Book III

ACROSS THE RUBICON

1994 was the year the Clinton Administration crossed the Rubicon in deciding to enlarge NATO. That decision took place not in one clear or decisive stride, but rather through a series of policy steps that cumulatively set the Administration on course to open NATO's door to Central and Eastern Europe. In a NATO summit in January, the U.S. and its allies embraced the goal of NATO enlargement in principle. President Clinton then met with the Visegrad heads-of-state in Prague, where he stated that enlargement was "no longer a question of whether but when and how."

But making a decision in principle and implementing it in practice were not the same thing. Indeed, the key issues in the debate were precisely those issues that NATO leaders had dodged: why, when, and how would the Alliance enlarge? Would it enlarge to extend a security umbrella over the region and fill in a security vacuum, in tandem with the EU's eventual enlargement, or only in response to the emergence of a new Russian threat, should one arise? Neither the declaration by NATO heads of state in Brussels nor Bill Clinton's statement in Prague had answered those questions. The reason for the silence on these issues was quite simple: there was not yet consensus on the way ahead.

In the course of the year, however, the Clinton Administration started to fill in the blanks on these key questions, at least in its own internal deliberations. It would take the rest of the year for the Administration to consolidate that deci-

sion and to resolve the final differences within its own ranks. By the end of the year that opposition had been overcome, a strategy had developed, and the U.S. had started to move forward with NATO enlargement.

This is perhaps the most important, yet also the murkiest, period in the Administration's internal deliberations and the one that future historians are likely to debate. The decision to enlarge NATO was ambiguous and opaque, at times deliberately so, and it was a decision that hardly qualified as a model of executive branch decisionmaking. Preoccupied with its domestic agenda and foreign policy crises in places like Haiti, Somalia, and Bosnia, the Administration never held a second top-level Principals Committee meeting to make a final decision to move forward on NATO enlargement. Nor did Clinton receive or sign the kind of official action memorandum that normally accompanies a major foreign policy decision in the U.S. government's interagency process.

Instead, one of the most far-reaching decisions on future U.S. strategy toward Europe emerged from behind-the-scenes bureaucratic combat, subtle public high-level policy proclamations, and growing political pressure from Republican opponents on Capitol Hill. Future historians will debate whether these vagaries reflected sloppy decisionmaking or deliberate Machiavellian bureaucratic behavior—or some combination of both. Even today key figures involved in the process at the time do not fully agree exactly when the Administration made the decision to enlarge NATO. But one thing is clear. While public debate over expanding the Alliance would continue unabated for several years to come, the Administration had crossed its own Rubicon.[1]

The first step in this shift came in January 1994 when Alliance heads-of-state embraced the goal of NATO enlargement and launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) at a summit in Brussels. In Prague several days later, President Clinton announced at a meeting with the four Visegrad heads of state that NATO enlargement was no longer a question of "whether" but "when" and "how." That statement was the result of an intense set of discussions among the President and his key aides in the run up to Clinton's first trip to Europe and reflected the President's desire to send a clear message that PfP was the start of a process that would open NATO's door to new members.

Yet, it was one thing to endorse enlargement in principle and quite another to set into motion the practical steps to make it happen. PfP was being launched at NATO with no agreement or even direct consideration of how it might actually lead to NATO enlargement. The issues of why, when, or how the Alliance would enlarge were never even raised at the January meeting of NATO leaders. Would enlargement take place before or after the EU's own enlargement? In two years or in ten? Or, would it take place only if a new Russian threat were to emerge? Instead of answering such questions, the summit had simply kicked the can down the road.

In the spring of 1994 National Security Advisor Lake made the first step in answering such questions when he quietly asked his staff to prepare a memo for

the President that provided a rationale, a framework, and a timeline for NATO enlargement—i.e., a plan. Lake presented the memo to the President in late June. In Europe several weeks later, the President publicly called on the Alliance to take the next steps in the enlargement process. Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke was brought back to Washington in the autumn of 1994 to work in Bosnia and impose the President's will to enlarge NATO on a recalcitrant bureaucracy. In September, Clinton told Russian President Boris Yeltsin for the first time that he was committed to enlarging NATO, but that the process would be gradual and that he would respect Russian interests and sensitivities.

The President's decision to push ahead with enlargement was reinforced by conservative Republican pressure on the Administration to be more outspoken. In the summer of 1994, Republicans embraced NATO enlargement as a key foreign policy goal in the Contract with America and tabled legislation on Capitol Hill calling on the Administration to identify specific candidates and set a public timeline for enlargement. After the Republican landslide victory in the November 1994 midterm congressional elections, the enlargement issue moved from the world of strategic seminars and internal Alliance debates to the political arena.

The shift in U.S. policy on NATO enlargement that took place in the course of the year had a cascading effect on attitudes across the European continent. Allies in Western Europe were caught by surprise, as many had concluded that PfP was intended to dodge the enlargement issues for some time to come. Many were reticent to follow the U.S. lead. The result was a compromise, in which an official NATO study on enlargement was launched in December at the annual Foreign Minister's meeting. Even this small half-step, however, elicited an angry outburst from Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Moscow's hostile reaction, in turn, convinced enlargement skeptics in the Clinton Administration, led by new Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, to make one final appeal to the President to reverse course. But the President stood by the decision to press forward.

To be sure, NATO enlargement was not yet a done deal. Many of the biggest hurdles still lay ahead. A cloud of uncertainty continued to hang over the Administration's policy as it slowly moved forward with enlargement, struggled to find its footing in Bosnia as well as to steady an increasingly topsy-turvy relationship with Moscow. Critics repeatedly questioned the depth of the President's support. Many predicted Washington would buckle under Russian pressure, weak allied support, or intellectual opposition at home. But the Administration would hold firm.

1. AN AMBIGUOUS DECISION

In early January 1994, Bill Clinton prepared to depart on his first trip as President to Europe and Russia. It was his first major opportunity to lay out his vision of a post–Cold War trans-Atlantic relationship and to highlight how his

policies toward Europe and Russia meshed. The trip's itinerary was designed to underscore his commitment to building a Europe undivided, democratic, and secure. His first stop was the NATO summit in Brussels. It was followed by a meeting in Prague with the heads of state of the four Visegrad countries. From there the President would stop briefly in Kiev on his way to Moscow. A brief and final stop was scheduled in Minsk, the capital city of Belarus, to seal an arms reduction deal that rid Ukraine and Belarus of the nuclear warheads inherited from the breakup of the USSR.

Tony Lake knew that the President was leaning toward enlargement. As National Security Advisor, his job was not only to make sure the President knew about differences on key issues in his national security team, but also to implement the President's own will. Lake was determined that the President's trip send a clear message on America's willingness to lead in opening NATO's door to the East. Sending a positive message on enlargement was central to the President's vision of a modern, updated Alliance. In the run-up to the trip, Lake and his Deputy, Sandy Berger, talked to President Clinton at length about NATO's future and what was at stake for the United States. It was those discussions and the subsequent trip that crystallized Clinton's support for enlargement.

As Sandy Berger noted, "The catalytic event was the President's trip to Europe in January 1994." Berger went on: "In preparation for that trip there were a series of discussions between the President and Tony Lake and myself about the concept of NATO enlargement. The President's view, which Tony and I supported, was that while Article V and collective defense needed to remain at NATO's core, the Alliance's membership and missions needed to be revised to maintain its relevance and the trans-Atlantic link as well as to provide a magnet for the East. That trip was a very important event and the President's statement in Prague publicly endorsed NATO enlargement for the first time. That statement was the result of a dialogue that had taken place between the President, Tony and me on enlargement."[2]

The more immediate problem facing the Administration was shoring up Central and East European support for PfP. In early January, Christopher had written his Central and East European counterparts urging them to embrace and exploit PfP's potential to build closer relations with NATO, but the response was not the desired one.[3] Nowhere was skepticism greater than in Warsaw. Olechowski complained privately that PfP made NATO membership appear like a "vanishing point" on the horizon.[4] Walesa unleashed his harshest public criticism yet, publicly lambasting PfP as a "major tragedy" bordering on appeasement. He insisted that by not standing up to Moscow, the West was only fueling Russian imperial tendencies. "If the West allows small things like this today, it will allow bigger things tomorrow. . . . We kept crying and shouting in 1939 but they only believed us when the war reached London and Paris. The situation is very similar today."[5]

Warsaw's support was critical for PfP's success. To get it, the Administration turned to three individuals in its ranks of Central European origin—Czech-born Madeleine K. Albright, Polish-born General John Shalikashvilli and Hungarian-born Charles Gati—to visit the region and lobby for the U.S. initiative. But their main mission was to get Walesa to endorse PfP—and to do so before the President arrived in Prague. On the day the trip was announced, Shalikashvilli defended PfP in a press briefing and made it clear that he viewed it as an alternative to NATO enlarging in the near-term. He argued that enlarging NATO could be "destabilizing" by drawing "a new line of division" in Europe that could fuel nationalist feelings in Russia. While PfP did not have NATO membership as its specific endpoint, he argued that it would start a process at the end of which all parties "would be in a much better position to seriously discuss" actual enlargement. Having counseled prudence, he said that the debate had already shifted and was now less about "whether" the Alliance should expand than "how" and "when." It was meant as a description of where the debate stood, not as a policy statement.[6]

When Albright, Gati and Shalikashvilli met with Walesa in Warsaw on January 7, the Polish President delivered a blunt message: PfP was "doomed to fail." The U.S., he insisted, was missing a historic opportunity to build a lasting peace in Europe. He urged Washington to make a "quick, short leap" to expand NATO and accomplish that goal. PfP, he complained, was more like crawling than leaping. Admitting that it would be "ridiculous" for him to reject PfP, he insisted that this U.S. initiative would only encourage Russian imperial tendencies. "To tame the bear," he told his U.S. guests, "you must put him in a cage and not let him run free in the forest."

It was already too late to stop Moscow from asserting its control in the CIS, Walesa continued. Enlarging NATO was only going to get harder with time if the West remained too preoccupied with Russian concerns. NATO should just enlarge and not pay any attention to what Moscow said. "Let the Russian Generals get upset," he proclaimed, "they won't start a nuclear war." Failure to act now could close the door permanently. American attempts at "finesse and nobility" were of little help when dealing with Russian blackmail, he told the U.S. delegation. "If the West does not leap now, it never will," he concluded.

Albright responded by telling Walesa that the U.S. had supported Poland during the long struggle against communism and it would continue to do so now. She recalled how impressed she had been watching him calm down striking Polish workers at a steel factory in 1981 and urged him to show the same pragmatism now. PfP could be the "leap" Walesa was looking for if he embraced it and exploited its potential. Shali added that the U.S. had not flinched in dealing with Moscow during the Cold War and that it would not flinch now or in the future. Both Albright and Shali told Walesa that the U.S. had a "direct and material interest" in Poland's security and would not abandon it—language that came close to sounding like a promise to come to Poland's defense.

Walesa was still not impressed. The U.S. had followed a brilliant strategy in winning the Cold War, he noted, but Washington was now making a mistake. Poles were among the most pro-American people in the world, but there were already nationalistic voices saying that Warsaw should stop begging the West to integrate them. He would consider carefully what to say when President Clinton came to Europe, Walesa continued, but as a "friend of America" he felt compelled to remain stubborn in his opposition. Foreign Minister Olechowski added that one could fill the Presidential library with "beautiful, idealistic statements" on Western intentions, but not one contained what Poland needed—a meaningful commitment on a timetable or roadmap.[7]

Afterward, Olechowski pulled Albright and Shali aside and repeated that there was a growing feeling arising in Poland of being spurned by the West. To turn public opinion around, PfP had to be seen as opening the door to Poland's eventual membership in NATO. If nothing else, "my job is on the line," he quipped. PfP in its current form was based on nothing more than "promises, promises and promises." What Poland needed, he said, was a U.S. assurance that it could join if and when it met all the criteria. "If at the end of the day, we look like a duck and quack like a duck, we want assurance that we will be called a duck," he concluded.[8]

The argument continued over dinner where Olechowski was joined by former Solidarity dissident and head of the Democratic Union party, Bronislaw Geremek, as well as the head of the post-communist Democratic Left alliance, Aleksandr Kwasniewski.[9] Kwasniewksi told the American guests that he had won the recent parliamentary elections, and that Geremek—who was seated next to him—had lost in part because of the West's reluctance to embrace Poland. Geremek nodded in agreement. Both men urged Washington to think in historic terms. Solidarity had succeeded by daring to do what others said could not be done. And Helmut Kohl had unified Germany by ignoring the nay-sayers, too. Washington had to use a window of opportunity that might last only months, not years.

