," which include

Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan. This cautious approach reflects the criticism of NATO members such as Germany that regards NATO's transformation into a global "alliance of democracies" as problematic. Even so, the American vision lives on. Republican presidential candidate John McCain has repeatedly voiced his support for such an alliance, which could emerge from a globally expanded NATO.²

Of vital importance to the United States is NATO's capacity for action. After all, partner states make a direct contribution to NATO-led operations and can thus claim the right to participate in NATO votes on these operations. Partner states also need to expand resources and capabilities and build the political determination necessary for upcoming deployments. If they manage to do so, the United States will then be able to draw on them for US-led missions outside NATO's structures. The fact that all these partners come from the greater Asia Pacific region caters to US security policy, which is geared toward engagement with China. Europeans fear that expanded partnerships will give the United States greater opportunity to form coalitions with supportive states independent of any consensus in the alliance.

Integrating more democratic states with independent regional interests will hardly simplify joint action.

The closer integration of contact countries into the alliance's decision-making mechanisms was controversial in Bucharest. Awarding this sort of partnership status prior to membership would have consequences for NATO's political coherence. There are already conflicts within the alliance over the use of military force and NATO's international role. Integrating additional democratic states with independent regional interests will hardly simplify joint action. For new partners, it is relations with the United States that make ties to NATO attractive.

But the partners would also be able to demand political support from NATO states for risks that have little to do with the security of present members. While it is unlikely that NATO will broaden its collective support guarantee (Article V) to include these partners, they might press the alliance to become involved in crisis responses lying far beyond most members' spheres of interest. Expansion into Asia also brings the threat of friction with China, which is likely to perceive NATO partnerships as part of an American containment policy. Expansion may thus come into conflict with the Europeans' more economically oriented policy toward China.

Finally, one must consider the effects that a global NATO will have on the international order, which currently rests on the predominant role of the United Nations and the principle of the equality of states. A global NATO, born by established democracies always convinced they are in the right, could be tempted to use military means without a valid mandate under international law. Furthermore, states such as China and Russia that are declared non-democratic are likely to respond to the creation of a global democratic alliance by establishing counter alliances.

2) See John McCain's remarks to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council (March 26, 2008), <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Speeches/872473dd-9ccb-4ab4-9d0d-ec54f0e7a497.htm>.

There is, however, consensus that cooperation with partners should be enhanced through regular consultations, and joint transformation programs and exercises. Participants in the Bucharest summit passed a number of “tailor-made packages” for contact countries. These will increase the alliance’s capacity for international action—even if they fall short of the American vision of “privileged” partners.

Regional Organizations as New Partners?

In the area of global crisis management, NATO must find ways to ensure its influence without committing substantial numbers of troops. In this regard, NATO must not overlook the strategy of expanding relations with regional security organizations. The goal here would be to establish a network of security organizations that will increasingly assume responsibility for “customized” crisis management in their respective regions. Africa could be an initial focus, and similar structures are also conceivable in the Middle East and Central Asia. NATO would be at the heart of such a network.

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The most important requirement is intensive collaboration not only between NATO headquarters and the office of the UN Secretary General, but also between the alliance and individual UN organizations. At the Bucharest summit, NATO once again confirmed its desire for closer cooperation with the United Nations, which was reflected in the participation of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. NATO is also prepared to campaign to have missions mandated under international law in the UN Security Council, using the weight, yet not the dominant position, of its democratic partners. The alliance would then be tasked with providing specific services to increase the effectiveness of its partner institutions. It could help build administrative capabilities through training, consulting, and financial support. It could also provide transport planes and ships to deploy troops to crisis regions. Communications and surveillance technology are among the other services it could offer to expand the operational capabilities of locally deployed troops. NATO could even offer its own human resources in theaters of operation if political support could be drummed up in the members’ home countries. One example is the deployment of forces to provide medical care in crisis regions.

But present experiences are sobering. This type of partnership can be seen in the collaboration between NATO and the African Union (AU) during the AU’s mission in Sudan (AMIS). NATO not only provided aircraft to deploy troops but also trained personnel to enhance the AU’s capabilities on a strategic and operational level. Despite this support, AMIS was incapable of safeguarding the population in Darfur and was eventually replaced by a UN mission. Yet this failure does not discredit NATO’s role.

An additional problem is that security organizations that have the necessary political coherence and that are able to develop the military planning skills essential for involvement in crisis management do not always exist. In the ASEAN Regional Forum there is no military collaboration upon which new

crisis response capabilities can be based. The Gulf Cooperation Council only has a small joint military force. The military exercises of the Shanghai Organization are intended primarily as a show of force to the Western world. This starting point is a major challenge to the globalization of NATO.

It is here that new partner states come into play once again. “Political go-getters”—states that use their political weight to give organizations adequate powers—must act as political entrepreneurs in establishing these structures. NATO must select partner states on the basis of whether they can credibly play such a role. In addition to partners in Asia, NATO must be prepared to work with regional powers such as Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Russia, though problematic, must also be included. The Western allies will need to rely more heavily on political, economic, and financial incentives to win over partners for this difficult task.