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NATO'S RETURN TO EUROPE

Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond

REBECCA R. MOORE and
DAMON COLETTA, Editors

Foreword by Nicholas Burns

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CHAPTER THREE

NATO's Enlargement Policy to Ukraine and Beyond

Prospects and Options

Andrew T. Wolff

Ukraine has lingered at the doorstep of NATO longer than any other candidate country. Since 2002, NATO has espoused a policy of integrating Ukraine into its Euro-Atlantic security structure with the end goal of full membership. Despite NATO's public pronouncements in support of Ukraine eventually becoming a member, it does not seem that the Alliance is fully committed to enlargement to Ukraine. On its part, Ukraine has not done the best job of convincing NATO of its worthiness as a potential Ally. Ukraine's path toward membership has been complicated by its internal problems and political divisions. It has repeatedly vacillated between two policy positions: remaining militarily neutral or seeking to join the Alliance. Also, Ukraine has the complication of its powerful eastern neighbor, Russia, adamantly opposing its accession to NATO. Even though Ukraine is not currently an official candidate for admission to NATO, it has indicated a desire to integrate more closely with NATO so that it may eventually become a member.

Considering the events of the Ukrainian Civil War and Russia's annexation of Crimea, does it make sense for NATO to maintain its long-held policy of keeping its door open for Ukraine? At the heart of this question lies the centerpiece of NATO's post-Cold War policy: its liberal-order-building project. This through NATO enlargement, along with the expansion of the European Union (EU), that Western leaders envision making Europe "whole and free." By transferring Western ideals of governance into excommunist states and expanding its security community, NATO hoped to create stability for all of Europe. This values-driven enlargement meant the Alliance was in the business of democracy promotion and would accept any European state seeking to become a member of NATO that had fully reformed and democratized

its political, economic, and military sectors.¹ This open-door attitude has driven three rounds of NATO enlargement to the east since the end of the Cold War. Then, in December 2015, NATO agreed to accept Montenegro as its newest member.² But the Ukraine Crisis and Russian aggression calls the open-door premise and NATO's liberal-order-building project into question. It forces NATO to rethink its geostrategic outlook and recognize the limits of its decades-long enlargement policy.

This chapter addresses the prospects and options for NATO enlargement by first reviewing the history of enlargement policy toward Ukraine. Next, it evaluates Ukraine's military and political reforms, to ascertain the current status of Ukraine's progress toward membership. The chapter then discusses the political debate within NATO on the question of Ukraine entering the Alliance and outlines how Russia impacts enlargement policy. After this discussion, the chapter goes on to assess various options for NATO's policy of enlargement to Ukraine. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering the implications of the Ukraine Crisis on enlargement policy and, in particular, what the crisis signals about the fate of NATO's liberal-order-building project. This analysis finds that Ukraine does not satisfy NATO's political and military reform enlargement criteria, nor is it likely to meet membership standards in the near future. Furthermore, support for Ukrainian membership within the Alliance is shallow, and the external security environment for expansion to Ukraine is highly unfavorable. Because of this situation, this chapter argues that NATO must modify its enlargement policy, work on developing a new type of relationship with Ukraine, and restore trust with Russia. NATO's enlargement policy needs to become more circumspect, and NATO leaders should focus on strategic considerations rather than liberal ideals as the main driver of Alliance policy for the foreseeable future.

NATO-Ukraine Enlargement Relations

The policy of NATO enlargement developed slowly after the end of the Cold War as NATO searched for a new relationship with excommunist countries. NATO instituted a number of outreach programs to the East—a liaison program, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), and the Partnership for Peace (PfP)—before settling on enlargement policy as the primary method for integrating Central and Eastern Europe into Western military structures. Enlargement policy emerged in response to demands from former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe that desired to join the West and sought security offered by the Alliance's Article 5 guarantee. Western capitals were receptive to these appeals due to a variety of reasons: fears of a security

vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, aspirations of spreading democracy and constructing a united Europe, guilt over abandoning the region after World War II, and gaining domestic electoral advantages. The overarching intent of NATO's enlargement policy was to help transform Central and Eastern Europe into a peaceful and prosperous space governed by Western democratic ideals.

In the 1990s, NATO sought to establish a new relationship with Ukraine, but offering membership was not initially a part of the Alliance's outreach to the country. Ukraine joined the NACC at its inception and was the first former Soviet republic to join PfP, in February 1994. As NATO solidified enlargement procedures with its 1995 *Study of NATO Enlargement*, Ukraine requested consultations with NATO on developing a more formal partnership. These consultations were not driven by a desire to join the Alliance but by the intention to create a unique relationship with NATO that would not incite a Russian backlash or leave Ukraine behind as the rest of Eastern Europe moved closer to the Alliance.³ Out of these discussions came the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine. It is this document which identified Ukraine as having a "special" relationship with NATO. An example of this unique relationship was the charter's creation of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) and the establishment of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Kiev. After signing the charter, NATO continued to enhance integration with Ukraine by setting up a liaison office in the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in April 1999, which helped to facilitate military reform and enhance PfP participation.⁴ Yet throughout the 1990s, both Ukrainian and NATO officials viewed the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO as a decision to be made in the far-off future.⁵ The Alliance was preoccupied with transforming Central Europe and the Baltic states, as well as stabilizing the war-torn Balkans. Ukraine was relegated to the margins of NATO's liberal-order-building agenda.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, NATO started to focus more intensely on integrating Ukraine into Western security structures. Ukraine's path toward membership officially began at the Prague Summit in November 2002 with the initiation of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. This plan presented a framework for NATO and Ukraine to cooperate in a number of policy areas including defense policy, legal issues, and information sharing, and it was intended to foster better civil-military relations in Ukraine.⁶ Imbedded in the plan is an Alliance commitment to actively work toward Ukraine's admission into NATO.⁷ Following the protests of the Orange Revolution of late 2004, NATO further enhanced its relationship with Ukraine by offering in April 2005 a package of reform programs called an Intensified Dialogue.⁸

