Book V

TOWARD A NEW NATO

In early December 1995, NATO Foreign and Defense Ministers gathered in Brussels for a rare joint meeting. They looked back at one of the most dramatic years in Alliance history. NATO had gone to war for the first time ever to help end nearly five years of ethnic conflict in Bosnia. Alliance ground troops were preparing to deploy for the first time ever beyond Alliance borders to help secure the peace in that war-ravaged country—alongside those of Moscow. As Secretary of State Warren Christopher told his colleagues, "For NATO this is, without exaggeration, a moment worthy of being called historic."[1]

NATO enlargement was not out of the spotlight. The drama of Bosnia and President Clinton's pledge to Boris Yeltsin to keep the issue out of the upcoming Russian Presidential elections had ensured that. But the Alliance's preparations were nonetheless moving ahead. The Alliance enlargement study had been completed on time and NATO now offered so-called "intensified dialogues" as the next step to those countries seeking membership. Following a meeting with Central and East European Foreign Ministers at the Ministerial, Christopher wrote Clinton underscoring the positive impact the prospect of enlargement was having in the region—and why it was essential that the process move forward in spite of Russian opposition and the doubts of some of Washington's allies. As Romanian Foreign Minister Melescanu had told the

Secretary: "The pace of enlargement may not meet all of our desires, but I believe it is proceeding in the most realistic way."[2]

Finally, France, which had emerged as a key ally in pushing a more muscular approach in Bosnia, now announced that it was prepared in principle to end its arms-length approach to NATO, bringing another chorus of cheers from the gathered Ministers.[3] That announcement offered the possibility of healing the rift that had been created when Charles de Gaulle pulled France out of the Alliance's military structures in the mid-1960s. The Clinton Administration's vision of a revamped and rebalanced NATO assuming a new post–Cold War mission by providing stability beyond its borders and across the continent was starting to take shape. As Christopher wrote the President, the decision to intervene in Bosnia was key in order to put the Alliance back on track: "Only a few months ago, many in Europe, as well as in the United States, questioned whether NATO had a continuing role to play after the Cold War. Now, NATO's role is universally acknowledged. It has found a vocation."[4]

But neither the U.S. nor its allies had time to rest on their laurels. Some 60,000 NATO-led forces had to successfully deploy to Bosnia to enforce a fragile peace. France's willingness in principle to fully return to the NATO fold needed to be explored. With Russian and U.S. Presidential elections scheduled for the summer and fall, NATO was not planning any major enlargement decisions. But the Alliance was quietly working to help prepare Central and East European countries for possible invitations. Last but certainly not least, NATO's search for a new *modus vivendi* with Russia remained elusive. While Yeltsin had chosen to work with NATO in Bosnia, Moscow was reluctant to take steps to institutionalize a broader NATO-Russia relationship lest they be interpreted as acquiescing to enlargement.

It was no easy task to bring these various pieces together into a coherent whole. At NATO's helm was a new Secretary General, former Spanish Foreign Minister Javier Solana. As a young socialist leader, Solana had demonstrated against NATO membership for Spain but had since become a strong supporter of the Alliance. He had spent several years in exile in the U.S. and had a keen understanding of the Anglo-Saxon mind set. His commitment to European unification was also deeply rooted. Coming from a country that itself had been isolated from the European mainstream, Solana instinctively understood the aspirations of Central and Eastern Europe. But like many European leftists, he shared the Administration's commitment to build a new relationship with a democratic Russia. Although a number of Republican Senators and members of Congress opposed his nomination, Solana turned out to be very much in synch with the Clinton Administration and became a central figure in the endgame on NATO enlargement.

1. ON THE BACK BURNER

Throughout much of the spring of 1996 NATO enlargement was kept on the back burner of Alliance work and intentionally so. Instead, this period was dominated by NATO's deployment of troops to Bosnia and the desire to explore France's interest in returning to the NATO fold. The latter was especially important to the Clinton Administration, which had reversed its predecessor's skepticism toward European integration and a greater European role in the Alliance. President Clinton had, from the outset, made it clear that he wanted to support European unity and integration. France's announcement was therefore welcomed with open arms in Washington.

The impetus for France's reintegration had come from President Jacques Chirac who, as the head of the Gaullist party, had performed the French political equivalent of Nixon going to China by reaching out to the Alliance whose integrated military structures de Gaulle had left in 1966. Several factors had led to this reassessment. Paris' vision of the EU assuming primary responsibility for European security after the Cold War had been tempered by the crisis in Bosnia and the difficulties in negotiating and ratifying the Maastricht Treaty. From his early days in office, Chirac saw both a need and an opportunity to rebalance the U.S.-European partnership through NATO as opposed to outside of it. The collapse of Soviet power had made Europe less dependent upon America for its security and refocused NATO on new missions in a way that could allow Europe to assume greater responsibility. If NATO's future was going to focus on peace support operations, these were areas where the Europeans could carry a larger share of the burden. Such a redefinition, Chirac calculated, could allow France to return to a more balanced and equal Alliance.[5]

U.S. diplomats had picked up on signs of France's new interest in NATO during the fall of 1995. The U.S. Ambassador to France, Pamela Harriman, reported that French officials had told their U.S. counterparts that they were considering returning to NATO's military structures. They cautioned against using the word "reintegration" given French domestic political sensitivities, preferring to talk about the Alliance's "renovation." Paris, they underscored, could not say it was returning to the "old NATO" but needed to be able to claim it was joining a "new and adapted" Alliance. They nonetheless made it clear they were aiming at "a major transformation of the structures of the Alliance." As one French official put it, "no options, not even radical ones" were excluded. How far Paris would go also depended on the Alliance: "The more it appears that NATO is changing and the Europeans are responsible for their own security, the closer France can move to NATO."[6]

When Chirac visited Washington in early February 1996, he underscored that the U.S. presence was still needed in Europe but that NATO also had to adapt to a new era. "France," he promised, "is ready to assume its full share of

this renovation process," adding that he wished to "confirm the open-mindedness and availability with which France approaches this adaptation of NATO, including the military side, as long as the European identity can assert itself fully."[7] In private, Chirac dismissed the notion of an Alliance based on two pillars—one American and the other European. "Previously we talked about two pillars. I was one of those who invented that concept, but it was probably not a good idea," said Chirac. "The problem is how to find a system—a single system—that can work in the event that the U.S. does send troops and also if the U.S. does not send troops because you think that it [the crisis] is not worth it." But Chirac was optimistic: "I believe we can find a solution. I am not worried. We have made a big change, taken a big step and we are ready to discuss everything. There are no taboos."[8]

The vehicle for negotiating France's rapprochement with NATO was the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI). It had been created in the early 1990s as a vehicle for European allies to organize themselves better under NATO's umbrella as well as to create the nucleus for Europe acting on its own in a future crisis if the U.S. refused to participate. ESDI now became the venue through which allies would try to hammer out a new arrangement that met French demands. The goal was to reach agreement on an overall principle and framework by the time NATO Foreign Ministers met in June, with details finalized by the end of the year. With such an understanding in place and with France reintegrated into NATO's military structures, the Alliance would also be in a much stronger position to enlarge eastward.

The Clinton Administration was delighted by this French shift. As Clinton told Solana in late February: "I think the French initiative is a positive thing. Chirac is very, well, French, but also a strong and imaginative leader who looks to the future. . . . We have never objected to a European security pillar within NATO, although we don't want Alliance equities to be compromised. I believe Chirac's proposal can be a good thing."[9] U.S. officials returned from early consultations in Paris in late February 1996 convinced that the French commitment to return to the Alliance was genuine, and that considerable common ground existed between the two countries.[10]

By late spring the U.S., France and other key allies had reached closure on several key principles. One was that NATO would remain the vehicle for Article 5 and defending Europe against future attack. A second was that ESDI would be built within, not outside of, the Alliance framework. A third was that when it came to addressing conflicts beyond Alliance borders, NATO would have what became known as the right of first refusal. This meant that allies would turn to the Alliance as the preferred framework for collective military action, but that there would also be a credible backup option for the European-only force under the Western European Union (WEU) to step in if NATO could not act. This last provision was critical. While European countries wanted the U.S. to remain

involved in European security, they did not ever again want to find themselves in a position such as in Bosnia where the U.S. would not participate in a military operation and they did not have the ability to act on their own to stop a crisis in their own backyard.

To put meat on the bones of this proposal, London proposed creating a European Deputy SACEUR (D/SACEUR) who, in addition to being a traditional Deputy, would also be the personification of ESDI and the strategic commander of any WEU-led operation. If the U.S. did not want to participate in a military operation, NATO would step aside and the D/SACEUR would lead such an operation under the WEU. This concept built on the Alliance's Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) initiative from the January 1994 NATO summit, which allowed military planners to put together and deploy mobile headquarters and forces in response to new crises in the post–Cold War world. Alliance planners also coined the concept of "separable but not separate forces." This meant that the U.S. and Europe would maintain a single pool of forces from which a smaller force package could be broken out or separated for a European-led operation. The WEU, therefore, did not have to develop its own planning capability, command structure and forces, but could instead draw on those of the Alliance. This would avoid duplication and ensure close trans-Atlantic ties.