Albright responded that Clinton cared deeply about Poland's security and wanted to move forward. But that would not happen if Poland refused to engage and continued to view PfP as a detour from its goal. The U.S. knew that it had to deliver with PfP, she continued, and that its own credibility was on the line. Shalikashvilli added that it was simply not possible at this point to bring Poland into NATO in the short-term. The 16 members of the Alliance would never agree to it. The U.S. had brought the Alliance to the point where it was debating not the "whether" but "when." But it did not want to make promises it could not deliver and repeat the mistakes of the 1930s when allies extended security guarantees they later did not implement.[10]

Back in the U.S., Vice President Al Gore was defending the President's policy against similar criticism. The Vice President, stepping in for Clinton, who

was attending his mother's funeral, delivered a major speech in Milwaukee. In it, Gore rejected criticism that the U.S. was neglecting the security of Central and Eastern Europe with PfP. "The security of the states that lie between Western Europe and Russia affects the security of America," Gore said. America had not spent years supporting Solidarity just to lose democracy in Poland; nor had it celebrated the Velvet Revolution just to watch it die from neglect, Gore insisted. "We prevailed in the Cold War for their sake and ours," the Vice President stated, "And now, we must prevail for their sake and ours in building a broader, democratic peace throughout Europe." PfP, he insisted, was meant to help these countries integrate into the West and to build the cooperation that could lead to NATO membership.[11]

The evening before, Berger and Dan Fried spent several hours in a heated roundtable discussion with the leaders from the U.S. ethnic communities of Central and East European origin. Participants on both sides subsequently recalled the meeting as a vivid moment in the enlargement debate. While the ethnic communities' leaders voiced their criticism of the Administration's policy as too deferential to Russia, they also sensed an openness on Berger's part and a commitment to Central and Eastern Europe that they had not expected. Berger, in turn, recalls being impressed by the group's sophistication and their arguments. He was disappointed by his inability to convince them that they should trust the Administration. Both sides would look back at this meeting as an important step in starting a dialogue on enlargement between the Administration and the ethnic communities that would deepen in the years ahead.[12]

On January 8, the President departed for Europe. As Air Force One crossed the Atlantic, Clinton sat down with Christopher, Lake, and Talbott, to talk about enlargement. Talbott, worried about the President's inclination to tailor his remarks to what his audience wanted to hear, emphasized the need to avoid pro-enlargement statements in Brussels and Prague that would only create additional problems in Moscow. Lake, in turn, warned against making PfP sound like a "treadmill" that would never lead to enlargement, and underscored that what was needed was a sense of "something real, of genuine momentum." Christopher, in turn, cautioned against making it sound "like a moving sidewalk that just keeps moving ahead at the same speed no matter what." In his words, "The direction is not in question, but we've got to be able to control the pace." Talbott noted the need for consistency: "Just remember, it's all zero-sum between Prague and Moscow. Give joy in one place and it translates into fear and loathing in the other. Any nuances of difference in the way you handle this thing from one stop to the other will be scrutinized and interpreted to death."[13]

Clinton's first European trip was filled with the typical combination of substance and pageantry. In Brussels the President received a new saxophone from the country that invented the instrument. In Prague, he drank Pilsner beer with

Havel and played the saxophone in a Prague jazz club. In Moscow, he enjoyed a dinner of more than 20 courses, including moose lips and vodka in Yeltsin's dacha while rubbing shoulders with local Muscovites in the Arbat. Throughout the trip, he mingled with crowds of curious onlookers.

But the tone of the trip was set soon after his arrival in Brussels. Clinton staked out a claim for a younger generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to redefine the U.S.-European partnership for a new era. Over the past half century, he told his audience, the trans-Atlantic community had realized only half of the triumph of the Second World War. But there was now an opportunity to complete that vision by integrating Europe's new democracies into the West. "For history," the President noted, "will judge us as it judged with scorn those who preached isolationism between the world wars, and as it has judged with praise the bold architects of the trans-Atlantic community after World War II."[14]

The President picked up on the theme at the NATO summit the next day: "I believe our generation's stewardship of this grand alliance, therefore, will most critically be judged by whether we succeed in integrating the nations to our east within the compass of Western security and Western values." NATO's founders had "always looked to the addition of new members who shared the Alliance's purposes and who could enlarge its orbit of democratic security," he added. "So let us say here to the people in Europe's East, we share with you a common destiny and we are committed to your success. The democratic community has grown, and now it is time to begin welcoming these newcomers to our neighborhood."[15]

More specifically, the President said, "the Partnership for Peace sets in motion a process that leads to the enlargement of NATO." But he also made it clear that he was not proposing enlargement in the immediate future. A rapid move on enlargement, he said, could draw a new line further eastward or foreclose the possibility of a democratic Russia and Ukraine. The President defended PfP against the accusations that it was too little too late. PfP was not a half-hearted compromise, he insisted; it was the right thing to do precisely because it enabled the Alliance to work toward enlargement while still reaching out to Russia.

On January 11, the President arrived in Prague for his first visit there since his student days. The previous day Warsaw announced that it would join PfP but labeled it "too small a step in the right direction."[16] That evening Clinton met with Czech President Vaclav Havel, explaining that two factors were key in his decision to support PfP. The first was what was politically possible. There was no consensus among NATO allies to extend formal security guarantees to the region for the time being.

But his thinking was also shaped by what was in Europe's own long-term interest, Clinton continued. Using a phrase he would repeat over and over again,

the President said that he viewed PfP as a way to work for the best possible future in European security while preparing for the worst. PfP allowed NATO to prepare for eventual membership without alienating Russia or pushing Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit. The U.S. President emphasized that he believed Russia was too weak economically and militarily to be a near-term military threat. But if he was wrong, he added, PfP would have better prepared the Alliance to move quickly to extend membership as a deterrent to Moscow. Havel replied that he understood the President's logic but that it was essential to publicly state that PfP was a first step to full membership. The President agreed.[17]

The next day the President fulfilled that pledge. Following his meeting with the Visegrad heads of state, the President used a press conference to reaffirm that PfP was the beginning of a process that could lead to NATO membership. "While the Partnership is not NATO membership, neither is it a permanent holding room. It changes the entire dialogue so that now the question is no longer whether NATO will take in new members, but when and how."[18] They were the same words Shalikashvilli had used a week earlier. But coming from the President in that setting made it an unmistakable tilt toward a firmer U.S. commitment to moving forward sooner rather than later. Those words would become a battle-cry for those who wanted to move ahead on enlargement quickly. "Finally," Lake exclaimed, "we've got a Presidential marker."

The following morning Clinton met with Walesa. He told him that he had been thinking about enlargement since their first meeting at the opening of the Holocaust Museum. He saw PfP as a door to eventual full NATO membership for Poland while protecting those countries that were not ready for NATO today but might be at some future point. He also did not want to draw a new dividing line in Europe that would isolate states of the former Soviet Union. He understood that Walesa and many Poles had a different view. And he recognized that Russian behavior might make it necessary to draw a new line in Europe at some point. But, Clinton continued, he wanted to see whether it was possible to enlarge NATO gradually and to build a system that brought security to all of Europe, including Russia. If Washington was wrong and Moscow attempted to reassert its influence, the U.S. would do "the right thing" and bring Warsaw into NATO. He asked Walesa to commit to making the most of PfP.

Walesa responded that PfP was a fine initiative, but that Poland had a different view of the problem. It had learned the hard way that opportunities should be acted upon lest they vanish. "Guarantees," he told Clinton, "do not create facts; it is facts that create guarantees." The West needed to create facts on the ground. There was a historic opportunity to include Poland in the West. This is what Russian generals feared and why they spoke in such threatening tones. If this was their attitude now, one could only imagine what it would be once Moscow was stronger. Yeltsin had promised him not to block Polish entry into NATO, but the West had not acted on it and Yeltsin had subsequently changed

his mind.[19] After Walesa left the room, Ambassador Rey told President Clinton he had just heard the Polish primal scream born of a thousand years of history and fifty years of personal experience.

After stopping briefly in Kiev to meet with President Kravchuk at the airport, Clinton arrived in Moscow. The trip's main goal was to reaffirm the framework for a U.S.-Russian partnership built on a Russian commitment to reform in the wake of the failed putsch attempts in Moscow and the disastrous results of the recent Duma elections. Foreign policy was discussed at a dinner held at Yeltsin's dacha on January 13. Upon his arrival, Yeltsin presented Clinton with a blue porcelain figure of the President holding a saxophone, and then had a real one brought out for him to play. Over dinner the two Presidents discussed everything from Russian politics to Yeltsin's tennis game as well as foreign policy issues such as Bosnia, Iraq and Europe.

Yeltsin told the President that the U.S.-Russian political relationship was the most important factor in Russia's foreign policy. He admitted that he was sometimes criticized for being too pro-American and allowing the West too much influence in Russia. But he wanted Clinton to know how much he appreciated his personal support and that of the U.S. "This is my personal view and it is a frank one, but it should be clearly understood on your side. We have great respect for you, for your work and for what you are doing." Russians knew, he added, that "you have come to Russia not to confront us," but "with a sense of support for Russia."

Yeltsin sketched out his vision of a future in which the U.S., Russia and the Europeans formed a kind of cartel working together on global security. While Yeltsin insisted that he supported PfP, it became clear that he did so as an alternative to NATO enlargement. If NATO were to enlarge, he told Clinton, Russia had to be the first country to join. But he quickly conceded that, "In truth, Russia is not yet ready to join NATO." He also noted that he had to consider the reaction of Russia's neighbors. Had the CIA, he teased Clinton, already done a report on the Chinese reaction to Russia joining NATO? At one point Yeltsin looked over at Talbott and raised his glass in a toast to him for being a true friend of the Russian people. His remarks left little doubt that Talbott had earned these words because he was seen as having championed PfP as an alternative to enlargement. Lake gave Talbott a wry look of amusement as he joined in the toast.

Clinton responded, telling Yeltsin by saying that there was now an unprecedented historical chance to build a unified Europe free of conflict for the first time since the rise of the nation state. That's why, the President continued, the U.S. and Russia had to work together in places like Bosnia and through partnerships like PfP. The U.S. wanted to work toward a situation where all countries in Europe had equal security. "If your efforts are successful and our own relationship of trust and confidence endures, that will be the key to gaining this objective," Clinton concluded. Yeltsin responded: "I agree with all that you have said.

The two of us have a unique potential as partners. If we decide to do something together, even in the face of obstacles, it can be done if we have your support," he added. "If we continue to work together as you suggest, we can do much to ensure peace and stability for Europe and for the rest of the world."[20]

The next day Clinton touched only lightly on NATO in a joint press conference with the Russian president. But the press zeroed in and asked Yeltsin about enlargement. He responded that NATO enlargement was fine so long as Russia was among the first to join. Europe must not be redivided "into black and white," as he put it. He was strongly opposed to admitting some countries but not others. "I'm against that; I'm absolutely opposed to it. That's why I support the President's initiative for Partnership for Peace." Clinton demurred, saying that NATO "plainly contemplated an expansion" at some future point, but PfP was "the real thing now."[21]

As the President returned home, commentators on both sides of the Atlantic tried to sort out what exactly the U.S. and its allies had or had not agreed to about NATO enlargement. Most people left the chambers of the North Atlantic Council on January 11 knowing that the issue of enlargement was now on the agenda and that NATO would enlarge at some point in time. But many assumed that NATO would only come back to this issue several years hence when PfP had been fully developed, the EU's timetable for enlargement was much clearer, and when the West had a better sense of where Russia was headed. Some Alliance officials thought this would take two to three years, others four to five years, and still others believed or hoped it would be much longer, perhaps up to a decade.