Discussions about Ukraine joining NATO reached a crescendo in 2008. At the NATO summit in Bucharest, the United States, joined by Great Britain, Canada, and East European Allies, lobbied for NATO to extend a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Ukraine and Georgia.⁹ The Alliance had created MAP as a mechanism to shepherd candidate countries toward membership by establishing a system of monitored reform benchmarks. However, opposition within NATO to offering Ukraine and Georgia a MAP was substantial. Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands opposed this proposition due to fears of a Russian backlash and lack of substantive reform in Ukraine. NATO leaders ultimately compromised at Bucharest by delaying the MAP decision while simultaneously promising “that these countries [Georgia and Ukraine] will become members of NATO.”¹⁰ This muddled decision at Bucharest to deny Ukraine a formal path to membership while pledging that it would achieve membership status in the future demonstrated a profound and unresolved disagreement among NATO leaders over accepting Ukraine into their midst.

A few months later, the Alliance revisited Ukraine’s membership prospects at the NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in December 2008. At this meeting, the United States pressured Allies to circumvent the standard applicant membership procedure via MAP and negotiate directly with Ukraine and Georgia about enlargement.¹¹ France and Germany led the opposition to the US proposal.¹² The result of this debate was an agreement to adjust the mission of the NUC by granting it responsibility to develop and oversee reform efforts in Ukraine via an Annual National Program, a reform and monitoring instrument which had previously been associated only with a MAP.¹³ In essence, the Alliance offered Ukraine the possibility of a backdoor route to membership that circumvents the formal MAP process.¹⁴

Following the contentious events of 2008, NATO’s enlargement efforts to Ukraine stalled. This is evident at the 2010 Lisbon and 2012 Chicago Summits where NATO leaders issued blanket statements in support of the 2008 Bucharest decision but offered no new initiatives to promote military integration or political reform. This cooling period on the issue of Ukrainian enlargement was due to a number of factors: the anti-enlargement Viktor Yanukovich government in Ukraine coming into power in 2010, Russia’s continued hostility toward enlargement policy, and waning Western support for Ukraine. However, this cooling period did not last long. In 2014, the Euromaidan protests, Russian aggression in Crimea, and the rebellion in the Donbas region forced NATO to focus more intently on its policies toward Ukraine and Russia. The Alliance responded with greater support for Ukraine, denounced Russia’s behavior, and suspended the NATO-Russia Council. The Alliance held

numerous consultations with Ukraine, decided to strengthen the defenses of its eastern Allies, and opened a contact point embassy in Kiev in September 2015. Yet despite these closer relations, NATO has not put Ukrainian enlargement back on its agenda. NATO deputy assistant secretary-general for emerging security challenges Jamie Shea stated during a May 2015 conference in Kiev that “Ukraine is not ready [for membership in NATO]. Now there are more important priorities regarding the solving of the situation in the east and reforms in many areas.”¹⁵ NATO’s current position is to delay any discussion of Ukrainian membership until Ukraine demonstrates tangible progress in its military and political reforms and solves its security problems in Crimea and the Donbas region. Ukrainian officials hope to join the Alliance one day, and NATO insists the door is open for Ukraine to become a member, but it seems that strategic concerns now take precedence over NATO’s enlargement policy.

Evaluating Ukraine’s Enlargement Criteria

Obtaining NATO membership requires that a candidate country meet NATO’s military and political criteria. There is no set formula for these requirements, but they involve the status of the armed forces and its resources, political and economic conditions, and a range of security and legal issues.¹⁶ In terms of military criteria, candidates must institute greater civilian oversight, enhance transparency in defense budgeting and planning, and show a willingness to participate in Alliance operations. On the political side, the candidate country must adhere to norms of democratic governance and exhibit political and popular support for membership. Finally, the candidate country must enhance overall Alliance security and add to NATO’s military capabilities. So, how well has Ukraine performed in fulfilling enlargement criteria?