With Russia's Presidential elections less than six months away, NATO's work on enlargement in the spring of 1996 was kept low-key and out of the public eye. As President Clinton told Secretary General Solana in March: "We should stay on the timetable that has been agreed, because it is designed to do the work that needs to be done in a low-key, unthreatening and transparent way. We also need to walk a tightrope and not unnecessarily inflame things in Russia or in Central and Eastern Europe. We should stay on the timetable and be almost boring, methodical, plodding, even bureaucratic. We need as much as possible to take away the emotional energy from the NATO enlargement issue in both Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, as well as among constituencies that support enlargement in the U.S. and Europe. In short, we should smile and plod ahead."[11]

The NATO bureaucracy did exactly that as it worked out the practical issues of actually preparing to enlarge the Alliance. Bilateral "intensified dialogues" were launched with those countries interested in knowing more about what enlargement would entail.[12] Candidate countries submitted papers detailing their membership credentials and responded to a range of questions regarding their military capabilities. NATO's Military Committee geared up to assess potential members' preparedness and their ability to contribute to Alliance defenses. NATO military staff started to travel to these countries for a hands-on look at the condition of infrastructure, port facilities, military bases, and airfields.

Work also started on two additional issues that were rapidly moving up on the Alliance's agenda. One was the cost of NATO enlargement. Widely varying estimates of what enlargement would cost were popping up in the West. These

differences revealed very different assumptions regarding what enlargement would entail militarily and how broad or narrow a definition of costs the Alliance should embrace. Some of the high estimates assumed NATO should deploy forces on the territory of new members and also included the overall costs of bringing the militaries of these countries up to NATO standards. Others assumed that allies would not deploy forces on the territory of new members and that the costs of enlargement should be restricted to the much narrower definition of ensuring, for example, that NATO command, control, and communication capabilities existed. NATO officials were asked to come up with an agreed-upon cost assessment by the end of the year.[13]

The second issue was how to deal with those candidate countries not included in a first round of enlargement. By now nearly a dozen countries of widely varying levels of preparedness had declared an interest in NATO membership. While official debate on which countries would be invited for a first round had been put off for the future, the U.S. had pledged to manage enlargement in a fashion that contributed to overall European security, including the security of those countries not receiving invitations. In some ways, the issue of how to handle those countries not joining the Alliance was just as difficult as deciding who would be brought in. By this time, the Partnership for Peace was increasingly recognized as a great success and both the number and complexity of PfP exercises was increasing. NATO set up a special task force, called the Senior Level Group, to examine how to expand it into something called "PfP plus" for those countries not invited to join the Alliance.

In early June 1996, NATO Foreign Ministers gathered in Berlin for their spring meeting. With the first round of Russian Presidential elections just around the corner, talk of NATO enlargement was consigned to the realm of "ongoing work" in the official communiqué. Instead, the Ministers' main message was that "a new NATO" was emerging—an "adapted" Alliance that, while retaining its core functions, was better equipped to deal with crises beyond Alliance borders, more balanced across the Atlantic with a strengthened European pillar, and better equipped to cooperate with Russia.[14] Speaking before the North Atlantic Council on June 3, Christopher praised the progress the Alliance had made in building a new NATO for a new Europe.[15] French Foreign Minister de Charette hailed the Alliance compromise on a European pillar as "a great success for Europe" and hinted that France would now be willing to take the next steps in terms of returning to the NATO fold.[16]

2. SLEEPING WITH THE PORCUPINE

Negotiating a NATO-Russia *modus vivendi* remained a top American and NATO priority. Yeltsin's decision to deploy Russian troops to Bosnia was considered a breakthrough in Moscow's cooperation with the West. At the same time,

the strong showing of the communists in the December 1995 Duma elections and Yeltsin's firing of several key reformers led to yet another wave of speculation about a possible Russian lurch toward authoritarian rule. On January 26, Yeltsin called Clinton to assure him of his commitment to a reformist course. "At this point," he told Clinton, "I guarantee to you the course of reform and democracy will stand." Yeltsin also noted that he had just sent a letter to Clinton on NATO. "The whole issue of enlargement will affect many aspects, including our election process," he concluded with an eye toward the upcoming Russian Presidential elections.[17]

Yeltsin's letter contained a litany of complaints about NATO enlargement. It claimed that the Alliance's decision to launch "intensified dialogues" with partner countries violated the understanding between the two Presidents on enlargement.[18] It was a reminder that while Yeltsin had opted to cooperate with NATO in Bosnia, he was still fighting enlargement and that the institutionalization of a broader NATO-Russia relationship was still held hostage, at least in Russian eyes, to the enlargement issue. On February 8, Clinton responded by reminding Yeltsin that they had agreed in the past "on the importance of advancing the integration of the Euro-Atlantic community to enhance regional stability and to assure an undivided Europe." The prospect of NATO enlargement, he argued, was already bringing enhanced stability to Central and Eastern Europe. "This is to Russia's advantage," Clinton wrote. "Boris, a new century is coming. The Russians, Europeans and Americans of the next century deserve to live without fear of the recurrence of this century's tragedies. NATO's enlargement, to which I am committed, will help ensure stability for future generations." Enlargement, the letter continued, "is part of a means to achieve our shared goal of a more stable Europe. And that goal includes a close, cooperative NATO-Russia relationship, to which I am also committed. We both share an interest in deepening Russia's integration into European structures. In the end, it is Russia's choice, but I stand ready to build a cooperative relationship between NATO and Russia."[19]

The Administration was convinced that Yeltsin's opposition was driven primarily by domestic political concerns, above all in an election year. This reinforced Clinton's determination to engage the Russian President to try to manage the enlargement issue. Yeltsin's uncertain health and political fortunes nevertheless left U.S. officials worried. The Russian President could be replaced by a harder-line leader, or by succumbing to those voices in his own entourage urging an all-out effort at trying to stop the Alliance. On January 9, those concerns were elevated when Yeltsin replaced Foreign Minister Kozyrev with Yevgeny Primakov, the head of Russia's foreign intelligence service. Interpreted as an attempt by Yeltsin to improve his nationalist credentials in the run-up to Presidential elections, it nevertheless raised the possibility of a tougher Russian approach to the West in general and on NATO in particular.

Primakov had been one of Kozyrev's most prominent critics. As Talbott wrote Christopher after his first official meeting with the new Foreign Minister, the contrast between the two men could not have been greater. Kozyrev was genuinely pro-Western and believed Russia's best hope lay in cooperating as closely as possible with the West. In contrast, Primakov had made his career by standing up to the West—"the man who could say *Nyet*." He was well known in the West for having defended Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. In the Russian press he was portrayed as a "Eurasianist" who believed Russia, along with China, could form an independent alternative power to the West. Whereas Kozyrev cared about ideas, the currency Primakov cared about was power. The new Russian Foreign Minster, Talbott wrote, seemed to relish the prospect of diplomatic and political combat. "There's an honor-among-thieves twinkle in his eye when he says, as he did several times in our sessions something like, 'Come on, cut the crap.' "[20]

Primakov, Talbott continued, saw his job as masking Russian weakness while rebuilding Moscow's strength. By his desk, he kept a small bust of Prince Alexandr Gorchakov, a 19th-century Russian Foreign Minister under Czar Alexander II who had presided over Russia's recovery from its total defeat in the Crimean war. Partnership with the U.S. was not part of his lexicon. For Primakov, the U.S. was a problem to be managed, humored or outfoxed. It was not the country Russia would turn to for help or advice. "We're a lot of things in his calculations about how to do that [rebuilding Russian power], but emphatically not partners. We're not necessarily enemies in the sense that we were during more doctrinaire Soviet eyes during the Cold War, but we're certainly rivals, which, in his view, is the fitting role for a Great Power."[21]

When Christopher called Primakov to congratulate him, the Russian Foreign Minister went out of his way to emphasize that his appointment did not signal a dramatic shift in Russian policy and that Yeltsin had underscored to him the importance of maintaining good relations with Washington.[22] When Mamedov met Talbott in Bonn, Germany several days later, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister urged him not to treat Primakov's appointment "like the second coming of the Soviet Union" and instead tried to convince the Deputy Secretary that the appointment was good for the U.S. "You should welcome the change," he told Talbott. Kozyrev's perceived softness in dealing with the West had compelled Yeltsin to show he could be tough—the opposite could be the case with Primakov. "Primakov," he told Talbott, "can make deals from political strength that Kozyrev couldn't make from weakness."[23]

While a number of op-eds in the American press lambasted Primakov's appointment, the internal U.S. reaction was initially one of "wait-and-see." An internal State Department strategy paper commissioned by Talbott on the prospects for U.S.-Russian in late January concluded: "While buckling our seatbelts for a rough ride during the months and years (and decades) ahead, we

should stay the course" and remain engaged with Moscow. "Yeltsin is likely to join in chest-thumping about the rights and greatness of the Russian state from time to time. But that does not mean that he will retreat on any of the fundamentals that have governed his relations with the outside world—and particularly with the U.S." Primakov, the paper concluded, was likely to adapt a more hard-nosed attitude toward the West but was not a risk taker. "Although not pro-Western in the sense that Kozyrev is, Primakov has not shown a proclivity to recklessness, xenophobia or extreme nationalism. He won't be looking for fights with the West; he will simply be less inclined to paper over differences or to be responsive to our positions."[24]