Even within the Administration's senior ranks, individuals came away from the trip with different views on just what had been decided. Lake, for example, was convinced that the President had already made the strategic decision to enlarge NATO. Referring to the Prague statement, Lake recalled: "When the President makes a speech like that, it's policy."[22] Others such as Bill Perry—who became Secretary of Defense on February 3, 1994—and the Defense Department believed that the President had merely launched PfP but had not yet made a final decision to enlarge. While enlargement was likely to happen at some future point, it was, in Perry's view, a separate issue that would be dealt with later and require another debate and decision.[23] When the Administration's NATO interagency working group (IWG) reconvened in the spring of 1994 to follow up on the summit's decisions, its focus was exclusively on getting PfP up and running. There was no discussion of actually enlarging NATO.

Even proponents of enlargement had their doubts about the Administration's future course. National Security Council aide Dan Fried, for example, recalls coming back on the plane from Europe and feeling that the momentum for NATO enlargement had been contained and that the opponents of enlargement had carried the day. Madeleine Albright, talking to some of her colleagues

on the airplane trip across the Atlantic from Bucharest, expressed her own doubts about the way ahead: "I guess we did a good job of selling PfP to them. I only wish I believed in it. I only wish it were real." In a memo to the President in late January, she warned about the lingering sense of disappointment in Central and Eastern Europe—a part of the world, she pointed out, that was unabashedly pro-American. That disappointment was caused, she noted, by a sense that the West was both naïve about Russia and too slow and too timid to open its doors to the region's nations. She urged the President to pay more attention to the region and to consider a range of policy steps—precisely because enlargement seemed a distant prospect.[24]

2. SHIFTING GEARS

In the spring of 1994 the focus at NATO headquarters in Brussels was on launching the Partnership for Peace. With the implementation of this new initiative came a flurry of new diplomatic and military activities.that led to a leap in the level of interaction between the Alliance and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Within 10 weeks of the Brussels summit, NATO briefing teams had visited 16 countries to explain how PfP would operate. Former communist military officers who had spent years trying to decipher what was going on in the Alliance now found themselves sitting in new offices at NATO headquarters and the Partnership Coordination Cell at SHAPE headquarters in Mons receiving NATO's advice on future joint operations. To those accustomed to the hostility and secrecy of the Cold War, it was nothing less than a miracle.[25]

This did not mean that the Central and East European countries had given up on trying to join NATO. They had not. But they realized that PfP was the only game in town and the best way to build a track record demonstrating their commitment. By the time NATO Foreign Ministers met in Istanbul for their annual spring ministerial meeting in June, some 20 Partner countries had signed up for PfP.[26] The first PfP exercises took place in Poland in September, an exercise named Cooperative Bridge 94 involving troops from thirteen nations—six of them NATO members, six former Warsaw Pact countries and Ukraine. NATO Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR) George Joulwan declared it a step toward realizing "the vision of a new Europe, a peaceful and cooperative Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals."[27] German Defense Minster Volker Ruehe, sitting beside his Polish colleague Piotr Kolodziejczyk, noted the presence of German troops on Polish soil and said: "Anyone who knows even a little bit about history knows that this is not a routine event when Polish and German soldiers are working together."[28]

The exception to this trend was Russia. Despite Yeltsin's promises to Clinton, getting Moscow to sign up for PfP was easier said than done. Yeltsin was under growing pressure to adopt a more assertive stance toward the West in a Duma

now dominated by nationalists and communists. During mid-March Duma hearings, Vladimir Lukin, Chairman of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, compared PfP to the proposition of a rapist to a girl he has cornered: she can resist or submit but the result will be the same.[29] Even harsher voices came from the Russian military. The notoriously hard line Lt. General Leonid Ivashov, then Secretary of the Council of Defense Ministers of the CIS, blasted PfP as a covert program to expand NATO by "hook or by crook" and the means for NATO to establish its strategic influence in Central and Eastern Europe right up to Russia's borders.[30]

Christopher felt the cooler political winds coming from Moscow at a meeting with Kozyrev at the Vladivostock airport on March 14. Although the two men usually worked in English, the Russian Foreign Minister pulled out a lengthy document and insisted on reading it line-by-line in Russian. He stated that while the U.S.-Russian partnership was of immense value to Moscow, there was a growing feeling that it was too unequal. Russian nationalists were exploiting this sense politically against Yeltsin. While the Russian President did not want to yield to the nationalists, he needed a strategy to deny them this card. Moscow and Washington needed to decide in advance the areas where they would cooperate or act independently. Above all, Moscow wanted U.S. understanding for its policies in the CIS. Yeltsin was not trying to restore the former USSR, Kozyrev insisted, but had the right to enjoy stability on its borders. If the U.S. supported Russian-led peacekeeping and economic integration in the CIS, Moscow would back the U.S. with peacekeeping in Haiti, Central America, Asia, or Africa.

Christopher replied that President Clinton, too, faced growing criticism of his approach to Russia. Americans were asking whether Yeltsin would stick to a reformist course, treat Russia's neighbors as independent states, and even whether a partnership was still viable. He noted that he had answered "yes" to all three questions in recent congressional testimony. But the glue holding the partnership together had to come from consultations that created real common ground, not some artificial agreement in advance. Following the meeting, Christopher cabled back to the President that the U.S.-Russian relationship was in a new phase. Washington and Moscow were like a newlywed couple. The honeymoon was over and they had survived their first squabbles. The question was whether they could move beyond these and build a more mature partnership.[31]

Russia's quest for a special status with NATO nevertheless continued. Yeltsin reiterated to German Chancellor Kohl his need for an agreement underscoring that Russia was different than other PfP members—in Yeltsin's words "a great country with a great army with nuclear weapons"—to satisfy Russian public opinion.[32] Finding that formula fell to U.S. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry and Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. The two men were a study in con-

trasts. Grachev was a combat veteran of the airborne forces and the Soviet military campaign in Afghanistan. He had earned Yeltsin's respect by standing by him during the October 1993 parliamentary putsch attempt. In contrast, Perry was a civilian and soft-spoken intellectual who looked as if he was straight out of a university—which he was.[33]

But the two men established a solid working relationship. Perry was a true believer in the Partnership for Peace and repeatedly urged Grachev to grasp the opportunities PfP held for Russia to redefine its relations with the U.S. and its European neighbors. "Bill had a phrase," recalled Ash Carter, one of Perry's closest confidantes and the then DoD Assistant Secretary dealing with US-Russian relations. "Play a lead role. Don't just hang back and sulk or you will be marginalized. If you want to be a leader in your neighborhood you have to act in a way that others will voluntarily follow you. That is the kind of Russia you should want to try to be and PfP can help you become that."[34]

In late March Perry left Moscow with a commitment from Grachev that Moscow would sign up for PfP by the end of the month.[35] That promise was immediately put on hold when NATO launched its first airstrikes against Serb positions in Bosnia. Criticized in the West as ineffective "pinpricks," NATO's actions created an uproar in Moscow and led to new demands for Yeltsin to stand up to the West.

In late May, however, Grachev arrived at the NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Brussels to announce that Moscow would sign up for PfP "without preconditions." But he also called for a "full blooded strategic partnership" and a separate document recognizing Russia's special status. Moscow, Grachev insisted, was not seeking "a warmer place in the sun" than other PfP partners, but a relationship "adequate to its weight" as a nuclear superpower with territory stretching from Europe to the Pacific. "What we suggest is not to limit the sphere of partnership," Grachev told his NATO counterparts, "but to enrich it with cooperation between Russia and NATO, not only in military areas but on other important issues." Agreement on this broader framework was needed before Russia could sign up for PfP, he insisted, and circulated a "parameters paper" detailing Russian thinking in this regard.[36]

NATO and Russian officials now worked out a compromise whereby Russia would sign on to PfP on the same terms as other Partners, but that both sides would also issue a short, general joint document on Russia's relationship with NATO outside of PfP.[37] At the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Istanbul in mid-June, Kozyrev promised Christopher a Russian signature on PfP before Clinton and Yeltsin met at the G-8 Naples summit in early July.[38] The next day Kozyrev told his NATO colleagues that he would soon return to Brussels to sign the PfP Framework Agreement.[39] Following his departure, however, the meeting deteriorated as the Russian delegation withdrew its support for compromise communiqué language, precipitating a five-hour long haggling session. One

Alliance official noted that he had "not seen negotiating tactics like this from Russia since we settled the terms for German unification nearly five years ago."[40]

Two weeks later, Kozyrev nonetheless returned to NATO headquarters for a carefully choreographed ceremony marking Russia's officially joining PfP. As agreed, NATO also issued a "Summary of Conclusions" referring to Russia as a "major European, international and nuclear power," thereby allowing Kozyrev to claim that NATO recognized Russia's unique role and special weight in European security.[41] Kozyrev stated that there were "no insurmountable obstacles" to developing a working NATO-Russia partnership. But the headaches in sorting out relations with NATO also led him to quip: "It is one thing if a small poodle tries to walk through these gates but quite another when an elephant like Russia tries to do the same thing."[42]

Meeting with Christopher and NATO Ambassadors, Kozyrev returned to the need to improve NATO's image in Russia but also warned the Alliance against making a "victorious march eastward."[43] As an unnamed U.S. official said following the Brussels signing ceremony: "This is just the beginning. We will see how Russia operates. Will they try to throw their weight around? Try to tell NATO what to do? Or be a true partner?"[44] Back in Moscow Russian communist party chief Gennady Zyuganov called Russia's signing up for PfP the "capitulation of Russian diplomacy and a betrayal of Russian interests" comparable to Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Communists and nationalists failed by only nine votes to pass a resolution in parliament declaring Russia's signature on PfP "null and void."[45]

While the Alliance focused on launching PfP, Tony Lake was thinking about how to move forward on NATO enlargement. Clinton had accepted an invitation to visit Warsaw in July and Lake wanted the President to be able to show visible progress on enlargement by then. Lake knew that the normal interagency process was too divided to produce the results he wanted. He embarked on his own process, using his knowledge that the President wanted to move forward on this issue. Instead of trying to force a consensus, he used his own staff to develop a new approach and selectively shared it with other key members of the President's national security team. Once he had the President's support for a new direction, he was willing to again open up that process—but with the strategic direction now established by the President.

In March 1994 the President queried his staff about a report on Russian pressure on Central and East European countries to drop their bid to join NATO. When NSC staffers Dan Fried and John Beyerle sent forward a memo summarizing where things stood on PfP, Lake rejected it and called Fried into his office. He told him that he wanted a paper not on PfP but on how to enlarge NATO. Fried was taken aback. He asked Lake whether he realized that nearly the entire bureaucracy was still hostile to the idea. Lake responded: "That's my

problem, not yours. You give me the policy. I'll give you the protection you need."

Fried knew he needed intellectual and bureaucratic allies to pull this off. He asked Nick Burns, the NSC's Senior Director for Russian, Ukranian, and Eurasian Affairs, for his help. Burns replied: "OK, let's do this right. Let's do this together." As neither Fried nor Burns were NATO hands, they sought out Alexander "Sandy" Vershbow, then the Principal Deputy in the State Department's European Bureau but scheduled to become the new NSC Senior Director for European Affairs in June. While Vershbow had loyally represented the European Bureau's critical approach to enlargement in the past, Fried knew that he was actually a closet supporter of enlargement. Vershbow agreed to be a ghost contributor to the memo pending his transfer to the NSC.

What came to be known as the NSC troika—Fried, Vershbow, and Burns (later replaced by Coit Blacker and Steven Pifer)—was born. These three NSC Senior Directors—responsible for NATO, Central and Eastern Europe, and Russia respectively—would work as a team over the next three years as the U.S. developed its strategy on NATO enlargement and a NATO-Russia relationship. Backed by Lake and Berger, their cooperation enabled the NSC to speak with a single voice in the interagency process. Following the Madrid summit in 1997, each of them would be promoted to Ambassadorial rank, partly in recognition of their work on NATO enlargement. National Security Advisor Berger gave them a signed copy of one of their early strategy memos on NATO enlargement noting how successful they had been in carrying it out.