Within the military sector, Ukraine has a mixed track record on meeting NATO standards. On the positive side, the MoD has implemented reforms which are reflective of Western best-practices. The MoD enhanced transparency in 2006 when it began publishing its annual *White Book* summarizing the state of Ukraine’s military. Also, the leadership structure of the MoD was reorganized in the mid-2000s to incorporate more civilian control over the military. In regard to the criteria of willingness to participate in NATO operations, Ukraine has been the most active PfP country in NATO operations, contributing personnel to missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Mediterranean via Operation Active Endeavor, and off the coast of Somalia in Operation Ocean Shield. Ukraine has been a regular participant in NATO joint military exercises, and Ukraine’s Yavoriv military base is the first PfP training center established in the former Soviet Union.¹⁷

On the other hand, Ukraine continues to display significant shortcomings in areas of capabilities, budgeting, and leadership. One of the biggest military shortcomings is Ukraine's reliance on outdated and ill-maintained equipment. In 2008, it was estimated that "only 31 of Ukraine's 112 fighter jets, 10 of its 24 bombers, and eight of its 36 ground attack aircraft were operational . . . [and] the entire Ukrainian Navy had only four combat-ready warships."¹⁸ At the time of the Crimea crisis, Ukraine had just six thousand out of forty-one thousand troops ready for combat, and a meager 15 percent of Ukraine's planes and helicopters were operational.¹⁹ Years of underfunding its defense budget has created a hollow Ukrainian military. From 2008 to 2013, defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) averaged 1.06 percent.²⁰ When compared to other candidate countries at the time of NATO membership decisions, on a per capita and percentage of GDP basis, Ukraine had the lowest levels of defense expenditures of any applicant country (see table 3.1). Recently Ukraine reversed this low spending trend by raising defense expenditures to 2.66 percent of GDP in 2014. Spending levels are estimated to be above 5 percent of GDP in 2016, but these increased levels of defense funding are in response to Russia's military intervention and are not a result of choosing to meet NATO enlargement standards. Despite these recent spending increases, the long-term damage has already been done to the armed services. Ukraine is in desperate need of modernizing its equipment, but it does not have the funds to do so. For example, it would cost roughly \$200 million to upgrade one battalion with the latest multiple-launch rocket system.²¹ This one upgrade would constitute 9 percent of Ukraine's total 2015 defense budget. The lack of financing military activities is so severe that the MoD solicited private donations to supplement its army provisions.²² Although Ukraine has undertaken an armament-buying spree, increasing its 2016 procurement budget by eight times its 2013 levels, it will require many years of greatly increased procurement spending to reach NATO standards.²³

Since 2014, Ukraine has backslid in some areas of military reform. With regard to civilian control of its armed forces, there has been a proliferation of independent, volunteer battalions fighting in eastern Ukraine that are beyond the control of the government. Some of these battalions have committed atrocities and human rights violations, and they create confusion as to who is the legitimate military in Ukraine.²⁴ Ukraine has also had trouble recruiting troops. It reinstated the draft in response to the separatist fighting but has repeatedly failed to meet conscription targets because of rampant draft dodging.²⁵ Another problem area is that Ukraine suffers from lackluster leadership in its MoD. In the past twelve years, Ukraine has had twelve defense ministers. Frequent turnover at the top of the MoD hampers long-range planning and

Table 3.1. Candidate defense spending and NATO enlargement decisions

	Defense expenditure (\$ Billion)	Defense expenditure per capita \$	Defense expenditure % of GDP
<i>1997 Decision</i>			
Czech Republic	.987	96	1.9
Hungary	.666	66	1.4
Poland	3.073	79	2.3
Total NATO	457.500	433	2.2
<i>2002 Decision</i>			
Bulgaria	.378	48	2.5
Estonia	.093	68	1.6
Latvia	.141	60	1.8
Lithuania	.233	63	1.8
Slovakia	.439	81	2.0
Slovenia	.311	156	1.5
Romania	.999	45	2.3
Total NATO	515.200	640	2.6
<i>2008 Decision</i>			
Albania	.254	70	1.90
Croatia	1.090	243	1.57
Macedonia	.192	93	2.06
Georgia (MAP)	1.03	224	8.13
Ukraine (MAP)	1.04	39	1.0
Total NATO	121.700	1149	3.0

Sources: Figures calculated from "Analyses and Tables," International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Military Balance* 99, no. 1 (1999): 300; IISS, "International Comparisons of Defence Expenditure and Military Manpower," *Military Balance* 103, no. 1 (2003): 335–36; and IISS, "Chapter Nine: Country Comparisons—Commitments, Force Levels and Economics," *Military Balance* 110, no. 1 (2010): 62–63.

signals instability in the armed forces.²⁶ All of this indicates that Ukraine continues to have significant difficulties complying with NATO's military standards for obtaining membership.

Meeting NATO's political criteria has also been challenging for Ukraine. According to Freedom House, an organization that tracks the state of political freedom and civil rights worldwide, almost all candidate members were politically freer at the time of their entry decisions than Ukraine currently is. NATO candidate countries typically have freedom scores of 1.5 to 2, placing them firmly in the "free" category. The notable exception is that of Albania in 2008, which had a "partly free" score of 3. Ukraine currently has a "partly

free” score of 3, and its average score since 2002 has been 3.2.²⁷ If admitted today, Ukraine would have the worst track record of any Eastern European NATO member in terms of democratic development.