In early February Christopher and Primakov met in Helsinki. Primakov assured the Secretary that Russian foreign policy would not become threatening and urged Washington to treat Moscow as an equal partner. But the new Russian Foreign Minister was adamant in his opposition to NATO enlargement. He resurrected Moscow's old claims that the NATO leaders had promised not to enlarge during the negotiations on German unification. He floated several alternatives to NATO enlargement for Central and Eastern Europe. When Christopher rejected them, Primakov responded: "We will have to find a solution to this issue that is acceptable to Russia, NATO and the Central Europeans or sleep with the porcupine."[25] That evening, Christopher wrote Clinton that "it is clear that for the present we will confront an overt, unyielding, hard line against enlargement from the Russian leadership."[26]

If Washington was holding firm on enlargement, some key allies were showing signs of backsliding. On February 3, German Chancellor Kohl suggested a moratorium on NATO enlargement to Bill Perry. If the West could produce "two years of calm" in relations with Russia, Kohl suggested, "progress in relations" with Russia might again be possible. After the meeting, German National Security Advisor Bitterlich asked whether the U.S. had "gotten the Chancellor's message." Bitterlich reiterated that decisions on enlargement should be taken only after this period of calm and that 1997 should not be used for a NATO enlargement summit, but to further expand PfP. He added that he would float this idea to the British and French as well.[27]

Alarm bells went off in Washington. As a State Department memo put it, the Chancellor's possible change of heart "threatens to disrupt the Western approach to Russia, roil relations with Central Europe, vindicate Russian opponents of NATO enlargement and embroil the Administration in a domestic spat with the Republican internationalists who would accuse us of accommodating Russian pressures."[28] U.S. Ambassador to NATO Bob Hunter reported that his British counterpart had commented over lunch that "the convoy on enlargement seems to be breaking up" as a result of Bonn's changing view.[29] Several days later, British Foreign Secretary Rifkind expressed concern over waning German support for NATO enlargement to Assistant Secretary Holbrooke and

made it clear that London was now committed to enlargement and that it would be a disaster if NATO lost its nerve on this issue in the face of Russian pressure.[30]

Bonn quickly backtracked. On February 9, 1996, German Foreign Minister Kinkel tried to take back the Chancellor's "two years of calm" statement, insisting it did not diminish Germany's commitment to NATO enlargement. A senior Chancellery official assured U.S. diplomats that Kohl's comments "only" reflected his concern that public talk about enlargement was strengthening the hands of the nationalists in Moscow in the run up to the Russian elections.[31] Shortly thereafter, Kohl assured Secretary Christopher personally that he was on board for enlargement—and claimed he did not understand how the impression to the contrary had arisen. But he underscored the need to take Russian interests into account and to keep the enlargement issue out of the Russian and U.S. Presidential campaigns.[32]

When Kohl visited Moscow the following week, Yeltsin told him that the two leaders agreed on every issue—except NATO enlargement. At the press conference, Yeltsin denounced NATO enlargement in what the press described as a "furious outburst" and called on NATO to postpone its enlargement plans while an uncomfortable looking Kohl listened to the translation.[33] In a subsequent interview, Kohl stated: "I am now for letting the issue [of NATO enlargement] settle down completely, not for pushing it aside, but letting it calm down, until the elections are over here [in Russia] and the U.S."[34] Kohl called Clinton upon his return from Moscow. He reported that Yeltsin was in good health and spirits for his reelection campaign but strongly opposed to NATO enlargement. He assured Clinton that he had told Yeltsin that NATO would enlarge but that allies were prepared to reach a reasonable settlement on this issue after the elections.[35]

Kohl was not the only European leader getting cold feet on NATO enlargement. U.S. Ambassador to France Pamela Harriman reported that at a diplomatic reception in Paris, President Chirac approached her in the presence of the Russian Ambassador to emphasize to her that the Russian people saw NATO as a threat and that forcing expansion would only aggravate the problem. It could hardly be read as a sign of French enthusiasm for enlargement.[36] Later that spring, Chirac suggested that the Alliance should not move forward on enlargement unless it first had a NATO-Russia agreement in hand.[37] Washington was also nervous about reports that French officials were suggesting that no major steps be taken on NATO enlargement before the Alliance had finished its work on adaptation, thereby potentially holding enlargement hostage to fulfilling Paris' *desiderata* on this issue. Other U.S. diplomatic posts in Europe reported an undercurrent of unease over enlargement among allies.

When Talbott met with Primakov on March 12, he made a pitch for both sides to keep their disagreement on NATO enlargement "manageable."

Primakov agreed but he warned that Moscow would be just as opposed to enlargement after the Russian elections and again urged Washington to reconsider its policy. "What I can't understand," he added, "is that even a guy like you is determined to preserve this element of NATO expansion. This is not just a psychological issue for us. It's a security question." Russia would never have cooperated with NATO in Bosnia, he insisted, if NATO were enlarging. He recalled how he had recently testified before the Duma on strategic arms control issues and found the most reformist deputies insisting that Moscow renounce arms control treaties if NATO expands. He again warned that enlargement would have a devastating impact in Russia politically.[38]

Meanwhile, Primakov was also traveling through Western Europe as well as Central and Eastern Europe, warning about the consequences enlargement could have on Russian reform and on Russia's relations with Europe. He, too, was pursuing a strategy of "negotiate and fight." While negotiating with Talbott and the U.S. about the contours of a possible NATO-Russia deal on the one hand, he was pursuing every possibility to dilute or undercut the Alliance consensus and play on divisions within the Alliance by warning of its possible dire consequences. He probed whether countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary would accept more limited forms of NATO membership—such as a so-called "French solution" whereby new members would join NATO's political but not military structures.[39] In addition, the Russian Foreign Minister tried to draw a second, even firmer line against further enlargement down the road. He hinted that Moscow could perhaps tolerate a limited first round of enlargement, so long as new allies did not allow foreign military forces on their soil, and countries like Ukraine and the Baltic states were excluded from consideration of eventual membership.[40]

In Helsinki, Christopher had warned Primakov that Russian efforts to stop NATO enlargement would only lead the U.S. to become more explicit about its commitment. Washington now decided to send a clear signal that there was no turning back. The Secretary was scheduled to visit Moscow in mid-March to prepare Clinton's upcoming trip. He decided to stop in Central Europe on the way to deliver a major statement on NATO enlargement. As Christopher later wrote in his typically understated manner: "The decision to make this statement reflected the Administration's belief that clarity and firmness concerning the U.S. position were our best assets in managing Russia's lingering opposition to that expansion."[41]

On March 20, Christopher delivered the strongest public endorsement of NATO enlargement yet in Prague. The key sentence in his speech read: "NATO has made a commitment to take in new members and it must not and will not keep new democracies in the waiting room forever. NATO enlargement is on track and it will happen." For the first time he also stated publicly that the first round of NATO enlargement would not be the last and that the

U.S. considered the Baltic states and Ukraine eligible candidates.[42] Meeting with Central and East European Foreign Ministers after his speech, he told them that he had wanted to state the U.S. view clearly and directly given the uncertainty inside Russia and in relations with Russia. The U.S. would enlarge NATO and there would be no pullback and no special deals with Moscow.[43] As Christopher later wrote: "The speech marked a turning point in our policy: after it there was no doubt in Central Europe, among our allies, or in Russia that NATO expansion would take place."[44]

The next day, Christopher arrived in Moscow to confront an enraged Primakov. The Russian Foreign Minister told him that the Prague speech was disingenuous and insulting. There were only two possible interpretations: either there had been a change in U.S. policy or Christopher had been speaking without authority from President Clinton. Christopher went over the speech carefully and pointed out that it was consistent with long-standing U.S. policy that enlargement was going to proceed in a deliberate manner. But Primakov continued his attack. "Russia will not accept NATO enlargement," he told the Secretary of State, "and that's not because it has the right of veto on any such enlargement—it's because Russia will defend its interests in this new, worsening geopolitical situation."[45] As Christopher later noted: "He really let me have it."[46]

When Christopher met with Yeltsin the next day in the Kremlin, however, the atmosphere was completely different. It was, Christopher later told his staff, the best meeting he had ever had with Yeltsin. The two men covered a broad range of issues that included Bosnia, the Middle East, China, the upcoming nuclear and G-8 summits, and Yeltsin's Presidential election campaign. It was clear that Yeltsin wanted a successful summit, not a confrontation with the West. During the meeting he did not even mention NATO enlargement, let alone Christopher's Prague speech. As the meeting was ending, the Russian President told Christopher that there was one issue on his mind that he had not raised: NATO enlargement. "It's now clear that we have at least an agreement to disagree on this point," Yeltsin said.[47]

In the run-up to Clinton's trip to Moscow in April, Christopher and Talbott sent the President a joint memo on what to expect. "You are likely to see in Yeltsin the personification of a Russian bear that is, in its own eyes, a wounded bear, but one bent on recovery and reassertion of its rightful place as a great power." They warned that Primakov and other key Yeltsin advisors "are fueling Yeltsin's darkest suspicions about us." In spite of the rhetoric about partnership, they "hold the very Soviet view that politics and history are a zero-sum game; there are only winners and losers" and "every issue between us becomes a test of wills and wiles." The best way to counter this was to rely on the personal chemistry between the two Presidents to keep the relationship on track. "We came away from our meetings with Yeltsin believing that he has not entirely signed on to the world according to Primakov. Yeltsin resists the worst he is hearing about

us and our intentions—because he has a great deal of confidence in you and your personal ties, and because he had rejected the advice of his own isolationists."[48]

Clinton was in Moscow for a so-called P-8 summit arranged to showcase western support for Yeltsin prior to the Russian Presidential elections. When the two Presidents met, Clinton emphasized that the U.S. had no intention of "sidelining" Russia and instead underscored how much the two leaders had already accomplished. "You and I are the first leaders of our two countries after the Cold War. We've done a remarkable job in getting a lot done while being honest about our differences. . . . I want historians fifty years from now to look back on this period and say you and I took full advantage of the opportunity we had. We made maximum use of the extraordinary moment that came with the end of the Cold War."[49] Yeltsin repeatedly referred to the need for a more "equal partnership" but seemed reassured by Clinton's commitment to seek out new ways of working together. The meeting also resulted in an agreement that preserved the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) that would assume a central role in the end game with Moscow on NATO enlargement the following year. Once again, the close personal ties between the two men had helped keep the U.S.-Russian relationship on track.

