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Expanding membership of NATO could be risky



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Canada could press for a reassessment of the obligations involved in belonging to NATO.

By Erika Simpson

To expand NATO by acquiring new members is tempting but risky. We could all be caught in a security dilemma.

As was the case during the Cold War, we may find that decisions to increase our security decrease Russian security, possibly leading to arms spirals and renewed confrontation. NATO's efforts to enhance security, whether by acquiring more allies such as Poland and Hungary, deploying troops and weapons on the alliance's new periphery or expressing interest in expanding the alliance, can decrease Russian security across-the-board and within every Russian political party.

NATO expansion could even lead Russia to move some of its nuclear or conventional arsenal into defen-

sive positions along a newly defined border.

Yet the former Central and Eastern European countries crave NATO membership because of the security guarantee embodied in Article 5 of NATO's charter and the economic and security benefits derived from such co-operation. The Russian presidential election last June and the U.S. presidential election last November allowed policymakers to defer a decision. But now we must face these problems. What might Canada do to ameliorate this security dilemma?

Canada could express legitimate concerns with respect to rapid NATO expansion. A case could be made that NATO membership should be made contingent on full economic co-operation in European markets — a prospect far enough into the future so as not to greatly increase Russian insecurity. Yet such a rationale would not alleviate the insecurity of would-be NATO allies such as the Czech Republic.

Rather, Canada could press for a reassessment of the obligations of NATO's Article 5. It can blithely be referred to as the three Musketeers' article: an attack against one is an

attack against us all.

But it is not such an easy principle to fathom. For instance, if Greece and Turkey engaged in an armed dispute over Cyprus, would we deem it necessary to defend either or both NATO members? If Turkey were to engage in an armed dispute with Iraq over the Kurds, to what extent would we be obliged to use armed force to restore Turkey's security? These are hardly hypothetical, far-fetched scenarios. We can readily see the contradictions and potential problems. Even now, before NATO enlargement, Article 5 prompts disconcerting questions and vague, if not inconsistent, policy. Before expanding NATO, Canada could press for an honest and forthright reassessment of the rights and obligations of Article 5. Furthermore, Canada could attempt to alleviate the security dilemma by proposing significant NATO reform.

MIDDLE AGE: Many people refer to the United Nations as a 50-year-old institution in need of reform. But NATO is also a middle-aged institution in need of reform. Wholesale reform will not work.

Reforms must be cumulative, built gradually on existing foundations. For instance, the decision by France to involve itself more closely in the military aspects of the alliance is one kind of reform. The establishment of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council and the Partnership for Peace are others. But NATO needs further transformation of its structures and procedures if it is to serve the common security interests of the allies and others.

In doing so, the first priority must not be to create new dividing lines. A reformed NATO, which did not aim to include the most powerful country in Europe, Russia, would be fatally flawed. NATO's Atlantic Council should strive to engage Russia in an active, co-operative relationship that would form the cornerstone of a new, inclusive security structure in Europe. NATO must reassure Moscow by offering a special relationship with formally embedded consultation mechanisms, a mutual non-aggression pledge and a promise to develop non-offensive defence systems.

If NATO expansion does take place, without Russian approval,

we run the risk of inciting old hatreds and new insecurities. The Russian leadership remains unstable. President Boris Yeltsin continues to be ill and weak. Gen. Alexander Lebed waits impatiently in the background. For Canada to push for NATO expansion now could contribute to the situation we do not want — a more paranoid and insecure leadership and populace. Far wiser to delay NATO enlargement until all Russians feel a part of Europe's emerging security architecture.

Finally, it would be helpful if the Canadian government were to re-emphasize the objectives underlying Article 2, which recommends in part the allies contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations, strengthen their free institutions, promote conditions of stability and well-being and encourage economic collaboration.

Canadians need to emphasize the ideas embodied in that article, and help transform NATO from a collective defence organization into an alliance of free and democratic nations intent upon ending East-West confrontation.

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