Ukraine also struggles with the issue of good governance. Ukraine is considered the most corrupt country in Europe and ranks 142 out of 175 on a global public-sector corruption index.²⁸ In 2015, the World Bank ranked Ukraine in the fortieth percentile in terms of government effectiveness. In a World Bank rule-of-law index, Ukraine scores at 23 percent, alongside Russia and Belarus and well below the European average score of 68 percent.²⁹ In particular, Ukraine struggles with corruption in its law enforcement and judicial system. For example, former prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk threatened to fire all nine thousand judges in Ukraine because of systemic corruption.³⁰ Even NATO reform programs have been embroiled in corruption. In 2012, the Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs reportedly embezzled \$12 million in NATO public relations funds.³¹ President Petro Poroshenko launched an anticorruption campaign in 2014, but it is clear that these efforts are not working.³² And Western leaders are expressing frustration with Ukraine’s lack of progress in fighting public-sector corruption. During a visit to Kiev in December 2015, US vice president Joseph Biden warned that Ukraine has “one more chance. It is absolutely critical for Ukraine in order to be stable and prosperous and part of a secure Europe to definitely, thoroughly, completely root out the cancer of corruption.”³³

Another political shortcoming is that Ukraine has shown inconsistent support for joining NATO. In May 2002, President Leonid Kuchma shifted Ukraine’s policy of neutrality by unveiling a new military doctrine that stressed Euro-Atlantic integration.³⁴ However, this pro-integration policy was short-lived because in July 2004, President Kuchma slowed preparations for NATO membership after receiving Western criticism on his government’s lack of reforms.³⁵ Incoming president Yushchenko rejuvenated the pro-NATO membership policy at the February 2005 NATO-Ukraine Summit.³⁶ Yet his government’s enthusiasm for NATO membership waxed and waned depending upon domestic political circumstances. For instance, the Yushchenko government pressed NATO for an Intensified Dialogue on enlargement in 2005, but enthusiasm for NATO admission was not shared by all political parties in Ukraine. Yanukovich’s Party of the Regions opposed joining NATO and, once Yanukovich became prime minister in the summer of 2006, he informed NATO officials during a visit to Brussels that Ukraine would not be pursuing NATO membership.³⁷ The Ukrainian government reversed its stance on NATO enlargement again when Yulia Tymoshenko took over as

prime minister in late 2007. On January 15, 2008, President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Tymoshenko, and Parliamentary Speaker Yatsenyuk issued a letter to NATO formally requesting a MAP.³⁸ Not all political leaders in Ukraine were pleased with this pro-NATO path. The Party of the Regions threw the parliament into deadlock by calling Prime Minister Tymoshenko's push for a MAP "hasty" and insisting that any membership decision must be approved by a national referendum.³⁹

With Yanukovich becoming president in 2010, Ukraine officially changed its foreign policy stance once again. In April 2010, he shut down the commission on preparing Ukraine for NATO admission and shuttered the national center for Euro-Atlantic integration.⁴⁰ In June 2010, the Ukrainian parliament announced that Ukraine would assume a "non-bloc" status.⁴¹ This nonalignment stance was short-lived. In December 2014, not long after the ouster of Yanukovich in the Euromaidan protests, Ukraine altered its neutrality position yet again and declared its intention to work toward closer integration with NATO.⁴² President Poroshenko predicted that Ukraine would complete its NATO reforms in five to six years and then hold a nationwide referendum on joining NATO.⁴³ These governmental oscillations between pro- and anti-enlargement show that Ukraine is not like other candidate countries in prior rounds of enlargement, which were able to maintain pro-enlargement policy stances despite changes in government. Ukraine's inability to sustain NATO membership as a priority has sowed doubt in Alliance eyes about the reliability and seriousness of Ukraine as a potential Alliance member.⁴⁴

And finally, weak popular support within Ukraine for NATO membership has hindered its enlargement prospects. From 2002 to 2014, a majority of the Ukrainian public did not support their country joining NATO. For instance, a 2009 poll revealed that only 21 percent of respondents supported a policy of Ukraine pursuing NATO membership. But after Russia's annexation of Crimea, popular support shifted wildly in favor of joining. A 2015 poll indicated a 64 percent level of support for Ukraine NATO membership.⁴⁵ However, the recent surge in NATO's popularity is overinflated in many polls because they often exclude surveys from Crimea and the rebel-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine. A Kiev International Institute of Sociology poll in March 2015, which included the eastern regions, shows a lower level of support for NATO accession at 43 percent.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the existence of separatist conflict in Ukraine illustrates the bitter divisions in the country, and these divisions invariably spill over into the enlargement debate. As long as these societal divisions persist, it is unlikely Ukraine will achieve NATO membership.