3. TOUGH LOVE FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

While enlargement was kept off of the public agenda in the run up to the Russian Presidential elections, behind the scenes the Clinton Administration deployed a "tough love" approach to encourage candidate countries to get as prepared as possible for NATO membership. Enlarging the Atlantic Alliance to Central and Eastern Europe would entail the largest peacetime increase in the U.S. commitment to Europe in half a century. This step would require the support of at least 67 U.S. Senators and would inevitably involve close scrutiny of these countries' qualifications on Capitol Hill. The political stakes were high. Rejection by the U.S. Senate would be a disaster for the country involved, the Clinton Administration and the Atlantic Alliance.

The Administration therefore consciously used the carrot of potential NATO membership as a "golden carrot" to encourage the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to consolidate political and economic reform, resolve minority issues and border disputes, and establish civilian control of the military. To be sure, these countries took these steps just because it was in their own interests. But the desire to rejoin the West, including its premier military alliance, was a powerful reinforcement in terms of validating their western credentials. While many of the reforms these countries were undertaking were also critical to qualify for EU membership, the fact that NATO was prepared to move faster, and

the security concerns of these aspirant countries so immediate, put Washington and the Alliance in a position of considerable leverage.

How to exercise that leverage was not always easy to discern. NATO did not have a detailed acquis (or set of detailed criteria) laying out precisely what these countries had to do to qualify as the EU did. NATO's founding fathers had left the Alliance considerable flexibility on this issue. Over the decades, the Alliance had brought in countries at very different levels of political, economic, and military preparedness, and for different strategic reasons. In the course of 1995, the Administration developed what became known as the five "Perry principles," named after the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Bill Perry, democracy, market economies, borders, civilian control of the military, and progress toward compatibility of the armed forces. A version of these had been embraced in the official NATO enlargement study.

But the Alliance's definition of its own strategic interests was also critical. NATO's thinking would crystallize around these two factors—performance and strategic interests—as the benchmarks for Alliance policy and decisionmaking. NSC Senior Director Dan Fried came up with a metaphor that became known as the "Dan Fried SAT Test" in interagency deliberations. Fried compared joining NATO to getting into Harvard, Yale, or another top U.S. university. Meeting the Perry principles, he argued, was like taking the SAT test. If you had an exceptional score, it got your application into the university's admissions office. But a good SAT score alone would not automatically get you into Harvard, and meeting the Perry principles wasn't good enough to get a country into NATO. Solid qualifications helped but at the end of the day Alliance members had to be convinced that a country's admission was in NATO's own best strategic interests. That was a political decision.

But Washington was serious about the performance factor. "NATO membership is not a right," the President had emphasized. "Countries with repressive political systems, countries with designs on their neighbors, countries with militaries unchecked by civilian control or with closed economic systems need not apply."[50] Already in the spring of 1995 Assistant Secretary Holbrooke had been sent to the region to deliver the "tough love" message to these countries that their qualifications would be put under a microscope to see whether they measured up to Western expectations. Holbrooke's message was twofold: The U.S. is committed to enlarging NATO, but it is time for you, too, to roll up your sleeves and get to work if you want to be in the running for an invitation.

At the time the Czech Republic was widely considered the strongest candidate for NATO membership, although it would subsequently lag in meeting NATO standards. Holbrooke had stopped in Prague shortly before becoming Assistant Secretary of State to urge the Czechs to mend their fences with the Germans over the issue of expatriated Germans from the Sudetenland following World War II.[51] Apart from this, Prague was regarded as the farthest along in

the region in terms of reform. Many Czech political leaders were pro-Atlanticist—more so than public opinion in general—with President Havel among the most eloquent voices anywhere on NATO's virtues. The country had neither border nor minority problems. They had joined the post-COCOM regime on technology controls. While the Czech military still had a long way to go in terms of defense restructuring and reform, it was hardly unique in this regard. Visiting NATO headquarters in the spring of 1995, Czech Foreign Minister Zieleniec argued that Prague had the best record of any post-communist state and that joining NATO was a "natural" decision given what it had in common with existing Alliance members.[52]

Hungary's case was less certain. Budapest was the first country to literally punch a hole in the Iron Curtain when Prime Minister Gyula Horn opened the border with Austria to allow East Germans to escape to the West in the fall of 1989. It had also led the push to dissolve the Warsaw Pact. Joszef Antall, the country's first post-communist Prime Minister, had been an outspoken Atlanticist who made NATO membership one of his top goals prior to his death in the fall of 1993. At the same time, a cause for concern was the issue of the Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries resulting from the post-World War I peace settlement and dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, more than two million Hungarians became national minorities in neighboring states. The shadow of Trianon as an "unjust peace" had cast its shadow over Hungarian politics ever since, which had reduced its population and size by about two-thirds. With the collapse of communism, this was precisely one of those ethnic conflicts that Western policymakers feared would again rear its ugly head, and Budapest's initial pronouncements on the issue did not always help inspire confidence.[53]

A new center-left government headed by Prime Minister Gyula Horn came to power in June 1994. Horn and his Foreign Minister, Laszlo Kovacs, pledged to soften Budapest's rhetoric, but they were soon accused by Hungarian conservatives of "selling out" on the minority issue. While Horn and Kovacs were among the most pro-western leaders in the socialist party, they initially seemed less committed to NATO membership. Their economic course also raised doubts about their commitment to reform. Richard Holbrooke, Dan Fried, and David Lipton (from the U.S. Treasury Department) arrived in Budapest in early 1995 to deliver a message that Hungary had to get its house in order if it wanted U.S. support for its NATO candidacy. Horn told Holbrooke he understood what Hungary needed to do to qualify for NATO. He pointed to the introduction of a more austere fiscal and economic policy and a recent ban on arms sales to rogue states and assured Holbrooke that he was committed to resolving the border and minority issues with Slovakia and Romania.[54]

In a separate meeting with Kovacs, the U.S. delegation focused on Budapest's need to resolve its border and minority issues. When Holbrooke tried

to make the point that the U.S. respected Hungary's history, Fried broke in to say: "No we don't. We hate it. When you say Trianon we understand the political and emotional content of what you are trying to say but we want to run screaming out of the room." Everyone laughed, but the Hungarians got the point. The last thing the U.S. wanted was to be drawn into modern versions of their age-old ethnic conflicts.[55] Several weeks later, Prime Minister Horn pulled aside the U.S. Ambassador to Hungary, Donald Blinken, at an embassy reception to tell him that he had gotten the message, that negotiations with Slovakia and Romania were on track, and that he was optimistic but could not guarantee that both treaties might be concluded by mid-March 1995.[56] Shortly thereafter, Hungary and Slovakia reached agreement on a new treaty governing minority rights in both countries.

Romania presented even more questions. It lagged behind other Central and East European neighbors and the reform commitment of Romania's first post-communist President, Ion Iliescu, was far from clear. Romanian political life and civil society had been severely damanged by the despotic rule of Nicolae Ceausescu, which now handicapped Bucharest's efforts at reform. The government included several extremist nationalistic and anti-Semitic parties. It was hardly an ideal NATO candidate. But public support in Romania was strongly pro-western and pro-NATO. Bucharest had made EU and NATO membership a top priority and Romanian diplomats were working hard to make the case that their country was "the Poland of the south" in terms of its strategic weight and regional importance. Moreover, they insisted that Hungary and Romania should enter NATO at the same time in order to increase regional stability and avoid exacerbating bilateral relations.

Meeting with Romanian Foreign Minster Teodor Melescanu, Holbrooke assured him that enlargement was not limited to the Visegrad countries and that the Administration did not want to see a new dividing line on the Romanian-Hungarian border. But he also emphasized that all countries could not come in at the same time. Romania's internal reforms and its relations with Hungary would be critical when it came time to consider Romania's candidacy. Unresolved border and minority issues would preclude the admission of both countries, Holbrooke underscored.[57] Later that day Holbrooke asked President Iliescu how he would explain to the U.S. Senate the presence of right-wing extremists in his government. Iliescu responded defensively and treated Holbrooke to a long-winded lecture on just what Romania had actually accomplished and how western countries, including the United States, continued to discriminate against it.[58] It was an early indication of the troubles Washington would have in getting its message through in Bucharest that what counted was performance.

