In January 1994, NATO committed itself to a gradual process of enlargement, and in 1999, it admitted three new members—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. A further enlargement decision is scheduled for 2002, with a new member (or members) possibly joining NATO in 2004. Over the next 15 years, as many as three decisions could be made on further enlargement. These decisions and the overall course of enlargement will pose many far-reaching strategic and military challenges for NATO policymakers. Which countries are likely to be admitted, and when? What is the status of the armed forces of potential member countries? What impact will the accession of new members have on NATO’s main missions?

This report develops and applies an analytical framework to evaluate potential members’ relative readiness for and likelihood of admission to NATO. The framework takes into account political, strategic, and military criteria. The purpose of the analysis is to inform decisionmaking by the United States Air Force, the United States European Command (EUCOM), and EUCOM component commands regarding shaping actions (with a particular emphasis on airpower) toward the aspiring members.

The research presented here is part of a larger project on the changing strategic environment in and around Europe and its implications for the United States and NATO. Sponsored by the Commander, United States Air Forces in Europe, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations, Headquarters, United States Air Force, the project was conducted in the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND’s Project AIR FORCE.
This report should be of interest to those engaged in policymaking regarding European security. Its specific military focus is on air forces, but its discussion of the defense planning implications of the enlargement process and the engagement and shaping recommendations is also relevant to other dimensions of military power.

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PROJECT AIR FORCE

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