Divided Alliance Support for Ukrainian Membership

NATO admits new members by consensus. Just one member has the power to block a candidate country from entering the Alliance. In the case of Ukraine's candidacy, the Alliance is deeply divided, and support is waning. The United States, once a champion of an ever-expanding Alliance under presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, has lost enthusiasm for enlargement policy.⁴⁷ President Barack Obama initially pursued accommodation of Russia through his "reset" policy, and the United States turned its attention away from Europe toward Asia.⁴⁸ The US downplayed enlargement in order not to risk spoiling the potential for warmer relations with Russia. Obama's general neglect of NATO's enlargement policy was evident at the 2012 Chicago summit where he received criticism within the US Congress for failing to push the enlargement agenda.⁴⁹ Furthermore, at the March 2014 US-EU Summit, President Obama replied to a question on NATO expansion by stating, "I think that neither Ukraine or Georgia are currently on a path to NATO membership and there has not been any immediate plans for expansion of NATO's membership."⁵⁰ President Donald Trump has been more explicit in expressing ambivalence toward the prospect of Ukrainian entry into NATO. When asked in August 2015 about Ukraine joining NATO, Trump replied, "I wouldn't care. If [Ukraine] goes in, great. If it doesn't go in, great."⁵¹ Not only have recent US presidents faltered on the enlargement issue, Congress has also lost its vigor in supporting NATO enlargement because of partisan bickering. The old dynamic of across-the-aisle support for NATO expansion in the 1990s and 2000s has ended.⁵² Even though the Ukraine Crisis has prodded the United States into reassessing its entire European security strategy, it has not sparked a US lobbying campaign for Ukraine's inclusion in NATO.

It is not just the United States that hesitates to support NATO membership for Ukraine. Germany has been consistently resistant to the idea of Ukraine joining NATO. In November 2014, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier rejected the notion of Ukraine entering NATO by saying, "I see a partner relationship between Ukraine and NATO, but not membership."⁵³ Also, French president François Hollande expressed that he opposes Ukraine gaining NATO membership.⁵⁴ Some new NATO members have begun to display a reluctance to enlarge to Ukraine. For instance, Slovakian prime minister Fico has publicly stated Ukraine should not join.⁵⁵ A lack of enthusiasm for Ukrainian membership is also present in the populations of some member states. A June 2015 Pew poll found healthy support for Ukrainian NATO membership in Canada (65 percent), the United States (62 percent), and Poland (59 percent) but rather weak support for Ukraine's entry into NATO in

Germany (36 percent) and Italy (35 percent).⁵⁶ Moreover, the Alliance has collectively been muted about the prospect of Ukrainian membership. The 2014 Wales Summit declaration mentioned the need to push for greater security integration in the Balkans and in Georgia, but Ukraine was conspicuously absent from this section.⁵⁷ When NATO released a statement reaffirming its commitment to the open-door policy at the December 2015 foreign ministers meeting, it failed to specifically mention Ukraine.⁵⁸ At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg made it clear that Ukrainian membership was not on the agenda.⁵⁹ It is apparent that very few voices in the Alliance are openly advocating for Ukraine to join NATO.

It must also be emphasized that NATO enlargement is a process dominated by politics. Although NATO has instituted numerous technical programs for helping the Alliance have a formal and transparent mechanism for candidate countries to join the Alliance (e.g., MAP), at the end of the process Alliance decisions on applicant countries are influenced by political concerns. For example, in the first post-Cold War round of enlargement in 1997, Slovenia arguably met all membership criteria but was left out due to its failure to apply political leverage on the US Congress through an organized ethnic lobby.⁶⁰ In the third post-Cold War round of enlargement in 2008, Greece vetoed Macedonia's application for membership because of a political dispute over Macedonia's name.⁶¹ What this signifies is that a country can technically meet all enlargement criteria but still be excluded from joining the Alliance. For Ukraine to gain NATO membership, it must do more than convince all member states that it meets NATO's enlargement criteria. It must remove political barriers to its accession within the Alliance to joining and assuage member states' fears that its admission will upset Russia. At present, it seems unlikely that Ukraine can accomplish this task.

Russian Hostility to Ukraine Joining NATO

Even if Ukraine achieves success with its military and political reforms, exhibits sustained popular support for NATO membership, and convinces NATO members of its viability as a member, the problem of Russian opposition remains. Russian hostility is a serious impediment to Ukraine entering the Alliance. Russia has never been comfortable with the notion of NATO expanding eastward, and it has been especially hostile toward the idea of NATO enlargement to Ukraine.⁶² In 2006, the Duma passed a resolution warning that "Ukraine's accession to the military bloc will lead to very negative consequences for relations between our fraternal peoples."⁶³ And in 2008, Russian president Vladimir Putin attended the NATO Bucharest Summit in order to

dissuade the Alliance from extending an offer of membership to Ukraine and Georgia. At the summit, he cautioned, “We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders . . . as a direct threat to the security of our country.”⁶⁴ Russia then demonstrated its willingness to use military force to stop NATO’s eastward expansion in the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008.⁶⁵ And it did so again with its annexation of Crimea. In a televised broadcast in April 2014, President Putin blamed the threat of NATO enlargement as an impetus behind the seizure of Crimea:

But it was also our understanding that if we did nothing then the [NATO] would, at some point, drag Ukraine into NATO and tell us it’s none of our business. It would seem that, from a military point of view, [Crimea] isn’t as significant as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries. I mean the availability of modern weapons, including those based on the shore. But if NATO forces place such weapons there, that will have geopolitical consequences for us. Then Russia would be, in effect, squeezed out of the Black Sea region.⁶⁶

From Russia’s perspective, Crimea is not only tied directly to its national security, but it also has strong historical and cultural affinities for the peninsula. Crimea has long been the headquarters of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, and it also serves as a vacation spot for Russian elites. In an address to the Duma in December 2014, President Putin described Crimea as having “invaluable civilizational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism.”⁶⁷ With an understanding of the geopolitical, historical, and cultural importance of Crimea to Russia, it is unsurprising that Russia would resort to military force to prevent Ukraine from integrating into Western security structures.

