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October 8, 1997**MEMORANDUM TO: OPINION LEADERS****FROM: WILLIAM KRISTOL****SUBJECT: NATO ENLARGEMENT**

Over the next month, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is holding a series of hearings to examine the merits of enlarging NATO to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The first of six planned hearings was held Tuesday.

The prevailing view is that there is more than enough votes in the Senate to ensure its "advice and consent" to the resolution approving NATO's expansion. We hope that assessment is true. But we worry about the depth of the support for expansion and the general tendency among an increasing number in Congress to question the need for and costs of American global leadership. Unforeseen events or a crisis within the alliance produced by an American pull-out of Bosnia could quickly make this vote much closer than it appears to be today.

It is also important that a vote for NATO expansion be done for the right reasons — not because it "plays well in Chicago" or is an item listed in the GOP's "Contract with America." What matters is that the Senate and the public understand that a vote for NATO's enlargement is a vote for the continuing exercise of American leadership in European affairs and a policy that builds upon the strategic opportunities presented by our victory in the Cold War.

The following memorandum on why NATO expansion is in America's strategic interest is the first in a series of Project briefs intended to provide concise reviews of the key issues and questions surrounding enlargement. Among the topics to be covered in the series are: the impact of NATO enlargement on U.S.-Russian relations, what "threat" is NATO designed to meet in the post-Cold War era, the cost of NATO enlargement, why NATO expansion matters to Europe and NATO's future, and why Bosnia is important to NATO and NATO's enlargement.

Through these memorandums, the Project intends to participate in the debate and, we hope, help frame the issue of NATO expansion in a useful and thoughtful way. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

1. [Why NATO Enlargement is in America's Strategic Interest](#) (Oct. 8, 1997)
2. [NATO Enlargement: What is the "Threat?"](#) (Oct. 13, 1997)
3. [Russia and NATO Enlargement](#) (Nov. 11, 1997)
4. [The Cost of NATO Expansion](#) (Jan. 20, 1998)

Why NATO's Enlargement is in America's Strategic Interest

Americans can take pride in this fact: the new democracies of Europe want to become members of an alliance led by the United States. This is a testament not only to our power but to the attractiveness of the principles on behalf of which that power is employed. But however satisfying it is to us that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic want to belong to a U.S.-led alliance, the decision to expand NATO should be made because it is in the strategic interests of the United States to do so.

And it is. For our bedrock interest is clear. As this century's experience of two world wars and one cold war suggest, the U.S. has a vital stake in deterring or, if need be, defeating any state which threatens to dominate this rich and potentially powerful continent. The past has been marked by one power or another making a bid to dominate Europe; in the recent past, of course, it was the Soviet Union. An American-led NATO prevented Moscow from accomplishing its goal. By placing Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic under NATO's security umbrella today, NATO can deter any rising power from aspiring to that goal in the future.

The alternative is to leave the states of Central and Eastern Europe in a geopolitical no-man's land, forcing them to plan and maneuver around the inevitably powerful pull of a unified Germany and a potentially resurgent Russia. By expanding now, NATO effectively takes the three states of Central Europe "out of play." Locked into a U.S.-led alliance, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic will not invite the kind of competitions and great power machinations that have plagued Europe in the past. As Charles Krauthammer has put it: NATO's expansion provides Europe with "stability through finality."

This basic strategic interest is reinforced by the fact that, today, the world's largest trade and investment relationship takes place between the United States and Europe. Although the expansion of the Far East economies over the past two decades has grabbed attention, Europe remains our largest trading partner, accounting for well over \$140 billion in exports alone. And based on the short history of U.S. trade with the three prospective members of NATO, we can expect commercial ties to those countries to grow as their economies reform and develop. U.S. exports to the three states have expanded at double-digit rates in recent years. Although our interest in NATO and its expansion does not begin (nor end) with commerce between the U.S. and Europe, we shouldn't overlook the obvious point that the U.S. retains a significant economic stake in seeing Europe free, stable and prosperous.

But why expand now? Why enlarge NATO when there is little evidence that the kind of competition that once proved to be so destructive in Europe exists today? The answer is that it is always better to settle matters of this kind when one can — rather than gambling that history and circumstances will remain so favorable. Also, by expending modest resources on bringing these three states into NATO today, the U.S. will find it easier in the future to turn its attention to those areas of the world where it is likely to have more pressing security concerns. Once the major powers of Central Europe are part of NATO, the security and stability provided by the alliance will reduce American concerns about this region, supplying greater freedom for the exercise of U.S. power and leadership elsewhere.

But why, it is asked, can't the Europeans establish a post-Cold War security regime for Central Europe themselves? Why should this settlement involve the United States? The blunt answer is that no interstate organization in Europe is capable of exercising the kind of power that NATO can. Although the European Union, for example, has set a goal of establishing a "common foreign and defense policy" for its members, this remains illusive. For the time being, it will take a back seat to the European Union's primary (and still problematic) task of creating a single economic market in Europe and establishing a single currency for its members. In contrast, NATO has been effective at maintaining a common foreign and defense policy for half a century.

The truth is that the European Union is never likely to replace NATO. As the Europeans know, any European security regime that does not include the United States will almost certainly be pulled in the direction of either Berlin or Moscow. No exclusively European organization can do what NATO has done so successfully: contain the traditional great power rivalries of Europe. Simply put, it is NATO which has provided the very stability in Europe that makes the EU's own efforts possible.

Ironically, the very success NATO has enjoyed over the past fifty years has led many to doubt its continued importance in the post-Cold War world. Critics of NATO and its expansion ask "Where is the threat" that the alliance is designed to meet? But they overlook the fact that there is no threat today precisely because NATO has worked, and it has worked because the U.S. has stayed actively involved in Europe's security. Now we have a chance to secure the gains of the past fifty years and extend them into the future by enlarging the alliance to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. This serves to preclude future threats in Europe, and it enhances our ability to exercise leadership elsewhere by increasing the power of an alliance on which we can draw, and by reducing the chances of distracting instability occurring in the heart of Europe.

As the 20th century comes to a close, the United States stands as the world's preeminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, it now faces a security environment that is defined as much by strategic opportunities as threats. America's core strategic interest lies in preserving and, where feasible, expanding the current favorable security environment. NATO's expansion is a critical step in maintaining an American preeminence that is in our interest, and the world's.