In developing this strategy, the NSC troika also turned to their own contacts in the strategic community, including RAND. In May 1994, I heard of the troika and their memo during a visit to the NSC. Along with Larrabee and Kugler, I had gone to see Vershbow and Fried to present a RAND briefing we had completed for German Defense Minster Ruehe on the "how" of enlarging NATO. Vershbow and Fried welcomed us with open arms and showed an intense interest in our work. They told us they were preparing a memo to the President on the issues our briefing raised and asked whether we would help them develop their ideas. We were delighted. It was the start of a close professional and personal relationship with Vershbow and Fried that culminated in the spring of 1997 when I became their counterpart on NATO enlargement issues at the State Department.[46]

Lake's tasking resulted in the first NSC memo to the President laying out a strategy on how to enlarge NATO. Entitled "Advancing our European Security Agenda: Working with Russia and the Central and East Europeans (CEE)," the memo argued that it was time to start to remove the ambiguity surrounding U.S. policy and to be clear about the Administration's objectives—at home, in Europe, and with Moscow. It was no longer sustainable to advocate NATO enlargement in principle but refuse to discuss the when and the how. Similarly, it

was insufficient to tell the Central and East Europeans privately that the Administration was prepared to enlarge if an authoritarian, aggressive Russian regime returned to power but not discuss the scenario for enlarging NATO in the absence of a new Russian threat. After all, the memo noted, the United States wanted Russian reform to succeed, not fail.

Above all, the memo noted the need to start to lay out a positive vision of NATO enlargement that could be accomplished while continuing to support democratic reform in Russia. It identified the Visegrad states as the leading candidates for NATO membership. While not excluding other Central and Eastern European countries, it noted that the process had to start with the most feasible candidates if it was to start at all. The memo also underscored the need to be honest and recognize that while the U.S. should not *a priori* exclude Russia from joining NATO, such membership was unlikely even in the longer term. It was therefore necessary to create a separate cooperative relationship with Russia as NATO expanded as the best way to include Moscow in a new European security order.

The memo also laid out a national timeline for enlarging NATO. It argued that the President should use his first term to lay the groundwork at home and abroad and prepare candidate countries for enlargement, with actual decisions on invitations being made at the start of the President's second term. The option of moving faster if events in Russia took a turn for the worse would, of course, be maintained. The memo recognized that the Administration would come under pressure from the Central and East Europeans to move faster and to be more explicit publicly about its intentions. It was nonetheless important to retain some ambiguity and move incrementally, the memo concluded, if Washington hoped to pursue these goals without precipitating a new crisis with Moscow.

This memo provided a remarkably prescient guide to U.S. policy on NATO enlargement over the next several years. While laid out in an intellectual strawman fashion, it contained all the key elements of the Administration's future strategy. It also foreshadowed the political problems the Administration would later face. By remaining publicly ambiguous on the timetable for enlargement and by refusing to commit to specific countries, the Administration may have made its work within the Alliance and with Moscow easier. But it also left itself open to accusations at home that it was not fully committed to enlargement and inadvertently contributed to a widespread perception that the issue was still up for grabs long after the Administration had internally decided to move forward.

Lake kept the memo at close hold, but shared it with select senior officials at both State and Defense for their input before forwarding it to the President. One of those was Talbott, who had since been promoted to Deputy Secretary of State. In the spring and summer of 1994 Talbott moved from opposing what he considered a NATO enlargement "fast track" to supporting enlargement on a slower time line and with stepped up efforts to build a parallel NATO-Russia re-

lationship that could mute Moscow's concerns. In a speech at Oxford University in January 2000, Talbott justified his and the Clinton Administration's support of NATO enlargement by invoking the teachings of Isaiah Berlin, an intellectual figure who was a major influence on him and a generation of scholars who had studied communism and the Soviet Union. Talbott recalled that a core theme in Berlin's teachings was "the unavoidability of conflicting ends" and the belief that final or perfect answers to difficult questions rarely exist. Berlin's writings had taught him, he noted, that the essence of statecraft was recognizing the necessity of choice and the fact that every choice could also entail an irreparable loss.

The Administration, Talbott said, ran that risk with NATO enlargement. It ran the risk of alienating Russian democrats engaged in a life-and-death struggle over reform and their country's future orientation. But not enlarging and adapting NATO to a new post–Cold War world also entailed risks to American interests and European security. The Administration made the decision to enlarge the Alliance while trying to mitigate Berlin's "unavoidability of conflicting ends." In Talbott's own words: "Seven years ago, at the beginning of this Administration, we faced a choice about the future of NATO. Given most Russians' fears that NATO is irredeemably hostile to their interests, many in Europe and in the U.S. felt that we should retire the Alliance with honor.

"But we said that would leave us without the means of deterring or if necessary defeating threats to our common security. Okay, said others, then we should keep NATO in business but freeze it in its Cold War membership. But we said that would mean perpetuating the Iron Curtain as a permanent fixture on the geopolitical landscape and locking newly liberated and democratic states out of the security that the Alliance affords. So instead, we chose to bring in new members while trying to make real a post–Cold War mission for NATO in partnership with Russia."[47]

This evolution in Talbott's thinking resulted from a combination of factors. An old truism in Washington is where you stand depends in part on where you sit. As Deputy Secretary of State, Talbott was no longer responsible only for U.S. policy toward Russia and the successor states of the former Soviet Union, but NATO and Europe as well. Whatever misgivings he had previously harbored on enlargement, Talbott knew that the President wanted to enlarge NATO. He also knew the President remained committed to supporting Russian democratic reform and integrating Russia into the West. His new portfolio, background, and relationship with the President inevitably made him the person that Clinton and Christopher turned to in order to figure out how to do both.

Talbott was now also exposed firsthand to the determination of countries like Poland to join NATO. In April 1994, he visited Warsaw to prepare the ground for the President's upcoming trip. President Walesa treated him to another lecture on Western naïveté in dealing with Russia.[48] Talbott also attended a quasi-

public meeting in the Parkova Hotel with "Poland Inc."—the elite of the Polish political class, policymakers, intelligentsia, and other influential groups in Poland. He made it clear that he understood their concern about a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, that this vacuum needed to be filled, and that PfP was an important step to achieving that and the path to Poland's future NATO membership. Polish participants in this meeting found Talbott more realistic on Russia and supportive of NATO enlargement than expected. "Strobe," according to U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Rey, who accompanied Talbott to the meeting, "demonstrated that he was not naïve about Russia and was not the enemy."[49]

Talbott also had an intellectual openness and curiosity unusual among the senior echelons of government. He was not afraid to change his mind if he became convinced of the merits of another position. He intentionally recruited people with different positions into his inner circle of lieutenants and encouraged debate among them, believing that the resulting tension would produce better policy. After becoming Deputy Secretary, Talbott started reaching out to proponents of NATO enlargement to hear their views. In his mind, the Administration already had the right Russian strategy. But it did not have a clear European strategy, let alone the right integration of the two. Talbott wanted to find that balance.

As Talbott often remarked to his staff, he wanted a policy that was "bilobal"—i.e., one that used the two lobes of the brain to integrate policy toward Europe and Russia into a common and consistent approach.[50] But Talbott's interest in moving forward was best reflected in the person he turned to as his alter ego in finding the balance between enlarging NATO and cementing a new relationship with Russia—Richard Holbrooke. Along with Tom Donilon, Christopher's chief-of-staff, Talbott was key in convincing Christopher to offer Holbrooke the job of Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. Equally important, Talbott helped convince Holbrooke to take the job. Neither was an easy sell. While Christopher wanted a strong person to take over the European portfolio, Holbrooke's ambition, steamroller tactics, and *modus operandi* were hardly his style. Similarly, Holbrooke was not eager to return to Washington for the same job he had held twenty years earlier. While interested in the issues, he feared he would lack the authority to get the job done.[51]

But Bosnia was spinning out of control and the Administration desperately needed a stronger hand on European policy to handle this crisis. Throughout the spring and summer Talbott and Donilon worked on Christopher and Holbrooke to finalize the latter's return to Washington. It was while sitting on a balcony of a hotel in Rome that spring that the Secretary of State finally agreed to bring Holbrooke back. "I'll hire him," Christopher told Donilon, "but he's your problem to manage." Talbott, in turn, helped convince Holbrooke to take the job. While he was brought back to Washington as Assistant Secretary first

and foremost to deal with what Christopher had dubbed "the problem from hell"—Bosnia—Holbrooke also told Talbott that he was prepared to take the job only if the two men also had a common position on NATO enlargement. He also told Talbott that the Deputy Secretary had to overcome the perception that he was only interested in Russia. There was no better way to do so, he argued, than to take the lead on NATO enlargement, especially as he was publicly identified as the Administration's leading opponent of the policy.

Being Ambassador in Bonn had only hardened Holbrooke's commitment to enlargement.[52] Talbott knew that Holbrooke was more forward leaning on NATO enlargement than he was. But he felt that Holbrooke's creativity and forcefulness were essential if the Administration was going to get it done in practice. The two men were in almost daily contact on the phone throughout the spring and summer as Holbrooke prepared his return to Washington. They debated how to harmonize the Administration's European and Russian policies over the summer of 1994, with Holbrooke repeatedly arguing that Talbott's handling of enlargement would be a key test of whether he would be seen as more than a "single issue" person.

As Holbrooke subsequently wrote: "Strobe and I agreed that we should try to reach a common position on NATO enlargement before I returned, and that he was perceived as its main opponent. . . . He needed no persuading that the countries of Central Europe needed the reassurance of an American commitment to their security; the issue was whether or not this could be accomplished without wrecking the emerging U.S.-Russian relationship. By the time I returned to Washington Strobe and I had reached a common position: it was possible to bring new members into NATO, slower than the Kissingers and the Brzezinskis wanted but faster than the Pentagon and some others desired."[53]

Talbott's memos to Christopher in the fall of 1994 reflected this shift in his thinking. "A year ago we said that the expansion of NATO would depend in part on the "security environment" in Europe. By that we meant—and we were clearly understood to mean—that if Russia "went bad," we'd hasten the entry of CEE states to protect them," he wrote Christopher in mid-September. "That remains a valid theme in our doctrine and contingency planning," he continued, "but it must not stand alone as a reason to expand NATO." Instead, the Administration needed to make the case for NATO to expand in a way that supports Russian reform. "An expanded NATO in an integrated Europe," he concluded, "is not a contradiction. But keeping it from becoming one requires conceptual sophistication, deft statesmanship, consistency, patience—and disciplined interagency considerations of tactics and strategy alike."[54]

Lake's memo went to the President in late June with Talbott's comments and blessing. It emphasized that U.S. policy had to articulate a clear rationale for NATO expansion that underscored that such a move would not constitute a threat to any other country and would not depend on a catastrophic failure of

reform in Russia. Instead, it argued, the Administration had to begin making the case that expansion would be stabilizing and reduce the security vacuum or blank spot in the center of Europe. The memo concluded that the President's July trip to Warsaw should be used to initiate the process, but do so in a fashion that did not precipitate new problems in relations with Russia. It recommended that President Clinton publicly reaffirm the case for NATO expansion and lay down a marker on the need to move forward without getting into specifics in his upcoming trip.