Through its seizure of Crimea, Russia has created a situation that weakens the prospects of Ukraine entering NATO. One of the criteria spelled out in the 1993 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, a document that established the parameters for admitting excommunist countries into NATO, is that candidate countries must resolve territorial disputes with their neighbors.⁶⁸ The annexation of Crimea ignited an intense territorial dispute between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine not only rejects Russia’s seizure of Crimea, but it also has a policy of reclaiming the peninsula. President Poroshenko declared at his 2014 inauguration speech: “Russia has occupied Crimea which was, is and will be Ukrainian. Yesterday, I clearly said this to the Russian leadership in Normandy during the celebrations of the 70th anniversary [of D-Day]. Crimea is and will be Ukrainian. Period. There can be no compromises with anyone

on Crimea.”⁶⁹ Moreover, NATO countries do not recognize Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Deputy Secretary-General Alexander Vershbow affirmed this position in April 2014 by saying, “I’m confident that Allies will maintain a long-term ‘non-recognition’ policy regarding Russia’s annexation of Crimea.”⁷⁰ It is doubtful Ukraine will succeed in persuading Russia to loosen its grasp on Crimea, and forcibly prying Crimea away from Russia is not likely to succeed. So long as this territorial dispute persists, NATO members will not allow Ukraine to join the Alliance.

Options for NATO Enlargement Policy

The lessons to draw from these discussions are that both Ukraine and NATO have never fully committed to each other and that Russia has the power to forcibly block Ukraine from joining NATO. On the one hand, Ukraine has been schizophrenic in its approach to NATO. There have been periods of interest in the prospect of joining the Alliance, but that interest has never been maintained. On the other hand, NATO members have been divided on the prospect of Ukrainian membership. A few members, such as Canada, Poland, and the United States, have supported Ukraine’s application, while other states such as Germany and France are more concerned about their relationship with Russia than with Ukraine. The overall Alliance position on enlargement to Ukraine is best characterized as being rhetorical and superficial. This posture signals that Ukrainian membership is a low and distant priority for the Alliance. In addition, Russia will not sit idly by as the West attempts to include Ukraine in its liberal order. Accepting Ukraine into the Alliance would likely spark a violent reaction from Russia. In light of this situation, NATO has three distinct paths when it comes to enlargement policy: push for Ukraine to join the Alliance, retain the status quo policy of delay, or reject the possibility of Ukrainian membership and establish a new basis for NATO-Ukraine relations.

Option 1: Campaign for Ukrainian Membership

NATO leaders believe in the transformational benefits of enlargement policy, but they do not seem to believe in this policy when it comes to Ukraine. To date, NATO has been inconsistent in pursuing a substantial reform process in Ukraine, and it has placed the onus on Ukraine to internally generate reform programs. If NATO believes that admitting Ukraine would create greater peace and security for all of Europe, then it should overcome internal divisions and more vigorously pursue a policy of reforming Ukrainian military and

political institutions. In this logic, to allow Ukraine to flounder outside of the Alliance destabilizes overall Alliance security and creates a security vacuum on NATO's eastern border.

A grand campaign for getting Ukraine into NATO requires diplomatic skill, substantial financial commitments, and a coordinated governance reform push. For such a program to succeed, NATO member states need to provide much larger assistance and reform aid to Ukraine than the five trust funds that allocated a meager \$5.9 million to Ukraine in 2015.⁷¹ The United States has pledged over \$335 million in aid in 2016, but this aid is mainly for training and purchasing equipment to help Ukraine fight in the eastern provinces. It is not aimed at encouraging Ukraine to meet NATO membership criteria.⁷² For an active enlargement campaign to work, all NATO members must allocate greater financial resources, coordinate their national efforts, and be more deliberate in prodding Ukraine to reform its military and political sectors. Because NATO's decades-long outreach program to Ukraine has not produced many positive results, a more serious and sustained reform effort is required on the part of the West.