President Clinton became directly involved in helping Hungary and Romania resolve their bilateral issues. Horn and Iliescu were invited to the

White House for visits in June and September 1995, where Clinton emphasized the need to resolve their bilateral differences if they wanted to be considered for NATO membership. Horn told the President that while his priority was getting Hungary invited to join NATO, he would support having Romania and Hungary join at the same time.[59] In his meeting with Clinton in September, Iliescu also made the case that Romania and Hungary should join together.[60] The breakthrough in Hungarian-Romanian relations would not come for another year, however. But the desire to make NATO's list was a key factor that helped convince both Budapest and Bucharest to reach a compromise in the early fall of 1996 so as not to miss NATO's short list for the first round of enlargement.

The key country, however, was Poland. Its size, strategic importance, and history placed it at the heart of the enlargement debate. It had provided the original impetus for the push for enlargement in the West. But it, too, was hardly an ideal candidate. Warsaw did not have effective civilian control of the Polish military. In this case, the problem started with President Lech Walesa. His view of civilian control over the military was simple: he was elected President in a free, open election and since the military reported to him there was civilian control over the military. Walesa wanted the backing of the military, and directly cultivated ties with the senior officers, thereby undercutting the authority of the Defense Minister he had appointed.

The person and personality of General Tadeuz Wilecki, the head of the Polish General staff, also complicated matters. An old-school, former tank commander, Wilecki was determined to protect the Polish military from what he considered misguided civilians or parliamentarians who, in his view, understood little if anything of strategy, Polish history, or the needs of the Polish army. He was suspicious of the West and did not believe it was serious about extending a defense commitment or that such a guarantee, if extended, was credible. Wilecki would often lecture visitors on how Poland had been mistaken to rely on Western powers to come to its defense in the past and sketch out his preferred alternative—a new Central European security confederation from the Baltic to the Black Sea under Polish leadership. He aspired to be a modern-day Pilsudski—and proudly displayed a bust of the Polish leader from the 1920s on his desk.

This was hardly NATO's ideal. The issue came to a head during the fall of 1994 when Walesa attended a dinner at Drawsko, a military training ground in Western Poland. For months Walesa's Defense Minister, former Admiral Piotr Kolodziejczyk, had been trying to bring Wilecki under his control. In the middle of the dinner Walesa polled the Generals regarding Kolodziejczyk's competence. The Generals voted overwhelmingly against the Defense Minister. Polish papers were soon full of accusations of an alleged "coup."[61] While a parliamentary investigation concluded that such allegations were exaggerated, they also

concluded that Poland lacked effective civilian control over the military. When the Parliament passed new legislation establishing such control, Walesa refused to sign it. It lay dormant until the new Polish President, Alexsandr Kwasniewski, signed it in early 1996. Wilecki continued to resist the plan and was not removed until shortly before the NATO Madrid summit.

Another question mark over Poland's candidacy for NATO was the Polish post-communist left's commitment, or lack thereof, to the Alliance. Following the left's return to power in the fall of 1993, Walesa had insisted on appointing the foreign and defense ministers to guarantee Poland's pro-western course. In January 1995, Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski resigned and claimed that Prime Minister Pawlak favored neutrality and that his post-communist government "simply dislikes the West" and "will never be convinced of the Western option." Russia, he added, was using those in Poland's leftist parties who had business interests or intelligence ties in the East to "disturb our attempts to join NATO."[62] To some observers it raised the specter of the kind of unstable politics that had characterized interwar Central and Eastern Europe and proven damaging to democratic rule.

It was against this background that Holbrooke and Fried arrived in Warsaw. While praising Poland for its overall progress, Holbrooke told Walesa that Poland had an image problem it needed to fix. Political infighting and the lack of civilian control over the military were raising concerns about the country's political stability. Warsaw also needed to stay the course on economic reform and stop arms sales to rogue states. Walesa, unfazed, thanked Holbrooke for his advice and admitted that after 50 years of communism, Poland's democracy might be somewhat less developed than in the U.S. But, he insisted, these were "technical problems" and that the real issue was when the West would abandon its illusions about Russia and enlarge NATO.[63] Pawlak, in contrast, was at pains to make clear that his government remained committed to political and economic reform.[64] Shortly thereafter, Pawlak traveled to Washington to reassure Christopher that the Polish left, too, supported NATO membership. Pawlak also committed to stopping Polish arms sales to rogue states, and an agreement to that effect was concluded later that spring. [65]

In Poland Holbrooke also took part in a ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The legacy of the Holocaust was becoming an important issue in the U.S. debate on enlargement. After World War II, few if any of these countries had come to terms with their own role in the Holocaust. Confronting this legacy now became a test of whether these countries shared the common values NATO stood for. Arriving in the U.S. in the summer of 1994, Polish Ambassador Jerzy Kozminski quickly concluded that while no one said it directly, Poland could not get into NATO without tackling these problems. Observing the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Kozminski watched as an event he believed

should have been focused on Germany's past behavior ended up highlighting Polish anti-Semitism.[66] Dealing with the Holocaust would become one of the hardest issues for Poland in the entire NATO enlargement debate.

In April 1995, the first bombshell went off when eight of the most influential American Senators and Congressmen from both the Republican and Democratic parties wrote Secretary of State Christopher to complain about the problems that Americans of Jewish origin and Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe were facing regarding the restitution of property confiscated by the Nazis and then nationalized under communism.[67] It was interpreted—correctly—as a sign that Poland and other candidate countries had to deal satisfactorily with this issue if they wanted to get into NATO. A second bombshell went off in early June 1995, when Walesa refused to disassociate himself from anti-Semitic remarks made by a Polish Roman Catholic priest and former Walesa advisor, Father Henryk Jankowski, while the Polish President sat in the congregation.[68] Walesa initially claimed that the "acoustics were bad" in the church and he was not sure what the priest had actually said. When Walesa finally issued a statement condemning the remarks, it was too little too late to quiet the storm in the West.[69]

Walesa was scheduled to meet Clinton in San Francisco, California in July 1995 during the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. The White House made it clear that Poland had to address this issue if the meeting was to take place. To further complicate matters, Ambassador Kozminski received word that there could be two anti-Walesa demonstrations in San Francisco—the first by American-Jewish groups and the second by local gay groups in response to critical remarks the Polish President had made about homosexuals. NSC Senior Director Fried called Kozminski from U.S. Air Force One to try to defuse the issue. They agreed that Walesa would first meet with American-Jewish leaders who were flying to San Francisco to confront the Polish President. Only then would the President receive Walesa. Walesa met with leaders of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and condemned anti-Semitism but refrained from criticizing Jankowski. The AJC issued a subsequent press release expressing its "disappointment" with Walesa's remarks, but the meeting with the American President went forward.[70] Kozminski returned to Washington further convinced that Warsaw needed to resolve the lingering issue from the Holocaust to strengthen its NATO candidacy.[71] Kozminski would work diligently over the next three years to resolve many of these issues. His role was critical in building a new, more positive relationship between Poland and the American Jewish community that would eventually culminate in the American Jewish Committee and other American Jewish groups endorsing Polish membership in NATO during the Senate ratification debate.

In November 1995, Walesa was defeated in a bitterly fought Presidential campaign by the socialist candidate, Alexander Kwasniewski. The Nobel

Laureate, who had defeated the Soviets, had now been defeated at the ballot box by a former communist. The alarm bells went off in Washington. Poland was the engine of U.S. strategy in the region and for U.S. public support. With a former communist at the helm, both were now put on hold. When Clinton called Walesa to offer his condolences, the Polish President warned, "You won't be able to count on the communists."[72]

But Kwasniewski had won precisely because he had repackaged himself as a social democrat with economic and foreign policies akin to those of Walesa, including on NATO. During the Polish Presidential debates he had distanced himself from earlier critical remarks on NATO.[73] Kwasniewski and his team immediately assured Washington that Poland's foreign policy goals would not change. When President Clinton called Kwasniewski to congratulate him, the Polish President emphasized that he was just as committed as his predecessor to joining NATO—"not [as] a game directed against Russia" but as a way to improve pan-European cooperation.[74] Speaking before the North Atlantic Council on January 17, 1996, the Polish President concluded an eloquent statement on why Warsaw sought Alliance membership by stating: "Poland will not disappoint NATO. I hope that the Alliance will not frustrate the hopes of the Poles."[75]

Kwasniewski was barely in office, however, when his Prime Minister, Jozef Oleksy, was accused of being a KGB informer. The evidence against Oleksy turned out to be thin, but he resigned amidst fears that Poland was penetrated by Russian intelligence moles. Warsaw was now tainted by accusations of being too close to Moscow, and the seventh Polish Prime Minister in six years had been forced to resign. But Kwasniewski and Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati stepped up their efforts to show the Clinton Administration that they were just as good Atlanticists as their predecessors.[76] In March, Kwasniewski sent his national security advisor, Marek Siwiec, to Washington for private discussions. Siwiec's message was simple: give Kwasniewski a chance to pass the exam. In April, Foreign Minster Rosati arrived in Washington to meet with senior U.S. officials. Gone was Walesa's tough rhetoric about using NATO enlargement to cage the Russian bear. In its place was a new tone emphasizing enlargement as the means to unify Europe while reaching out to Moscow. It was identical to that of the Clinton Administration.[77]

Washington's rapprochement with Kwasniewski was not complete until the Polish President visited Washington in early July 1996. A day before he departed for the U.S., Kwasniewski invited American Ambassador Nick Rey over for late afternoon drinks. Pressed by Kwasniewski on what he should try to achieve in Washington, Rey said: "Mr. President, you must prove that Commies don't have horns."[78] Kwasniewski passed the test. In the Oval office he told Clinton: "President Reagan helped in bringing about the end of the Soviet Union; President Bush helped reunify Germany. You, Mr. President have the historic

challenge of enlarging NATO, thus unifying Europe and completing the changes we began in 1989." He continued: "This is not anything against Russia but for European integration and stability." The Polish President pointed out that whereas the American President had visited the eastern half of a divided Europe as a student twenty years earlier, he had come to the U.S. around the same time as a young Polish student to see what the West was like. "Now we, our generation, can end these divisions once and for all," he told the President.[79] Poland had regained its good name in U.S. thinking and policy.

