Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Having committed itself to gradual enlargement in 1994, NATO took the important step of admitting Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as members in 1999. But even though NATO’s enlargement has received an enormous amount of public attention, NATO’s transformation in the 1990s is probably the more important of the two steps NATO has taken. Created as an organization dedicated to the collective defense of its members, NATO has now expanded its mission to include conflict prevention and conflict management throughout Europe, including beyond the boundaries of the NATO treaty area. In both its enlargement and its transformation, NATO has been driven primarily by political imperatives—that is, not by a sense of direct threat, but by an environment-shaping agenda of democratization and integration.

The military implications of NATO’s enlargement and transformation for the United States and its allies are profound. NATO’s transformed role entails missions for which the armed forces of many of its current members remain underprepared, and the accession of each new member extends the NATO commitment to the collective defense of all members, even if there is currently no apparent threat to a new member. The commitment entails a multitude of military preparations to ensure that if a threat were to materialize, the commitment would not be hollow. Such preparations are necessary for deterrence, to help ensure that a threat does not materialize in the first place.

NATO’s transformation and the way that NATO enlargement has unfolded have in some ways blurred the line dividing NATO mem-
bers and non-members, making military planning more complex. By taking on a larger responsibility for European security as a whole and identifying specific countries as potential future members, NATO may be seen as having extended an implicit security guarantee to non-member states. At the same time, NATO membership entails a unique level of cooperation, trust, and specific preparations for joint operations, all of which become more complicated as NATO’s size increases. For military planning purposes, the U.S. armed services and the United States European Command (EUCOM) must be able to accurately identify whether and, if so, when a particular country might join NATO. Nearly a dozen countries make up the “long list” of potential NATO members—i.e., those that could conceivably join within the next 10 to 15 years—and some of these candidates present significant challenges for defense planning, even in the benign security environment that currently exists in Europe. If the situation changes for the worse, the membership and/or the defense responsibilities for probable members could increase greatly.

Forecasting the likelihood of a given country’s accession to NATO is a complex endeavor, particularly because of the political rationale driving the process. The United States will likely be the main decisionmaker in any future NATO enlargement, as it was during the initial round in 1997–99. The final decision, however, will be made within a NATO framework and will be subject to the political preferences of NATO’s main members, as well as to intra-alliance bargaining.

STUDY OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

This report is designed to assist the U.S. Air Force in preparing for NATO’s continuing evolution and enlargement in the next decade and beyond. It offers a framework for gauging the likelihood that specific countries aspiring to NATO membership will become members, and it presents guidelines for arriving at the general time frame in which a given country might become a NATO member.1 In addi-

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1The guidelines are meant to be used by military planners to assist them in predicting political outcomes. The author is well aware of the pitfalls associated with predictions, and the forecasts should be taken as elaborations stemming from a current rundown of the criteria developed for assessing the likelihood of accession. Should the circum-

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tion, the report provides an overview of the problems prospective members face in terms of their armed forces, especially their air forces, as well as shaping guidelines and priorities for U.S. planners regarding these armed forces.

**REPORT ORGANIZATION AND APPROACH**

The report consists of five chapters. Chapter Two establishes the context for thinking about contemporary defense planning in Europe, using as its starting point the overall benign security environment that currently exists in Europe and that stems, in no small part, from NATO’s transforming itself into an organization whose mission includes aspects of collective and cooperative security. This chapter establishes the background for NATO’s enlargement and defines NATO’s criteria for new members.

Chapter Three examines the unfolding of the post–Cold War enlargement to date. It traces out an identifiable pattern in the process and provides parameters for how future enlargement is likely to evolve in relation to an informal five-step process to accession that NATO has put in place.

Chapters Four and Five constitute the core of the analysis. Chapter Four provides a framework for thinking about the likelihood of specific countries joining NATO in the foreseeable future and presents an analytical tool for assessing the readiness and attractiveness of aspiring members. The analysis focuses chiefly on the nine countries on track to membership through the Membership Action Plan (MAP), each of which is evaluated using both the explicit pre-conditions established by NATO and the unstated but dominant strategic criteria that govern NATO decisions. Two scales are devised for assessing the MAP countries—one for along the explicit criteria, and one for along the implicit criteria—and a final assessment is made by combining the two.

Chapter Five presents the military implications of the enlargement process, assessing the armed forces of the MAP states. The major challenges facing all the MAP states are analyzed, as are the special circumstances concerning some of the criteria change, as they almost certainly will, a reevaluation (using the framework provided here) will be in order.
problems of particular countries. Like the three countries that joined NATO in 1999, the MAP states face particular challenges with regard to their air force capabilities.

Chapter Six reviews the major problems facing the MAP countries and discusses the complications NATO faces as a result of these countries being placed on the membership track. A list of recommendations to guide the USAF and EUCOM in their planning processes is provided, along with specific actions that planners might consider for shaping the situation to U.S. and NATO advantage, particularly for support of U.S. goals in Europe.

The data used to inform this report were drawn from primary documents (NATO materials) and secondary literature, supplemented by interviews with former U.S. officials to NATO and defense representatives of countries aspiring to NATO membership. The report is based on information available as of the end of 2000.