A reinvigorated policy of enlargement must also focus on transforming Russia as well. Despite Alliance protests to the contrary, Kiev's road to NATO runs through Moscow. This means that the Alliance must convince Russians to shift their foreign and security outlook so that they no longer view NATO as a threat. To campaign for Ukrainian membership while Russia remains violently opposed to this prospect is to court conflict between NATO and Russia. Operationalizing a shift in Russian views toward NATO will be difficult and will require a substantial public diplomacy campaign intended to change the attitudes of the Russian people and their elites. This outreach campaign should also include opening new venues for NATO-Russia cooperation and encouraging Russia to adopt Western governance standards. For Ukraine to become a member of NATO, trust between Russia and the West must be restored. Ultimately, the long-term goal of enlargement is not only to incorporate Ukraine into NATO but also to get Russia to the point where it may also be considered a candidate for NATO membership. Europe cannot be truly "whole and free" without Russia included in its political, economic, and security architecture. This means the door to Western institutions, including NATO, must be left open for Russia. Western leaders should expend more diplomatic capital and financial resources to promote transformative political change in Russia. If Russia can be coaxed onto an integrationist path with the West, then enlargement to Ukraine becomes a viable option.

The chances of a grand enlargement campaign succeeding are dubious. History shows that Ukraine has a poor record of reform, and achieving major

reforms during a time of civil strife is a Sisyphean task. The outreach project to Russia would take years to have any significant impact on Russian attitudes toward NATO, and it is unlikely that Russia would respond favorably to a Western reform push. Western leaders currently have little appetite for a major reform campaign to transform Russia. Moreover, it is fanciful to think that NATO members, especially the United States, would be willing to view Russia as a candidate for NATO membership. All of these challenges mean that a grand campaign for Ukrainian membership is not likely to be adopted.

Option 2: Status Quo Policy

Another option is for NATO to continue its status quo policy, which amounts to delaying the decision on Ukrainian membership as long as possible. It is a policy based on the hope that one day conditions within Ukraine will improve and Russian hostility toward enlargement will soften. With this option, the Alliance can continue to work with Ukraine on reforming its institutions and military practices at a leisurely pace. It also allows the Alliance to avoid confronting internal NATO divisions and external strategic complexities with Russia. This policy is a low-risk, low-effort strategy that upholds values championed by the Alliance yet does not destabilize relations with Russia by being too strident in expanding the Alliance.

The problem with the status quo policy is that it has failed in terms of improving NATO's security. A slow-motion and half-hearted enlargement policy toward Ukraine has not only worsened the Alliance's security because the possibility of conflict with Russia is greater than any time since the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is evident from the fact that the Alliance has refocused its mandate toward an emphasis on territorial protection, and NATO now considers Russia as a strategic adversary.⁷³ The status quo enlargement policy creates a security dilemma whereby every time Ukraine moves closer to NATO, Russia reacts in a more aggressive fashion that, in turn, justifies Ukraine moving closer to NATO. The outcome of a slow and careful enlargement process has been greater Russia-NATO tensions.

Another problem with this option is that it assumes that NATO's approach to enlargement is merit-based and technocratic. On paper this may be true, but in reality geopolitical considerations can upset a candidate's application for entry into NATO. If Ukraine successfully reforms and definitively elects to join NATO in a national referendum, it is still unlikely that Alliance members will accept it into the fold because doing so will have negative repercussions on Western-Russian relations. If, at that time, NATO keeps Ukraine in limbo despite meeting membership criteria, then its merit-based, values-driven

enlargement policy will be exposed as hypocrisy. A status quo policy on NATO's part is easy and consistent, but it is also devoid of the deliberateness, energy, and creative diplomacy that is possible with the other two options. And the status quo policy does not address the festering problem of Russian opposition to enlargement.

Option 3: Reject Ukrainian Membership and Establish a New Relationship

The final option for NATO is to publicly reject the possibility of Ukraine joining the Alliance. The reason for choosing this option is to bring stability to the strategic situation in Eastern Europe and recognize that enlargement to Ukraine adversely affects relations with Russia. Denying Ukraine entry into the Alliance removes a major point of contention between the West and Russia and opens up new avenues for cooperation with Russia. No longer will Russia feel that NATO is purposefully trying to encircle its territory. Alleviating Russia's security fears may incline it toward greater cooperation with NATO and may produce a sociopolitical environment in Russia that is more conducive to adopting Western norms. Furthermore, this rejection option creates an opportunity to establish a new type of relationship with Ukraine that falls just short of membership.⁷⁴ NATO and Ukraine can continue to cooperate in a number of areas, and NATO could offer long-term financial and political commitments to encourage Ukraine's reform process. This new special relationship could also entail negotiating with Russia about establishing Ukraine as a permanent neutral state.⁷⁵ The rejection policy also allows NATO to focus its energy and resources on other areas of enlargement that deserve greater attention such as the Balkans.