One country that failed to address its problems and disqualified itself from the first round of enlargement was Slovakia. Following the "Velvet Divorce"—the peaceful breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993 into separate Czech and Slovak Republics—Slovakia was widely considered to be a front runner in the enlargement race. But the increasingly anti-democratic tactics of Slovakia's first post-independence Prime Minister, Vladimir Meciar, undercut and eventually destroyed his country's chances of joining its neighbors as a candidate for NATO enlargement at the Madrid summit.

In late February 1995, Holbrooke and Fried arrived in Bratislava to deliver the first of several warnings to Meciar about the consequences of his behavior for Slovakia's NATO bid. In a dinner with Holbrooke on February 23, Meciar insisted that he was committed to successfully resolving the Hungarian minority issue and achieving NATO membership. Questioned by Holbrooke and Fried about the anti-democratic methods he was using to fight his political opponents, he argued that he was simply engaging in hard-ball politics. "I know I am a tough opponent but I don't play foul," Meciar claimed, adding that he did not need to "use undemocratic methods" to defeat his political opponents. He told Holbrooke, "I know a club member must respect its rules and that a club must try to prevent anyone from introducing disruption into its ranks. We want to prepare Slovakia to be a reliable partner."[80]

But the evidence of Meciar's undemocratic behavior continued to mount—as did U.S. warnings about the consequences. When Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Joe Kruzel and Fried were back in Bratislava for bilateral U.S.-Slovak defense talks later that spring, Slovak President Kovac described how Meciar was telling people that the EU and NATO would turn a blind eye to Slovakia's internal politics. Kruzel and Fried emphasized that such an assumption was "dead wrong."[81] Despite protests from the parliamentary opposition, Slovak civil society, and the West, Meciar's anti-democratic behavior only increased. In August 1995, Kovac's son was kidnapped. Armed thugs halted the younger Kovac's car outside of Bratislava, blindfolded and beat him, poured whiskey down his throat, drove him across the border to Austria and dumped him, unconscious, outside a police station near the Slovak-Austrian border. He was wanted in the West on charges of fraud—but the evidence soon suggested that this was a dirty-tricks operation carried out at Meciar's behest to discredit

the Slovak President. In the spring of 1996 a key witness to the kidnapping was killed by a car bomb.

In a meeting with President Kovac in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in August 1995, President Clinton noted that the U.S. did not take sides in political contests and that who won or lost elections was not Washington's business. "But observing the democratic rules of the game is," he emphasized.[82] Later that autumn the EU and the U.S. officially demarched Bratislava over the growing anti-democratic trend in the country. Meciar continued to insist that such criticism would not harm Bratislava's chances of joining the West.[83] But the West was drawing a different conclusion. The U.S. State Department's annual report on human rights detailed "disturbing trends away from democratic principles" in the country.[84] When Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Kramer and NSC Senior Director Fried returned to Bratislava in the spring of 1996, their message was that NATO enlargement was "values driven" and that Bratislava would not be given "the benefit of the doubt" when it came to decisions on NATO membership.[85]

Slovakia was no longer a credible candidate for NATO membership. While Slovak officials would allege that Bratislava was dropped as part of a "secret deal" with Moscow—an allegation that Meciar made to Ambassador Madeleine Albright in July 1996—the reality is that there never was an official internal U.S. decision to disqualify Slovakia or to take it off some internal list.[86] There was no need to. Slovakia had disqualified itself. By the time the U.S. government started official internal deliberations on which countries it could support for an initial round of enlargement in early 1997, there was nobody left in the U.S. government to support Slovakia's candidacy for NATO at the upcoming summit in Madrid.

4. UKRAINE AND THE BALTIC STATES

The Clinton Administration had pledged that NATO enlargement would enhance security and stability throughout Europe as a whole, including for those countries not invited to join in the first round. Nowhere was the test of that pledge more poignant than in the case of the Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—and Ukraine. While they were often lumped together in the minds of many Western policymakers as "former Soviet Republics," in reality they had little in common.

The three small Baltic states had been connected to the West through travel and commerce since the days of the Hanseatic League. Rival regional powers had fought to control their ports for centuries, resulting in alternating occupations by the Swedes, Danes, Germans, and Russians. Lithuania had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth that had once reigned across the region from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Following the Russian Empire's collapse at the

end of World War I, the Baltics emerged as independent states along with Poland and Finland. They were the object of one of the great geopolitical crimes of the 20th century—the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed in 1939 on the eve of World War II. Afterward, they were annexed by Stalin and for forty years Moscow pursued a strategy of forced industrialization that settled large numbers of Russians speaking in Estonia and Latvia. The Baltic desire for independence never died out, however, and the independence movements in these countries played a crucial role in toppling the USSR in 1991. Having escaped Moscow's grasp, these states were determined to do whatever it took to integrate into the West.

Ukraine, on the other hand, had been part of the Russian empire for a century. Kiev was in many ways the cradle of the Russian state, not "just" another imperial possession acquired over time. Even during Soviet times many Russians accepted the fact that the Baltic states were more Western and different. But Ukraine was considered an integral part of Russia proper. While the Baltic states were part of Russia's window to the West, Ukraine was even more significant strategically because of its resources and because it served as a springboard for Russian influence into Europe. As Zbigniew Brzezinski put it: "It cannot be stressed strongly enough that without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an Empire."[87]

There was one more basic difference. Whereas the Baltic states were united in their desire to integrate with the West, Ukraine was internally unstable and divided on many issues, including its national identity and future geopolitical orientation. Those uncertainties in Ukraine posed some tricky policy challenges for the U.S. and its allies as the Alliance moved forward on enlargement. The last thing NATO wanted was for enlargement to further divide and isolate Ukraine, pushing it back into Moscow's embrace. Occupying a swath of territory nearly 1,000 kilometers wide separating Central Europe from Russia, Ukraine provided the strategic depth that made it possible for NATO to enlarge without the forward deployment of allied military forces.

Kiev's own views on NATO enlargement were a combination of hopes and fears.[88] As Foreign Minister Hennadiy Udovenko put it to Talbott: NATO and Russia are competitors whereas NATO and Ukraine were not.[89] Ukrainian officials supported a strong NATO as a key pillar of European security and a counterweight to Russian pressure that allowed them to consolidate their independence and sovereignty. Publicly, Kiev supported the right of the Central and East Europeans to join NATO. Ukrainian officials underscored that they did not fear NATO's presence on their borders. On the contrary, an enlarged Euro-Atlantic community could facilitate expanded ties with the West. They emphasized that, over time, they wanted their country to become a "European country" in the fullest sense of the word. In private, some Ukrainian officials

underscored that their long-term goal was to join NATO but that they did not dare articulate it publicly since it was unrealistic in the foreseeable future and would only further complicate relations with Moscow.[90]

But these long-term hopes were tempered by short-term concerns. Kiev saw itself as the target of Russian political and economic pressure and feared that NATO enlargement could give Moscow a pretext to step up such pressure. It also feared that NATO enlargement, if not handled carefully, could provoke Moscow to deploy additional conventional or even tactical nuclear weapons in the region. Having dismantled its own nuclear deterrent, the prospect of NATO provoking a Russian deployment of additional nuclear weapons on Ukraine's border was a political nightmare. Kiev was also worried about lukewarm Western support for its independence and feared that its own security could be sacrificed as the price for Moscow's acquiescence to NATO enlargement.[91]

As NATO moved forward on enlargement, Kiev tried to come up with a policy that maximized its chances for westward integration yet minimized the dangers of increased Russian pressure. Several Ukrainian desiderata nonetheless emerged.[92] One was that NATO enlargement proceed slowly. As first Deputy Foreign Minister Tarasyuk put it: "the later [the expansion], the better."[93] Another was that the Alliance restrict the military component of NATO enlargement in order to avoid possible Russian pressure for countermeasures. In the summer of 1996 Ukraine tabled a nuclear free zone proposal for Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, Ukraine also wanted to strengthen its own relations with NATO and develop its own "special relationship" with the Alliance in parallel to enlargement. Kiev, in the words of one Ukrainian official, wanted a NATO-Ukraine relationship that would include "everything short of Article V"—that is, everything short of an explicit security guarantee.