Looking back, Sandy Berger would point to this memo as the decisive one—the President now formally endorsed enlargement. "There are some decisions [in government] that are top-down and others that are bottom-up. This was a decision that was both," Berger argued. "The top-down part came from the President. The fundamental concept of enlargement was something he believed in. What came from the bottom-up were the how, the when and the what. Perhaps the reason there was not an orderly decision making process in the bureaucracy was that the President had made his decision. The President believed in this—and Tony and I believed in it, too. We did not feel the need to formalize it."[55]

The fact that U.S. policy was shifting gears became evident during Clinton's Warsaw visit in early July 1994. Polish officials had lobbied hard for some sign of movement on NATO enlargement, arguing that Warsaw needed to counter a widespread sentiment among Poles that they would again be "betrayed" by the West. "Now it is your time to be more concrete," Olechowski told Ambassador Rey.[56] Opposition leader and Solidarity icon Bronislaw Geremek was equally emphatic with U.S. officials: "Words are most important," he said. "We need words that Poland will be a member of NATO." When former Deputy Foreign Minister Jerzy Kozminski arrived in Washington as Warsaw's new Ambassador in mid-June, he, too, underscored the need to take "a clear step forward from Prague" during Clinton's trip.[57]

Speaking before the Polish Sejm on July 7, Clinton inched beyond simply repeating that enlargement was not a question of whether but when and how. Instead, he started to lay out in public the rationale for enlargement contained in the Lake memo, stating that enlargement would not depend on the emergence of a new threat in Europe but should be viewed as "an instrument to advance security and stability" in the region. Poland, he also underscored, was likely to be among the first to join when NATO expanded.[58] At the press conference with Walesa, the President took a further step when he stated that he had always supported enlargement, that PfP had been a first step toward enlargement and that "now what we have to do is to get the NATO partners together and to discuss what the next steps should be."[59] The last part of that sentence was not in his talking points. Watching the President speak, Lake turned

to Fried and said: "He's making policy; he's making policy."[60] At a press conference in Berlin several days later, Clinton repeated his message.[61]

Returning to Washington, Lake seized upon the President's remarks and queried his staff how best to follow up. On July 15, Senior Director Sandy Vershbow sent Lake a memo entitled "NATO Expansion—Next Steps" in which he proposed launching exploratory discussions in September with key allies on the issues of criteria and a timetable to be followed by a broader discussion in the Alliance as a whole. He also suggested using the December Ministerial to launch a NATO enlargement study to start spelling out in greater detail U.S. and allied thinking on a NATO-Russia relationship. Lake agreed.[62]

3. PRESSURE FROM THE RIGHT

This shift in Administration policy took place against the background of, and was reinforced by, growing political pressure from conservative Republicans and the so-called "ethnics"—Americans of Central and East European origin—in the course of 1994 for the Administration to commit more explicitly to NATO enlargement. Prior to the summer of 1994, congressional and public interest in NATO's future and questions such as enlargement on Capitol Hill was almost nonexistent. NATO had faded from the political radar screen as an issue with the end of the Cold War. A handful of Republican and Democratic Senators such as Senator William Roth (R-DE) and Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) introduced resolutions on NATO's future, including enlargement, as early as 1992. Both resolutions died in Committee due to lack of interest and support.[63]

In the spring and summer of 1994, however, the issue of NATO enlargement moved back to the center of attention on Capitol Hill. It was a time of growing partisanship in American politics. The Clinton Administration had come to power with Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate. But the Republicans were launching an aggressive campaign to regain control under the leadership of minority leader Newt Gingrich. Republicans in the House were putting together a series of attacks on the Administration's domestic and foreign policies. And high on the Republican hit list were the Administration's policies on Russia and NATO.

In the spring and summer of 1994, a small but influential group of Republicans on Capitol Hill started to rachet up the pressure on the Administration to adopt a clearer stance in favor of NATO enlargement and a tougher policy toward Moscow. Their interest in these issues was rooted in both substance and politics. Republicans, especially from the Reagan wing of the party, had a long tradition of supporting freedom and independence in Central and Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War and the rise of Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s. Many of them viewed NATO enlargement as a logical ex-

tension of that tradition. Not all Republicans were part of this tradition—nor did all major figures or voices in the Republican party support enlargement. Opponents ranged from Realpolitik figures such as Brent Scowcroft, George Bush's former National Security Advisor, to the neo-isolationist and nativist Pat Buchanan. But in the early 1990s the Reaganite wing of the Republican party with its strong anti-Yalta tradition held sway in powerful leadership positions in both the House and the Senate.

Republicans also considered the embracing of NATO enlargement as good politics. There was a modest but real constituency for enlargement among Americans of Central and East European origin. They were centered in so-called "battleground states" in the Midwest. It was a constituency that usually voted Republican but one where Clinton had registered strong gains among so-called "Reagan Democrats" in 1992. It was a constituency the Republicans wanted to bring back to their fold. In the spring of 1994, it was also a constituency whose leadership was increasingly disappointed with the Clinton Administration's approach on Europe and Russia, which it viewed as too pro-Moscow and unresponsive to its concerns. In early 1994, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) approached key Republican Senators and Congressmen seeking their support in stepping up the political pressure on the Administration on enlargement. Gingrich and his key lieutenants sensed a political opportunity. "NATO enlargement was," as Gingrich subsequently recalled, "the right thing to do for foreign policy and ideological reasons and it was the right thing to do for political reasons."[64]

The main vehicle for Republican pressure was legislative. Republican Senators and Members of the House started to introduce one piece of legislation after another promoting a clearer commitment to NATO enlargement by singling out the Visegrad countries as the strongest candidates for membership, setting a target goal of 1999 for the first candidate countries, and authorizing the President to provide defense equipment to assist these countries in their defense modernization efforts. When such legislation was being discussed in Committee, various groups of the CEEC would organize calls, letters or simply line up outside of a congressman's office or hearing room to ensure that their views were known. They never failed to mention that there were about ten million Americans of Polish origin and an additional ten million from other Central and Eastern Europe countries who could cast votes in the next election. These efforts culminated in the NATO Participation Act in October 1994.[65]

The Republican push on enlargement can be traced to a handful of individuals who took up this issue as a personal crusade in the spring of 1994. One of them was Senator Hank Brown (R-CO). A soft-spoken junior Senator on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Brown was not a foreign policy heavyweight. But he was passionate on the issue of NATO enlargement. As a college student at the University of Colorado, Brown had studied Central European his-

tory with a Polish émigré Professor by the name of Edward Rozek who had fought the Nazis during, and the communists after, World War II before heading West. Brown came away from his classes ashamed that the United States and its allies had done so little to stand up for the cause of Polish freedom and independence after the end of World War II. For Brown, supporting NATO enlargement was a matter of national honor given what he viewed as America's failure to stand up for these countries in the past.

Speaking before the Senate in the summer of 1994, he stated:

> The year before I was born the world saw Poland disappear as it was engulfed by Germany and the Soviet Union. Many important historians looking back on those events cite the perception created by democracies of the world that they would not stand with Poland as the impetus behind the Nazi invasion. Because our support was ambiguous, because those of good faith, who believe in democracy did not stand together, each country fell separately to the totalitarian aggressors. . . .
>
> Other members will recall the valiant struggle of the Polish underground during World War II against the Nazi invaders. As the end neared, the Soviet Army asked these partisans to surrender and negotiate for control over the country, for the bringing of democracy and stabilization to Poland. The Polish underground leaders were reluctant to do so and only agreed to surrender to the Soviet authorities after the United States urged and assured them that they would be well treated. . . . The tragedy of history is that those valiant leaders of the Polish underground were arrested, were imprisoned and eventually executed. . . .
>
> And what did the United States do? Tragically, little. I do not want, for this generation, for it to be said that we did not do what we could to make sure that these same events do not happen again.[66]

Brown was also appalled by the overall Western response to Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He often pointed to the response of the United States to Western Europe after World War II and the subsequent creation of the Marshall Plan and NATO—a historic time when Washington had opened its markets, supported European integration, and extended a security umbrella over these countries via NATO. In contrast, he felt that after the watershed events of 1989, both the EU and NATO were timid and shortsighted in reaching out to Central and Eastern Europe. Above all, Senator Brown was suspicious of Russian intentions. He became convinced that PfP and what he saw as the Administration's "go-slow" policy designed to deal with Russian sensitivities was a mistake that could lead to the same kind of historical blunder that had allowed Moscow to assert its control over the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In February 1994, following the NATO summit, Brown decided to introduce legislation that would clarify what he considered to be the fuzziness in U.S. policy. Politically, he was determined to do exactly what the Administration was still loath to do in public: differentiate between Central and Eastern Europe and Russia and put the former on an explicit track to full NATO membership. Practically, he wanted to make these countries eligible for excess defense equipment purchases that could be used to increase their defense capabilities and make their forces interoperable with their NATO neighbors. Brown now submitted the first of several amendments proposing to name the Visegrad countries as the leading candidates to join NATO and make them eligible to purchase excess defense equipment. It was the first move in a game of political and legislative chess. Brown and his allies tried to attach their amendment to almost any piece of legislation. The Administration would counter by insisting that such legislation was unnecessary or politically premature.

But Brown also enlisted the support from a handful of Democratic Senators who were pro-enlargement—including Paul Simon (D-IL) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD). Simon, one of the most independent-minded and liberal members of the Senate, represented a state with one of the largest communities of Central and East European origin. Senator Barbara Mikulski was herself a proud Polish-American. She shared Brown's view that the United States had failed these countries in the past and had an obligation to assist them in their efforts to integrate themselves into the West. She often told the story of how her grandmother had been a strong supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt but that after Yalta she turned her picture of FDR on its side. For Brown, Simon and Mikulski, NATO enlargement was not only a political and strategic interest. It was also a chance for the U.S. to help undo the tragedy that had befallen Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War.

Similar efforts were underway among Republicans in the House of Representatives. Leading them was Republican Congressman Benjamin Gilman (R-NY). In the spring of 1994, Gilman was the ranking minority member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. A centrist Republican, he embraced NATO enlargement because he believed it was the right policy and because he wanted to show that the Grand Old Party was still internationalist. Gilman introduced his bill, entitled the NATO Expansion Act, in April. While welcoming PfP, it, too, argued it was time to recognize the Visegrad countries as candidate countries and set the goal of bringing them into NATO by 1999.[67] Gilman justified his bill by arguing "there is genuine doubt in the Administration and elsewhere about where the Congress stands on the vitally important question of expanding NATO to include the new democracies of Central Europe."[68] A third and similar piece of legislation entitled the NATO Revitalization Act was introduced by Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL) in early May. It too called on the

Administration to establish specific benchmarks and a timetable on enlargement.[69]

The real breakthrough came with the Contract with America in August 1994—literally a few weeks after President Clinton had given the green light on enlargement in Warsaw. The brainchild of Gingrich, the Contract became the vehicle for the so-called Republican Revolution of November 1994 and the end of the Democrats' control of the House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time in 40 years. Unveiled in the summer of 1994, the Contract with America became the Ten Commandments for the "Gingrich Revolution." NATO enlargement was one of its key planks and those congressmen who rode to power on the Contract's coattails were signed up to it. Along with a commitment to National Missile Defense (NMD) and limits on the U.S. contribution to peacekeeping, NATO enlargement was one of the Contract's few national security priorities. It specifically called for the United States to reaffirm its commitment to NATO after the end of the Cold War, to enlarge to democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, and to reorient the Alliance to meet new threats. It set the goal of bringing Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into NATO by January 1999.[70]

The background materials published with the Contract underscored the gap between Republican and Administration thinking. Whereas enlargement proponents in the Administration were articulating a rationale centered on integration and emphasizing a step was not necessarily aimed against Russia, the Contract with America underscored a harder-edged rationale for enlargement as a hedge against Russian neo-imperialism. The Administration was portrayed as being romantic and "soft" on Russia, with PfP portrayed as a naïve attempt to build a liberal collective security system in Europe that would render NATO ineffective as a military alliance. "The countries of Eastern Europe know only too well what Russia is capable of," the materials continued, adding that "Russia still has to prove that it will observe its new boundaries which goes against its centuries old imperial tradition and the belief of many within its military and government." The U.S., it concluded, should expand the frontier of freedom eastward without asking Moscow for permission.[71] NATO enlargement had moved from the world of strategic intellectuals and seminars to center stage in American politics.