This option faces obstacles in being adopted and may have adverse consequences. First of all, getting the Alliance to change its mentality on NATO enlargement will be difficult. Enlargement policy has been one of the primary pillars of NATO's post-Cold War existence. It is the vehicle by which the Alliance successfully transformed the security environment of much of Central and Eastern Europe. Publicly closing the membership door on Ukraine fundamentally alters the logic of enlargement by admitting that there may be limits to the transformative powers of enlargement. This will put NATO in a position where it will be accused of betraying its democratic values and appeasing Russia. It could undermine the Ukrainian reform movement, and NATO would lose influence over Ukraine's reform process because of the absence of conditionality power—the ability to positively influence behavior based on the prospect of admission.⁷⁶

Also, saying “no” to a candidate country will likely send negative signals to other applicant countries in Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans and the Caucasus. Countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Serbia may conclude that NATO leaders can no longer be trusted and will look for alternative security solutions. If this were to happen, especially in the Balkans, then NATO’s overall security would deteriorate. Furthermore, rejecting Ukraine as a NATO candidate likely means that NATO would also reject Georgia’s candidacy due to the fact it shares similar geopolitical circumstances. Georgia has lingering territorial disputes in the form of its breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia politically and financially supports these two separatist provinces, and it is strongly opposed to Georgia joining NATO. One can also assume that rejecting Georgia’s NATO candidacy would have a negative impact on the pace of reform in that country. However, the damage posed by rejecting Ukraine and Georgia as candidates could be minimized by the Alliance clearly proclaiming that these are special exceptions to its norms-driven enlargement policy. NATO can still maintain its enlargement policy in the Balkans and be open to other potential members such as Finland and Sweden. Furthermore, rejection does not mean that NATO neglects Ukraine. It can continue to support civil-military reforms in Ukraine and can work with Ukraine in NATO-wide operations and PFP exercises. The rejection option does not mean a suspension of relations with a country nor does it imply an abandonment of Alliance values.

Implications for Enlargement Policy

NATO’s open-door enlargement policy has created a challenging situation for the Alliance. NATO allowed its enlargement policy to be driven by a philosophy based on liberal values and upholding the right of countries to choose their own military allegiances. Such a style of enlargement has produced positive results, particularly in Central Europe and in the Baltic states, but the flaw in a values-driven enlargement is that it has been devoid of broader strategic considerations. The desire to spread freedom as a means to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe has, in fact, created instability for the entire West by goading Russia into a hostile and aggressive posture. NATO leaders chose to emphasize the normative aspects of enlargement to Ukraine while dismissing the detrimental political and military ramifications this policy would have on Russia. Leaders in Russia view NATO expansion as a direct threat to their security, and they reject NATO arguments that enlargement spreads peace and prosperity. They suspect the true intent of NATO expanding to its borders is to dominate the region and isolate Russia. And Russia’s interventions

in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate that it is willing to fight to keep NATO from expanding any closer to its borders.

The post-Cold War strategic mistake for the Alliance was not making the establishment of an enduring and peaceful relationship with Russia its highest priority. The Alliance tried on repeated occasions to create a healthy relationship with Russia, such as establishing the 2002 NATO-Russia Council, but these attempts were hampered by Alliance decisions in other policy areas. The Alliance's insistence on enlargement, the unilateral way it pursued the Kosovo War, its European ballistic missile defense proposal, and the West's support for Kosovo's declaration of independence without Russian approval created an atmosphere of distrust between NATO and Russia. And all of this distrust was sowed before Russia invaded Georgia or annexed Ukrainian territory. Furthermore, NATO justified its enlargement policy in a way that was off-putting to Russian ears. Arguing that spreading Western reforms provides security for all of Europe is not comforting to a Russia that is largely excluded from Western security and economic institutions. Revamping enlargement policy provides a way for the Alliance to make a course correction with its relationship with Russia by removing a major irritant in NATO-Russia relations. Modifying enlargement policy could be the basis for building trust with Russia and possibly be the impetus for breaking Russia and NATO out of their political and military stalemate.

Each option laid out in this chapter has substantial risks, and all will be difficult to pursue. Yet it is clear that sticking with the status quo option will not work. NATO's enlargement policy should not be set on autopilot. The status quo option does not adequately deal with the fundamental problems of Ukraine's inability to reform and Russia's hostility to NATO expansion. The other two options—active campaign or rejection—do address these concerns but in different manners. The active enlargement campaign option holds out the promise of finally sparking true reform not only in Ukraine but also in Russia. Yet this option is unlikely to be initiated because of deep internal divisions within the Alliance and the fact that it depends on an expensive and sustained reform effort. Also, Ukraine's poor record of reform is discouraging, and Russian leaders are unlikely to be receptive to a democracy-promotion campaign. A better option with more immediate impact is to forswear Ukraine entering NATO. Doing so allows NATO to work on establishing a new type of relationship with Ukraine and to reap the benefits of lower tensions with Russia. Of course, this option means that NATO must subordinate its liberal ideology for broader strategic concerns. The starting point for making this policy change is to admit that the trajectory of enlargement has failed in Ukraine's case. The

enlargement policy created a tug-of-war between the West and Russia over Ukraine's external orientation, resulting in the deterioration of stability for all of Europe. Halting NATO's open-door enlargement policy to Ukraine will produce a more cooperative international environment. Furthermore, NATO cutting off Ukraine's path to membership does not mean it gives up on promoting democratic reform in Ukraine or that it halts its liberal-order-building project in other regions, particularly in the Balkans. Ultimately, altering enlargement policy with respect to Ukraine by being more discerning and less ideologically driven provides a way for achieving better relations with Russia, creating greater stability for Eastern Europe, and improving the overall security of the Alliance.

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