As it became clear that NATO enlargement was moving forward, Kiev requested the first of several consultations to discuss the consequences of NATO enlargement on Ukraine. Already in June 1995, President Kuchma had told NATO Secretary General Claes that Kiev was interested in a "special" NATO-Ukraine relationship similar to what was being offered to Russia.[94] As the Alliance completed its enlargement study in the fall of 1995, Kiev forwarded its own first cut of ideas on a NATO-Ukraine relationship.[95] In the summer of 1996, Ukrainian Foreign Minster Udovenko wrote Secretary of State Christopher requesting U.S. support to further institutionalize a NATO-Ukraine relationship "to support regional stability during the expansion of the Alliance and to prevent new lines of division from arising in Europe."[96]

The U.S. response was positive. When Ukrainian National Security Advisor Voloymyr Horbulyn arrived in Washington in September 1996, Talbott assured him there would be "no sign on NATO's door saying that the Baltic states and Ukraine are not welcome" and committed to developing a NATO-Ukraine relationship.[97] In September, the U.S. announced the creation of a U.S.-Ukrainian

Commission modeled after the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. In mid-October Foreign Minster Udovenko handed Talbott two non-papers containing Kiev's ideas of how to structure a NATO-Ukraine relationship and in early November Kiev handed over a draft text on a NATO-Ukraine charter to Ambassador Hunter and Secretary Solana.[98] For Washington and its allies, the key questions were how to get Kiev to focus on substance rather than mere symbolism and how to calibrate the NATO-Ukraine relationship so that it had real meat on the bones but was a bit less "special" than the relationship NATO wanted to create with Moscow.

The policy challenge with the Baltic states was different. Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt had coined the phrase "the Baltic litmus test" in an article in *Foreign Affairs*.[99] He had written that the Baltic issue was a test of whether Russia had truly become a democratic state. But it was a litmus test for the West as well. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania wanted full Alliance membership as soon as possible. These three countries had suffered enormously under Soviet rule. There was hardly a Baltic family that did not have a story about a family member deported to Siberia. Although Soviet troops had withdrawn, the nearest Russian military bases were just across the border. Unlike other Warsaw Pact countries, the tiny Baltic states had to build their militaries from scratch. These states feared they would be the first target if a new neo-imperialist Russian government returned to power. They brushed aside Western arguments that their quest would undercut reform in Moscow and pointed out that if they had followed the same Western advice in 1991, they might have never achieved their independence.

At the same time, there were few countries that were initially less qualified, and whose aspirations for NATO enjoyed less political support in the West. Even the most avid and early supporters of NATO enlargement rarely mentioned the Baltic states. Many in the West worried about strong Russian opposition to Baltic NATO membership. Others worried whether the Baltic states could be defended given their exposed situation. Large Russian-speaking populations in Estonia and Latvia raised doubts over how stable and cohesive these countries were. On a flight to Warsaw from Cracow in January 1995 following the commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, Holbrooke asked Estonian Foreign Minister Juri Luik: "Look, are you guys really serious about trying to get into NATO?" Luik responded that while he recognized the hurdles that lay ahead, NATO membership was indeed a top priority for all three Baltic states.

The focal point of Baltic lobbying was Washington. The U.S. was the leading power in NATO. It had never recognized the illegal annexation of these countries and its policies were seen as being shaped less by *Realpolitik* than the major European powers.[100] The Baltic states sent their top diplomats to Washington. They excelled at presenting their countries as the underdog in a

David versus Goliath struggle with Moscow. The Latvian Ambassador to Washington, Ojars Kalnins, was a public relations executive from Chicago. Estonian Ambassador, Tom Ilves, was a former journalist who had grown up in New Jersey before working for Radio Free Europe. Both had given up their U.S. citizenship to work for their homelands. The Lithuanian Ambassador, Alfonsas Eidintas, was a prominent historian as well as an avid basketball player, the latter being Lithuania's national passion. He once showed up to a meeting with Talbott with a broken arm from playing basketball and said: "I got this knocking on NATO's door."

They were assisted by Baltic-Americans, many of whom had returned to their homelands to help rebuild their countries. It was not unusual for U.S. officials to sit down with Baltic delegations and discover that their counterparts were from Cleveland, Chicago, or Los Angeles. The Baltic-American community was small but well organized and worked closely with other groups to build political support for NATO membership. When State Department officials briefed Congress on U.S. policy, they often found that Baltic-American representatives had either just preceded them or were standing outside ready to make the case for the U.S. to provide more security assistance. They were relentless and single-minded in their focus on getting into NATO. As Estonian President Lennart Meri put it to an audience at CSIS following meetings with the President and his national security team: "You are probably wondering what we talked about at those meetings. Well, I'll tell you: security, security, security."[101]

The Baltic states were not the only countries pressing the Administration on how it intended to handle the Baltic issue in connection with NATO enlargement. Their Nordic neighbors were just as keen to know. Nordic support for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was a matter of moral sympathy as well as strategic interest. Nordic leaders were afraid that NATO countries would try to saddle them with the primary responsibility for Baltic security. Suggestions by both British and German officials along these lines set off the alarm bells in the region.[102] Last but by no means least, these countries worried that NATO enlargement, if mishandled, could lead to a new Cold War in Europe that would be disproportionately felt in the Baltic region, where military countermeasures taken by Moscow were most likely to occur.[103]

For all of these reasons, the Nordic countries became nervous as it became clear that the U.S. was moving forward with enlargement. They responded by stepping up their own security assistance to the Baltic states and by speaking out on the right of the Baltic states to join NATO. But they also insisted that only the U.S. and NATO could provide a security guarantee. As Finnish President Martii Ahtisaari told Secretary Christopher: "Some in Europe have suggested that the Nordic states provide security guarantees to the Baltics." But he added "This is not realistic. The Nordics can do much to help the Baltics, but the Nordics cannot realistically guarantee Baltic security.[104] As Swedish Permanent

Undersecretary Jan Eliasson emphasized in a conversation with U.S. Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff in early 1996: "It is better to leave to us the non-security measures."[105]

The Clinton Administration knew it needed a Baltic policy. The question was what it should be. In March 1995 Vice President Al Gore had visited Tallinn to underscore American support for Baltic independence and Western integration in principle.[106] But a general assertion that the Baltic states were eligible for NATO membership some day in the future was a first step but not a policy. The real question was what the U.S. was prepared to do to ensure that Baltic security was not undercut in the short-term as enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe took place, and what steps it would take to improve the chances of these countries joining the Alliance at some later date. The closer the Alliance came to launching the enlargement process, the more urgent an answer to these questions became. Yet the Administration remained divided internally. As a State Department memo to Holbrooke noted on April 14, 1995, interagency discussions over how positive Washington should be on the Baltics joining NATO were stalemated.[107] Shortly thereafter, Holbrooke turned to the memo's author, Chris Dell, and told him that the differences in the U.S. government on how to handle the Baltic issue were simply too large. "This is a year too early," he said. "We have to put it aside and come back to it later."

By the end of the year, however, National Security Advisor Lake and Talbott were adamant that the U.S. needed a more clear-cut policy. After yet another round of inconclusive interagency deliberation, NSC Senior Director Dan Fried turned to the State Department's new Office Director for Nordic/Baltic Affairs, Carol van Voorst, and said in frustration: "Carol, you have got to figure this out. We need a policy. Do something." They agreed that van Voorst and Dan Hamilton, a European expert that Holbrooke had brought back with him to Washington from Bonn, would take the lead in drafting a strategy with bilateral and multilateral tracks to help integrate the Baltic states into the West. It would be called the Baltic Action Plan (BAP) and they would use Lake and Talbott to ram it through a hesitant bureaucracy.

About the same time, the first draft of an article that a RAND colleague, Bob Nurick, and I had authored, entitled "NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States," landed on the desks of senior policymakers in Washington. RAND's growing role in the NATO enlargement debate had led a number of Danish and other Nordic diplomats to visit Santa Monica and push us to answer the question of what would happen to the Baltic states if NATO enlarged. Having spent time as an exchange student in Denmark, I was interested in the Nordic and Baltic region but did not consider myself an expert. But the Estonian Ambassador in Washington, Tom Ilves, who had been a colleague of mine at Radio Free Europe in the 1980s, was also pushing us to address the Baltic issue. At the invitation of Danish Defense Minister Hans Haekkerup, Nurick and I

toured the Baltic states, and then wrote an article laying out a strawman strategy on how to deal with the issue. We argued that since the Baltic states would not be in the first round of NATO enlargement, it was all the more important for the West to have a strategy. "If mishandled, the Baltic issue had the potential to derail NATO enlargement, redraw the security map in northeastern Europe and provoke a crisis between the West and Russia."[108] To avoid this, the article proposed creating a U.S.-Nordic alliance to implement a five-part strategy to expand Western cooperation with the Baltic states to mute any negative fallout from NATO enlargement. Much to our surprise, the RAND paper had an immediate impact in terms of framing the policy debate. Talbott handed out copies to visitors as an example of the kind of ideas the U.S. was considering and used it to push the government's internal thinking as well.