Republicans would subsequently claim that their leadership on Capitol Hill, backed up by the political muscle of the "ethnics," eventually pressured the Clinton Administration to embrace NATO enlargement.[72] They point out that the Administration opposed their legislation on the Hill and refused to publicly endorse leading candidate countries or set a target date for enlargement as proof that the Administration had not yet made up its mind on, or even opposed, NATO enlargement. Senior Clinton Administration officials, on the other

hand, insist that the President had embraced enlargement well before the Republicans on Capitol Hill discovered the issue, and that Republican legislation had little if any impact on their thinking. They claim that they opposed Republican efforts to legislate policy on enlargement for other reasons—executive privilege, the need to take into account the concerns of key allies as well as those Central and East European countries not included in Republican-backed legislation, and the need to manage relations with Moscow. At least one senior Clinton Administration official recalls that a Republican congressman involved in the Contract admitted in private that Clinton was moving to embrace enlargement and that Republicans did not want to be outflanked on this issue.

The record shows that the President had indeed decided to move forward on NATO enlargement prior to the launch of the Contract with America in the summer of 1994, or the final passing of the NATO Participation Act late that fall. But the White House's strategy on enlargement was just that—internal and confidential. Republican pressure to move forward on enlargement came exactly at a point when the final debates over how to move forward were still being fought out in the Administration's ranks. Its public posture was far less clear. Under the circumstances, Republican pressure reinforced enlargement proponents in the Administration and made any prospect of backing down increasingly difficult—if not impossible. As Gingrich himself put it: "They might have done it anyway but we made it impossible for them not to do it."[73]

There was a more basic political disconnect, however, as both sides approached the enlargement issue with very different premises. The Clinton team had come to power with its top priority being the consolidation of democracy in Russia. The President embraced NATO enlargement as part of a broader strategy to consolidate democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, and as part of a strategy to modernize the Alliance for the future by shifting its focus toward new threats. It viewed an enlarged NATO and a new partnership with a democratic Russia as equally important pillars in a new pan-European security structure. It saw its main challenge as finding a way to enlarge NATO without changing or undermining the President's support for Russia. It therefore wanted to move slowly and cautiously to manage the tensions between those two policies.

Republican critics, on the other hand, increasingly criticized the Administration's approach to Russia as fundamentally flawed and interpreted the Administration's more cautious approach to NATO enlargement as being overly influenced by what it considered too much deference to Russian concerns. Conservative critics believed that Russia did pose a threat to these countries and that Washington and its allies should move expeditiously and irrespective of Russian concerns. Their rationale for enlargement was different and explicitly tied to a policy of neo-containment. Many of them agreed with the views of leaders such as Lech Walesa who argued that NATO should just go ahead and create facts by enlarging, and deal with Moscow later. Administration state-

ments about enlargement as part of NATO's overall transformation and the need to focus on new missions were often seen as either misguided liberal thinking, or a simple reluctance to stand up to Moscow on this issue.

Republicans, in short, did not believe the Administration was serious about NATO enlargement. They believed that in the end the President's desire to maintain relations with Moscow would win out. They wanted to force it to do what they considered to be the right thing. From the Administration's viewpoint, the Republican embrace of NATO enlargement in the Contract with America was part of an effort to condemn the Administration's foreign policy, not cooperate with it. It was seen as a hostile act, not as an attempt to build bipartisan support. The Administration's rationale for enlargement was different than the one being proposed by the Republicans. There was little trust or common ground and the Republican antipathy toward Clinton was already strong. As Gingrich put it, "even if the President had spoken out more clearly in favor of enlargement we would not have believed him because he simply lacked credibility."[74]

Finally, Republicans were increasingly determined to use this issue politically to criticize the Clinton Administration and paint it as "soft" on Russia and incapable of handling a major national security issue such as NATO. The Democrats had been out of power for more than a decade and were seen as inexperienced. President Clinton's critics were seeking to exploit the issue of his draft record in Vietnam, the controversy over gays in the military, and any other real or perceived foreign policy weaknesses to question his competence as commander-in chief. The public still viewed Republicans as more competent on such issues as national security and defense. NATO and the management of the United States' premier military alliance was widely seen as a benchmark of a President's foreign policy skill and acumen. By criticizing the President on this issue, Republicans hoped to further discredit the Administration's overall foreign policy competence and standing—and the White House knew it.

By the fall of 1994, Republicans and Democrats would start to compete over who could do a better job on NATO enlargement. An early example of this competition took place in October 1994 when President Walesa attended the annual meeting of the Polish-American Congress in Buffalo, New York. At the dinner banquet Senator Hank Brown presented the Republican Party as the champion of Poland and the NATO enlargement cause. Madeleine Albright, who was on the stage with Brown, was furious and rewrote her speech on the spot to challenge Brown's assertions that the Administration was soft on the issue. Leaving the podium, she turned to U.S. Ambassador Rey with fire in her eyes and said, "We have got to do this." NSC Senior Director Fried pulled aside Walesa's Chief of Staff Mieczyslaw Wachowski and said to him: "Do you now understand that the Administration is serious about this?" Wachowksi, known

for his skepticism and argumentative nature, replied soberly: "Yes, we now understand this is real."

Republican support for NATO enlargement was also critical for two additional reasons. First, it gave the Central Europeans additional leverage vis-à-vis the Administration. It was an open secret that Republicans on the Hill were in close contact with the Central Europeans and used their reactions to Administration policy moves as a guide to whether or not to attack U.S. policy. They would frequently check with Central European Ambassadors whether or not they were satisfied with an Administration policy. If they were not, the Republicans would try to turn up the heat. For its part, the Administration knew that if the Poles were happy, the Republicans were likely to be content as well.

Second, Republican support also started to challenge the widespread assumption that the U.S. Congress was unlikely to support enlargement. One major argument against enlargement throughout the 1993 debate was precisely the contention that it was not ratifiable on Capitol Hill. This view was also widespread among allies in Europe. Gingrich's ability to tap into the party's Reaganesque legacy, his authority, and the weight of the Contract locked in the Republican Party's support of enlargement at this crucial early stage in the debate. The fact that Republicans were pushing the Administration to move further and faster on enlargement changed the political calculus and lineup and suggested that domestic support for enlargement was stronger than many had assumed. This issue was not going to go away or to be managed outside of the public spotlight.

4. HOLBROOKE'S RETURN

Richard Holbrooke's return to Washington in late summer 1994 consolidated the Clinton Administration's decision to move forward with NATO enlargement. Holbrooke was essential in turning the strategy laid out in Lake's NSC memo into actual U.S. policy. He was a relentless negotiator, willing and able to use every scrap of leverage to achieve his objective. He was capable of cajoling, browbeating, or charming his way to his desired goal—and often would try all three methods in the course of a single conversation. Within three months, Holbrooke had bulldozed through the shift in both U.S. and NATO policy.

Roger Cohen of *The New York Times* once described Holbrooke in the following terms: "His appetite goes beyond the [dining] table. It is a force of nature. It gulps down movies . . . books. It zaps restlessly from channel to channel. . . . It leads him to carry on two or even three telephone conversations at once. . . . The appetite fills rooms and disrupts meetings. It is in short, a devouring zest for life that sweeps over people, embracing them in its intrusive warmth or crushing them in its roughshod power, complicating his life and sometimes putting his [Dean] Ruskian ideal of service and self-effacement grotesquely at odds with the baroque reality of being Richard Holbrooke."[75]

Holbrooke's commitment to NATO enlargement had deepened during his tenure in Bonn. His presence and his activism were felt in Washington shortly after he arrived. During his confirmation hearings, he defended PfP but underscored his interest in setting a clearer course on NATO enlargement.[76] Following his confirmation he called in members of his senior staff who had opposed enlargement in the past. He made it clear that that they had a choice: get on board or get another job. He also asserted the State Department's right to chair the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on NATO policy. He wanted to make it clear that he was in charge.

Holbrooke returned briefly to Berlin to attend a ceremony marking the withdrawal of the U.S., British, French, and Russian troops. He had put together a "New Traditions" conference designed to emphasize the new bonds that could tie the U.S. and Germany together even as the American military presence was declining. It was his grand finale as Ambassador to Germany. Vice President Gore was supposed to attend, but had torn his Achilles' tendon and had to address the conference by video from Washington. As a skilled bureaucratic infighter, Holbrooke understood that if Gore repeated Clinton's remarks from Warsaw on the need for the Alliance to now take the next steps on enlargement, they would be locked in as U.S. policy. The Pentagon also understood this, and therefore wanted to walk back what it saw as off-the-cuff comments that it had not agreed to. What Gore would say in Berlin now became an issue of an intense bureaucratic wrestling match.

Shortly before the conference, Holbrooke had accompanied Chancellor Kohl to Chicago where Germany's soccer team was playing in the World Cup. Holbrooke spoke to Ruehe's right hand, Vice Admiral Weisser, who assured him that if Gore repeated Clinton's language on the Alliance taking the next steps on enlargement, Ruehe would second it. Holbrooke now went all out to get the key language in the speech over the Pentagon's objections, discussing it with Gore personally. Even from a distance in Berlin, Holbrooke intervened by sending his deputy, John Kornblum, to seek out Gore's national security advisor, Leon Fuerth, and to intercede with Gore himself to explain why the key language had to remain in the speech over the Defense Department's objections. Gore followed Holbrooke's advice. Speaking the next day, the Vice President repeated the key language on the need for the Alliance to begin discussions on NATO enlargement that fall.[77] Ruehe immediately supported the Vice President. Bill Perry, who was also on stage with Ruehe, was caught off guard and tried to suggest that Gore had not meant to imply that negotiations needed to start immediately.[78]

The Defense Department was furious. Holbrooke had outmaneuvered them and they knew it. But the Pentagon stood by the long-standing bureaucratic principle that existing policy stood until it was officially revised. In their view, a new policy decision to actually move forward with a specific strategy on en-

largement had not yet been made. It required their approval, too. Holbrooke was seen as trying to make policy over their heads and over-interpret what the President and Vice President had said. The shootout took place when Holbrooke circulated a State Department paper laying out a strategy for enlarging NATO and called an IWG meeting on September 22, 1994 to discuss it. More than 30 senior officials gathered around a horseshoe-shaped table in the conference room of the State Department's European Bureau, including Assistant Secretaries of Defense Joseph Nye and Ashton Carter, Deputy Assistant Secretary Joseph Kruzel and the newly appointed Army Lieutenant General Wesley Clark.[79]

Many of the attendees watched in astonishment as Holbrooke insisted that he had a mandate from the President to enlarge NATO—and the sole purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to implement that decision. As far as he was concerned, the debate within the Administration on this issue was over. He had not returned to the job he had held 20 years earlier to waste his time with interagency squabbles, he told the assembled crowd. Anyone who had problems with enlargement should address their concerns to the President, he concluded. Holbrooke then went around the table and either demolished or simply ignored the arguments of the Pentagon representatives. As he came around to the end of the u-shaped table, he turned to Wes Clark. The two men would become close friends, working together to bring peace to the Balkans in the years to come. But this was their very first encounter. When General Clark questioned Holbrooke's claim, he asked him if he was questioning his Commander-in-Chief. That, he added, would be "insubordination." Clark turned red with anger and demanded that Holbrooke retract the accusation. The participants sat in stunned silence. This was clearly not your average interagency meeting.

But Holbrooke was right. The President did want to enlarge the Alliance. One day earlier, Holbrooke had sat in on a discussion Clinton had on enlargement with a skeptical Jacques Chirac, then Mayor of Paris. After Chirac queried Clinton on NATO enlargement, the President first turned to Christopher, who responded: "If we handle this carefully and relatively slowly, NATO expansion can be accomplished. An abrupt, precipitous move right now to take in three or four countries could cause difficulties." Enlargement was not, as the Secretary put it, "a weekend project" but one that would require several years to lay the foundation for NATO and with Moscow. "This is an area for moving carefully, not taking the plunge," he noted.

The President then jumped into the conversation, "How and when we expand the Alliance while we—all of us in the West—manage our relations with Russia depends in part on whether we believe we can make the future differently from the past. Poland and Hungary and others want to be in NATO because they believe that the impulse of the Russian empire will reassert itself." Yeltsin wanted Russia to be able to settle disputes along its borders and be ade-

quately represented as a great power, the President continued, but he "does not believe there will be a new impulse toward empire building after he is gone—at least not in terms of geographic expansion." Clinton continued that the Russian President did see NATO expansion "as forcing him to react and reawakening forces in Russia he is trying to keep down." Therefore, the President concluded, the Alliance should expand but "in a careful way, so as to leave open the possibility that the future will be different, rather than recreating the certainty of the past."[80]

One week later Boris Yeltsin arrived in Washington. One year after his bloody confrontation with the Russian Parliament, Yeltsin wanted to project the image of a country that had moved beyond the violent confrontation of the previous autumn. He arrived in the U.S. determined to present himself as a confident leader ready to build on his personal relationship with President Clinton. As he stated in his memoirs:

> I was completely amazed by this young, eternally smiling man who was powerful, energetic and handsome. For me, Clinton was the personification of the new generation in politics. He lent hope to the idea of a future without wars, without confrontations, and without the grim ideological struggles of the past.
>
> I understood that this personal human contact with me was important for Clinton, too. In his view my political steps were connected with the fall of communism, which had been the main threat to America in the twentieth century. Clinton was ready to meet me halfway. No other President came to Moscow so many times. . . . No other President engaged in such intensive negotiations with the leaders of our country or provided us with such large-scale aid, both economic and political.[81]

The "Bill and Boris" relationship was in full bloom. The two leaders cultivated a relaxed and informal image of two good friends doing business in shirtsleeves. The event was so down home that *kasha*, the traditional Russian peasant fare, found its way onto the White House state dinner menu. Before the Russian President's arrival, Administration officials briefing the press hinted that the enlargement issue was likely to come up. The press was told that President Clinton planned to discuss with Yeltsin "the future security structure of Europe"—including NATO expansion and Russia's place in that structure.[82]

Before arriving in the United States, Yeltsin had stopped in London for talks with British Prime Minister John Major. The White House immediately received a readout from 10 Downing Street. The Russian leader, Major reported, was concerned that the U.S. was accelerating NATO enlargement, and had urged London to help rein in American "eagerness" on the issue. Yeltsin did not argue that the Visegrad countries should never join NATO, but insisted that

their entry in the next few years would cause a severe reaction in Russia. Major said that he had reassured Yeltsin that enlargement would be gradual, was not aimed against Russia, and that it would not take place for several years. Yeltsin, he reported, seemed relieved and indicated that he would have no difficulty with enlargement on that kind of timetable.[83]

Clinton had prepared himself to discuss NATO enlargement with Yeltsin by rehearsing his talking points with his senior aides. As the visit unfolded, however, the Russian President did not raise the issue. Finally, Clinton himself brought it up at the end of a private lunch the two leaders had in the East Wing of the White House on September 28. Over coffee, Clinton said: "Boris, one last thing. On NATO, please note I have never said we shouldn't consider Russia for membership or a special relationship with NATO. So when we talk about expanding NATO, we're emphasizing inclusion, not exclusion. My objective is to work with you and others to maximize the chances of a truly united, undivided and integrated Europe. There will be an expansion of NATO, but there's no timetable yet. If we started tomorrow to include the countries that want to come in, it would still take several years until they are qualified and others said yes. The issue is about psychological security and a sense of importance to these countries. They're afraid of being left out in a gray area or purgatory."

"So we're going to move forward on this. But I'd never spring it on you. I want to work closely with you to get through it together," the President continued. "As I see it, NATO expansion is not anti-Russian; it's not intended to be exclusive of Russia, and there is no imminent timetable. And we'll work together. I don't want you to believe that I wake up every morning thinking only about how to make the Warsaw Pact countries a part of NATO—that's not the way I look at it. What I do think about is how to use NATO expansion to advance the broader, higher goal of European security, unity and integration—a goal I know you share."

Yeltsin replied, "I understand, and I thank you for what you've said. If you're asked about this at the press conference, I'd suggest you say that while the U.S. is for the expansion of NATO, the process will be gradual and lengthy. If you're asked if you'd exclude Russia from NATO, your answer should be 'no.' That's all." Washington considered it a pale green light to proceed cautiously. Clinton then asked Talbott, who was taking notes, to explain a public dispute that had taken place between Perry and Ruehe in Berlin over whether NATO's door should or should not be open for Russia. Talbott summarized Perry's view as "we're not ruling it out" and Ruehe's as "never." Yeltsin responded: "Good for Perry. He is smarter than Ruehe."[84]

Washington's key allies had picked up on the Clinton Administration's shifting priorities as well. Many of them were surprised. They were not all happy. The United Kingdom was the first to pick up on the shift behind the scenes in Washington. It now found itself caught between its preference for a go-slow ap-

proach on NATO enlargement and a determination not to repeat the mistake of getting on the wrong side of U.S. policy as it had on the issue of German unification. As London concluded that President Clinton was committed to moving forward, it made clear that it was not prepared to stand in the way.[85] In mid-October, Holbrooke visited London to discuss NATO enlargement. British officials told him that London "accepts and welcomes" enlargement but that the pace should not be forced and urged Washington to proceed in a way that did not upset relations with Moscow.[86]

France was the most ambivalent of Washington's allies about the U.S. policy shift. In the summer of 1994 French officials had told their U.S. counterparts that they assumed that Central and Eastern Europe would first be integrated into the EU and NATO integration would come gradually at the end of that process—i.e., in about a decade.[87] When Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff visited Paris in mid-September he was immediately queried whether the U.S. now wanted to move faster. He responded "yes." His French interlocutors underscored their preference for a more gradual approach.[88] "What," one French official asked, "has happened in the past year to make this so urgent?" But by mid-October 1994, Paris, too, was signaling that while it was not enthusiastic, it could go along with enlargement so long as it proceeded in tandem with EU enlargement and Washington did not provoke a crisis with Russia.[89]

Germany was the key. In a *tour d'horizon* with Holbrooke before his return to Washington in early September, Kohl had laid out his views on America's future role in Europe to the departing U.S. Ambassador. Europe was fortunate to have in President Clinton a leader from a generation less burdened by World War II and the Cold War, Kohl said. He criticized the previous Bush Administration's hostility to European integration as "old think" he had disagreed with. "Please tell your colleagues and the President," he stated, "that there are certain times, in both domestic politics and foreign affairs, when windows of opportunity open. Most people fail to notice at all, and the results only show years later." The current period was one of those windows, the Chancellor noted. The U.S. and Germany needed to set a course that would ensure the trans-Atlantic relationship for the future and lock in security and stability in Europe as a whole.

Kohl made it clear that he saw NATO as the critical European defense institution for the foreseeable future, not the EU. The EU, the Chancellor said, was unable to deal with defense issues. The French were becoming "milder" in their opposition to the Alliance, he noted, and went so far as to speculate that Paris might rejoin the Alliance's integrated command. But the biggest challenge the U.S. and Germany had to tackle together was Central Europe, the Chancellor continued. There was no simple answer. He pointed to the anxieties of countries like Hungary and Poland. They were determined to get into NATO

and did not care what price the West might pay in overall relations with Russia. NATO enlargement was inevitable, he concluded. But the West needed a balanced approach that took Moscow's concerns into account.[90]

In mid-October, a second NSC strategy paper listed five U.S. objectives for the end of the year: launching a formal Alliance review on a framework for expansion; an initial sketch of benchmarks for potential new members; an expanded PfP program for future members and nonmembers alike; an expanded NATO-Russia relationship; and a strengthened OSCE to underscore Western willingness to include Russia in a new European security architecture.[91] In early November, a U.S. briefing team toured Brussels as well as individual national capitals to propose that the December Foreign Ministers meeting launch an official NATO study on the "why" and the "how" of enlargement, but set aside the more controversial "who" and "when." This would allow the Alliance to answer the myriad of questions involved in actually enlarging the Atlantic Alliance but leave the politically controversial issues of which countries might enter, and when, for later.[92]

Two problems loomed on the horizon, however. One was Bosnia where trans-Atlantic differences were again reaching the breaking point.[93] The other was Russia. The President's exchange with Yeltsin notwithstanding, there were signs that Moscow was not at all comfortable with the direction the U.S. and NATO were headed. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow was reporting signs of growing Russian nervousness that the U.S. was going to pursue a tough line—which the Republican landslide victory in the November mid-term elections only reinforced.[94] On November 14, the newly arrived Russian Ambassador to NATO, Vitaly Churkin, zeroed in on NATO expansion in a courtesy call to Ambassador Hunter. He argued that if the Alliance launched the next stage in the enlargement process before the NATO-Russia relationship was up and running, it ran the risk of undercutting the latter even before it got started.[95] The storm clouds were starting to gather.

Christopher and Talbott were counting on the President's relationship with Yeltsin to keep Russian anxieties in check—and that meant meeting with him at the upcoming OSCE summit in Budapest at the end of the year. Clinton had promised the Russian President he would come if there was important work to do. But the U.S. President's domestic advisors were insisting that he travel less and focus on his domestic agenda. In mid-October Christopher and Talbott weighed in urging the President to attend the summit. "We are on the verge of being able to lay out a sweeping vision of a 'new European architecture' that would build on your January Brussels speech," Christopher wrote the President.[96] Talbott argued that the Administration had a chance for a diplomatic breakthrough that would also inoculate Clinton against Republican charges that the Administration was soft on enlargement. "If we get this right—and at the right time, which means very soon—we can seize control over this

issue in a way that essentially takes it away from the Republicans in '96. That doesn't mean that Poland will be in NATO by then. But it does mean that we will have a plan in place and a process underway that will make it difficult for anyone to attack the President for failing to deliver on his promise or for giving the Russians a veto over NATO expansion."[97]

The Republican sweep of Congress in the November mid-term elections left the White House in shock and only made the President's domestic advisors more adamant that he not go to Budapest. On November 7, Talbott, supported by Lake and Christopher, sent a note directly to Clinton pleading with him to attend: "Chief," he wrote, "believe me, this is an absolute, total, no-question-about-it MUST. You gotta go. If you go, it'll do a lot of good, diplomatically and politically; if you don't, it'll cause big problems on both fronts." Budapest was a "launching pad" for our "tough but doable" goal of harmonizing NATO expansion with support for Yeltsin: "If you give Budapest a miss, you'd appear to be abandoning the field to Yeltsin, Kohl and others; we'd miss the chance to establish a CSCE 'second track' that must parallel the NATO expansion track. Yeltsin (who's under huge pressure to come out against NATO expansion) would feel vulnerable at home and, frankly, let down by you, since you agreed when he was here that you'd meet in Budapest 'if there's serious work to be done,' which there sure is."

5. ACROSS THE RUBICON

On December 1 Christopher and his NATO colleagues announced that the Alliance would "initiate a process of examination to determine how NATO will enlarge, the principles to guide this process and the implication of membership." They were careful to underscore that it was still "premature" to discuss a timeframe for enlargement or which countries would be invited to join. In other words, the study would answer the "why" and the "how" but not yet the "who" or the "when" of enlargement. Finally, NATO emphasized its interest in closer relations with Moscow and ensuring that enlargement contributed to the stability and security of the entire Euro-Atlantic region—code for ensuring that Russian security interests did not suffer. While it was at a pace that seemed glacial to some, the Alliance had finally taken its first official step in a process explicitly designed to enlarge NATO.[98]

And everyone knew it. The Central and East Europeans were delighted. They realized that enlargement was not yet a done deal, but the process was finally moving forward. In Brussels, Olechowski joked to a somewhat startled Christopher that he wanted to kiss him out of gratitude to Clinton for finally turning words into deeds.[99] As he later recalled: "This was the moment that I thought there was a turning point."[100] Czech Foreign Minister Zielenic termed the meeting "one of the most important in NATO's modern history" and noted

that "after eighteen months of hesitation NATO members have clearly assumed a more active approach to expansion."[101]

Moscow knew it, too. And its reaction was quite different. Later that same day Kozyrev met with NATO's Foreign Ministers for what was supposed to be a carefully choreographed event where he signed two key documents inaugurating expanded NATO-Russia cooperation.[102] Although the Russian side had been briefed on the enlargement statement in advance, at the last second Kozyrev refused to play along with the agreed script. He stunned his NATO colleagues by suddenly announcing that he had just spoken to Yeltsin and that it was "impossible" to sign the documents in light of the decisions NATO had taken earlier in the day on enlargement. Moscow now wanted a "pause" to clarify NATO's intentions.[103] As one Russian paper put it, "Mr. Da" had suddenly become "Mr. Nyet."[104]

The story only got worse. Two days later in Budapest more than 50 heads of state gathered for the OSCE summit. The President had overruled his domestic advisors and agreed to go to Budapest after all. But it required him to fly through the night for a brief stop of several hours on the ground before returning to Washington. Although Christopher and Holbrooke had gone directly from Brussels to Budapest to meet the President, there was no opportunity to discuss the implications of Kozyrev's surprise performance in Brussels. The tight schedule also left no time for Clinton and Yeltsin to meet before either of them spoke publicly.

Instead of the trip becoming the successful bookend of his European policy for the year Christopher and Talbott had promised, it became a diplomatic nightmare. Following Clinton's address, Yeltsin gave a dramatic speech in which he criticized the U.S. for moving ahead with NATO enlargement. Washington, he said, was "sowing the seeds of distrust" and not taking Russian interest into account. "Europe, not having yet freed itself from the heritage of the Cold War, is in danger of plunging into a Cold Peace," he warned.[105] President Clinton felt ambushed and was furious as he jetted back across the Atlantic. Talbott would later say it was one of the worst days of his diplomatic career. One week later Moscow invaded Chechnya, dealing yet another setback to U.S.-Russian relations.

In the days following Budapest, American diplomats scurried to find out what was behind the Russian leader's outburst.[106] Had Moscow deliberately sandbagged Washington in an attempt to derail enlargement? Or had there been a breakdown in communication? Talbott was dispatched to Moscow to find out what had happened and why. Yeltsin's National Security Advisor Dimitri Ryurikov told him Yeltsin had reacted so harshly because he felt Washington no longer trusted him. The Republican victory in Congress, along with the NATO enlargement study decision were seen as evidence that U.S. policy toward Russia was hardening. Ryurikov compared Yeltsin to a business-

man who has just discovered that his partner has taken out an insurance policy in case their joint venture fails. He claimed that Moscow had believed that NATO enlargement had been stopped in the fall of 1993 and that PfP was a kind of alternative, only to now discover it was moving forward. Moreover, Washington's European allies were also telling Moscow it was the U.S., not them, that was rushing the pace.[107]

In a separate meeting, Kozyrev told a somewhat different story. He admitted that Yeltsin had been unconcerned about reports that the U.S. was pushing forward on NATO enlargement, saying he trusted the assurances Clinton had given him. Kozyrev admitted that he himself had called the Russian President before Brussels and had spun him up over the language in the NAC communiqué. When Yeltsin then saw television reports of the NAC meeting, he had become angry, saying: "What's happening to my friend Clinton? Why is he doing this to us?" He had then been unable to keep Yeltsin in check at Budapest where the Russian President had personally rewritten his speech at the last minute to attack the U.S. President, Kozyrev admitted.

"The combination of the content of the Brussels communiqué itself, and the tone of what Clinton said in Budapest made us feel that you were triumphing, you'd scored a diplomatic victory over us, you were ramming this through over Russian objections," Kozyrev replied.

Talbott responded angrily that Clinton had consistently stood by Yeltsin when many in the West were ready to write him off. The NATO communiqué reflected exactly the kind of strategy the President had discussed with Yeltsin in September and did not represent a sudden shift in U.S. policy. But he added that Yeltsin's behavior had certainly made it harder to support a policy of engagement with Russia. Kozyrev replied that Yeltsin did not want, and Russia could not afford, a new Cold War. What was now needed, he added, was to find a way to include Russia in decisions regarding NATO's future and a new European security architecture.[108] That job now fell to Vice President Al Gore, who arrived in Moscow for a previously scheduled meeting of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission.

Meeting with Chernomyrdin and Kozyrev over breakfast, Gore underscored that the U.S. remained committed to a vision of an undivided Europe that included Russia. Moscow's protests, Gore added, were based on the assumptions that NATO would expand quickly and without a *modus vivendi* with Russia. Neither was true. Enlargement was going to be a slow, deliberate process consistent with what Clinton had told Yeltsin in September. Chernomyrdin shot back, "that is your view, but the Baltics and the others have already started to pack up their bags for NATO as a result of the communiqué." He noted that while both sides spoke of a slow and deliberate process, they meant something very different. Moscow wanted a timeline of 10, 15 or 20 years for enlargement, but could perhaps live with 5–7 years. Gore responded progress could be much

more rapid. But the way out of the dilemma, he underscored, was for NATO and Russia to accelerate work on creating a new NATO-Russia relationship.[109]

Yeltsin himself received Gore in a hospital where he was recovering from surgery. Yeltsin was clearly determined to send the political message that U.S.-Russian relations were alive and well. "Despite all the talk, the reports in newspapers and the gossip," he said, "Russia and America remain partners. Bill Clinton and I remain partners. It will take more than we've been through to ruin that." But he then went straight to the NATO enlargement issue and his suspicion that the U.S. was accelerating its policy under Republican pressure. When Gore insisted that Clinton's September commitment stood and there had been no change of policy, Yeltsin challenged this and argued that the NATO communiqué had changed Alliance policy. But he asked the Vice President: "Can you assure me that in 1995 it will be solely a matter of working out the concept?" Gore responded in the affirmative. Yeltsin asked what Clinton would do if the Poles pressured him to move in 1995? Gore repeated that the U.S. only had plans to study the enlargement issue, not to actually expand, in the upcoming year.

But Gore also underscored that NATO would, at some point, enlarge. Yeltsin replied by asking: "What then is Russia's relationship with NATO?" When Gore responded that the U.S. had not ruled out eventual Russian membership either, Yeltsin answered, "Nyet, nyet , that doesn't make sense. Russia is very, very big and NATO is quite small." The Vice President then used the image of two space ships docking in parallel to imitate NATO and Russia coming close together. Yeltsin responded enthusiastically "Da, Da." Gore added: "We need a process that brings three things together: our bilateral partnership, Russia's relationship with NATO, and NATO expansion. It must be gradual."

"Yes," said Yeltsin. "In parallel! Simultaneous, simultaneous! But not like this." And with his hands, he demonstrated one spacecraft moving toward the other but the other moving off in the other direction. As the conversation was ending, the Russian President said to Gore, "We are being advised to step up the pressure on Clinton. Please convey to him that we will never do that, that Russia will remain the U.S.'s partner to the end."[110]

Yeltsin's outburst in Budapest also forced a final clarification of the battle lines within the Clinton Administration on NATO enlargement. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry was in Moscow with the Vice President. He had been on the road dealing with growing tension in the Persian Gulf and Korea and had not been closely involved in the internal U.S. deliberations on enlargement. But he had been in Brussels after Yeltsin's Budapest outburst and came away convinced the decision to launch the enlargement study was a mistake. In his view, PfP had just been launched and the U.S. had not yet had a chance to engage the Russian military, or to make any progress in changing hostile Russian attitudes toward NATO. Perry believed that there was a reasonable chance that PfP could

start to change those attitudes—and that it was important to do so *before* NATO started to enlarge.[111]

Returning to Washington, Perry asked for a meeting to make his case. On December 21 he joined Gore, Talbott, Christopher, Lake, and Berger in Clinton's private study in the White House to discuss the way ahead.[112] The Secretary of Defense argued that moving ahead on enlargement was a mistake, that a Presidential decision had never been made, and that it was wrong to make policy through a communiqué. He recommended that the U.S. return to the original go-slow approach based on PfP for several more years. But Clinton made it clear that he had decided to move forward with enlargement. As Perry later described it, the President "felt that right was on the side of the East European countries that wanted to enter NATO soon, that deferring expansion until later in the decade was not feasible and that the Russians could be convinced that expansion was not directed against them."[113] Looking back, Perry acknowledged he realized during the meeting that in Clinton's mind the decision to enlarge NATO had already been made some time ago, something he should have known earlier but did not.[114]

But Clinton also underscored that he wanted to move forward slowly on enlargement and with a maximum effort to address Russia's concerns. Gore and Christopher argued that it was going to take at least three to five years to get NATO and candidate countries ready in any case which left time to first establish a parallel NATO-Russia relationship that could defuse tension with Moscow. Gore pointed out that such an approach would be criticized by the Republicans and the leaders of the ethnic groups who wanted a clearer public commitment and timetable on enlargement, but that the Administration would simply have to absorb such criticism. It was agreed to keep the Administration's policy ambiguous and to avoid setting a public timetable. The way to manage the tension of supporting the Central and East Europeans and also assisting Yeltsin was, as Gore put it, to take refuge in "parallelism." He proposed that a Deputies level process be set up to work both the NATO enlargement and NATO-Russia tracks and suggested the Administration find a way to insulate itself from the political pressure generated by both the Republicans and ethnic lobby to move faster. Ambiguity was key to avoiding open conflict on the issue at home and abroad. The President concluded: "The policy is right. But we need to work with the Russians."[115]

In the days following the meeting, Talbott would sit down with Perry to explore the Secretary of Defense's concerns. He subsequently sent Christopher a memo summarizing Perry's views on the following terms: "What is bugging him about our approach to NATO expansion and the Brussels communiqué, quite simply, was that he doesn't agree with our policy. In his view, NATO should not take on new members unless Russia goes bad; we should hold open the possibility of adding new members only as a hedge against the failure of Russian re-

form and a return of the Russian government to the geopolitical offensive. In the meantime, we should put all our emphasis on developing PfP, in lieu of Alliance expansion." Talbott went on to add that this was a defensible position intellectually that others had taken previously as well. "Trouble is, it's not our Administration policy—and hasn't been for just over a year now."[116]

The Deputy Secretary noted that the Administration had been committed to expanding NATO since the President's trip to Europe the previous January. "In other words, we've rejected, as a matter of policy, the notion of only expanding NATO if Russia turns bad." He had made the case to Perry that it was a mistake to justify expansion solely in terms of dealing with a resurgent Russia. "If we cast expansion in those terms, we'll give the CEE states a stake in portraying reform as having failed; and we'll give the Russians no choice but to see expansion—or any steps in that direction—as a vote of no-confidence in them. Yet there will have to be steps toward expansion, of the kind we're contemplating in 95; otherwise the President's rhetoric of 94; will look very hollow indeed."

As 1994 drew to a close, Clinton wrote Yeltsin to reiterate his commitment to a strong U.S.-Russia partnership. He noted that the last year had been a difficult one for both of them, but insisted that both leaders could look back with pride at what they had accomplished together. He assured Yeltsin that he stood by his September commitment on NATO enlargement: enlargement would proceed gradually and openly and the U.S. would develop a partnership with Russia in parallel to this process. "I know you share my view that the European security issue is almost without question the most important and sensitive issue we will confront together. I believe we have now laid a solid foundation for dealing with the many questions and complexities that lie ahead. I look forward to keeping this in the forefront of the personal discussions in the year ahead."[117]

On December 29, Yeltsin replied that Gore's visit to Moscow had helped eliminate the "serious misunderstandings" from Budapest. His understanding of their September conversation on NATO enlargement, he emphasized, was that NATO would not act hastily but rather put in place a full-scale NATO-Russia partnership before proceeding with enlargement. Yeltsin suggested accelerating efforts to reach a parallel agreement on a NATO-Russia relationship along with the completion of the NATO enlargement study. He invited Clinton to Moscow in May and suggested that Christopher and Kozyrev meet early in the New Year to come up with some ideas for the two leaders to discuss.[118] Washington breathed a sigh of relief. The Russian President no longer seemed focused on stopping enlargement, but instead on accelerating work on building a NATO-Russia relationship. Now Washington had to fill both tracks with substance.