By the spring of 1996, an initial cut of the Administration's Baltic Action Plan was complete. But the Baltic states were getting more, not less, nervous. A number of Russian press reports speculated that if the Baltic states tried to join NATO, Moscow might retaliate, including with military steps. Two Russian analysts from the Institute of Defense Studies, associated with the Defense Ministry and intelligence circles, published a report suggesting that if NATO enlarged, Moscow should preemptively intervene in the Baltic states.[109] One of the authors subsequently gave an interview to the Estonian daily *Postimees* on April 27, where he warned that Estonian accession would bring about immediate military action by Moscow—and in the meantime Moscow would "nudge our nuclear weapons as close to NATO as possible: to create a "new political-military nuclear curtain."

The Western press also speculated that Baltic exclusion from NATO would be the price Moscow received for acquiescing to NATO enlargement. As the former Finnish diplomat Max Jacobson had warned: "NATO is not going to sign a secret protocol with Russia on dividing Eastern Europe, but the actual outcome of an expansion that admits Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic—while leaving the three Baltic states indefinitely outside—would be in effect to tell Moscow: 'These are ours, the rest is yours.' That is how the Russians would interpret it."[110] As one Western commentator warned: "NATO Beware—Baltic Iceberg Ahead."[111]

Meeting in Riga in late May, the three Baltic Presidents, Lennart Meri, Guntis Ulmanis, and Algirdas Brazauskas, sent President Clinton a letter asking the U.S. to publicly affirm its commitment to eventual Baltic membership in NATO.[112] In handing the letter over to the U.S. Ambassador in Riga, Larry Napper, President Ulmanis said he was confident that Washington would not sell out the Baltic states but worried that some of Washington's European allies might be tempted to exclude these countries from NATO in the future and urged the U.S. to reign in such proclivities.[113] On June 28, President Clinton met with the three Baltic Presidents in the White House. Ulmanis opened the

conversation by stating: "It has been said that in the 20th century God is dead. I nevertheless believe that the values under which Western civilization has united since the Bible have given testimony to a common God. NATO and the EU have come into existence precisely on the basis of those values and with the goal of preserving them."

President Clinton responded that the U.S. wanted to see the full integration of the Baltic states into the West and that there would be no "secret deals" with the Russians. NATO's door would remain open after the first round, he continued. But he left little hope that the Baltic states would be among the first NATO candidates. "Unfortunately I cannot say to you today what you want me to say."[114] When they met with Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole, he was no clearer on where the Baltics fit into his thinking either. As an editorial in *The Washington Post* noted after the Baltic Presidents' visit, neither the Administration nor the Republicans in Congress had an answer for how to handle the Baltic issue as NATO expanded. "Like the smallest kids on the playground determined to join in the game, the Baltic Republics have repeatedly raised their hand first—first for independence, first to apply to NATO, first to demolish communism and build democracy and send peacekeeping battalions to Bosnia. They are polite, but that is not the same as accommodating. They want to know why they can't play too."[115]

Over the summer, the Administration finalized its Baltic Action Plan. Its premise was clear: U.S. goals for the Baltic states were the same as for Central Europe and Eastern Europe—integration into the West. At the same time, it noted that "for geographical and historical reasons" this goal was more difficult to attain and detailed a three-track approach based on expanded U.S.-Baltic cooperation; greater U.S.-Nordic cooperation in support of Baltic efforts to integrate into the EU and NATO; and enhanced U.S. involvement in helping to manage Baltic-Russian differences. When Deputy Secretary Talbott shared it with the Baltic Ambassadors on August 28, their reaction was cautious and reserved. They knew it was a plan to shelter them from the fallout of NATO enlargement, not one to actually get them into the Alliance. Tom Ilves, the Estonian Ambassador and later Foreign Minister, joked that it should have been called the "Baltic Electoral Plan," since it was unveiled only a few months before the November 1996 U.S. Presidential elections.[116]

That evening the Latvian Ambassador to Washington, Ojars Kalnins, wrote in his journal,

> Once again we are in a position where we can write our own ticket, as long as we have drive, persistence and originality. The Americans have given us their best shot in terms of providing a plan that will address our security needs. Their "best shot" being one that does not provide security guarantees, no hard promises on NATO but a complex of programs and

> assistance wherein the hope is that the whole will appear to exceed the sum of the parts and convey the impression of security.

While acknowledging that some of his Baltic colleagues were more cautious and had even dismissed the BAP as a kind of "booby prize," Kalnins wrote:

> I realize that the decision to push full and strong for Baltic membership in NATO is highly unlikely from this or any other administration under the present circumstances. . . . Getting NATO to expand at all will be a battle both in the U.S. and in Europe, and getting the Balts on the front line of expansion merely compounds the problem. Given these realities, we need to squeeze out what we can under the circumstances. Pushing at all times for full NATO membership (we need to do that to maintain maximum leverage) we need to simultaneously nickel and dime the Americans to provide us with programs that will compensate us for the lack of NATO membership.[117]

Shortly thereafter, U.S. Secretary of Defense Bill Perry made it official. Perry was in Copenhagen attending a conference hosted by Danish Defense Minister Hans Haekkerup, perhaps the staunchest supporter of Baltic membership in the Alliance. The U.S. Secretary of Defense was worried that the Baltic states' expectations on enlargement were too high and that the U.S. ran the risk of stringing these countries along, thereby creating an even greater disappointment down the road. As he read his draft speech, he decided the moment had come to tell the Baltics the truth. His staff watched as he rewrote his speech by hand during lunch, wondering what their boss was doing. After lunch, Perry strode to the podium and told the audience that while the United States supported the independence of the Baltic states, "they are not yet ready to take on the Article V responsibilities of NATO membership." He added that they were making progress in that direction and "we should all work to hasten the day that they will be ready for membership." NATO's reply to those countries that had applied for membership but would not be accepted, he concluded, "is not 'no,' it is 'not yet.' "[118]

5. "A LONG DANCE WITH NATASHA"

On June 3, 1996 Lech Walesa visited President Clinton in the White House. The former Polish President described to Clinton a debate he had recently participated in at the University of Chicago on NATO enlargement. He understood that many Americans opposed enlargement—because "they don't want to die for Eastern Europe." He told the President he had tried to persuade his audience that the best way to ensure that Americans would never again risk their

lives in Europe was to enlarge NATO but with mixed results. "So it's clear that some Americans are opposed to enlargement and that it is not easy for you," Walesa remarked.

"You know where I stand on this," President Clinton replied. "We should enlarge NATO; we will have the support of the American people for this and most Europeans will support us, too. Since we first discussed this, you and I, I've persuaded most of our European allies that we should move ahead and I've stressed that there will be no veto by Russia nor by anyone else."

Walesa underscored that the key decision lay in Washington's hands. "It all depends on what you in America decide. The Europeans—France, England, the others—will not decide this question. You will. We Europeans complain about you but look to you to decide things," he added. "Without a clear signal Europe will lose its way. That would be terrible because now, for the first time, Europe has a chance, a unique chance, for unity." Walesa added that he knew how important Clinton's support had been. "You have launched this and done a lot. The direction is clear and that is good."

But the Polish President also lamented the fact that, in his view, the West had in the past missed several opportunities to act. "That's because democracy has trouble making the tough decisions; democracy makes easy decisions but not difficult ones." He urged President Clinton to move forward as quickly as possible after the Russian Presidential elections. "Don't waste this opportunity," he told the President." Of course the delays are not America's fault. The Europeans have been slow throughout. And you think, why should we worry about Europe if the West Europeans don't? But you must make the hard choices, even for the Europeans, because the Europeans themselves won't or can't."

Walesa continued that Bosnia had again shown why U.S. leadership was needed. "The Europeans could decide nothing. You had to make the decisive moves. And you did and these were right. He urged Clinton to do the same on NATO enlargement. "Here is where the decisions must be made. Make them and the Europeans will shout for a while but accept them," the former Polish President concluded. Warsaw would support the United States but its patience, too, was wearing thin. "Poland is like a ballet dancer, a beautiful dancer in a theater or a café. Poland has nice legs and Yeltsin is tempted. But we are safer with someone else," Walesa told the President. The key question was: "How long will Poland keep dancing on a thin line, like a ballerina, without knowing with whom to dance? She wants NATO and the EU as her partners. Yeltsin can be very jealous. A jealous Natasha."

"Poland will have a long dance with the right partners, a good dance," the President assured Walesa, adding that "every time I see Boris Yeltsin from now on I'll be sure to think of Natasha." "A jealous Natasha," Walesa emphasized.[119]

On June 7, 1996, NSC advisor Tony Lake handed Secretary Warren Christopher a NSC paper. It was entitled "NATO Enlargement Game Plan:

June 96 to June 97." It contained the White House's game plan for pulling together the different strands of the Administration's efforts at NATO reform culminating in a NATO summit at which the Alliance would announce France's reintegration with the Alliance, extend invitations to the first new members from Central and Eastern Europe, and complete an agreement with Moscow launching a new, cooperative NATO-Russia relationship. The overall theme of the summit, which would notionally take place in the spring of 1997, would be the creation of a "new NATO" that had adapted itself for the post–Cold War era. It was, the paper argued, the culmination of President Clinton's initial call at the January 1994 NATO summit for the Alliance to recast itself for the new post–Cold War era.

The historic centerpiece of the summit would be the decision to invite former Warsaw Pact countries to join NATO. "Currently, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are the aspiring members most frequently cited," the NSC paper noted. The Baltic states "lack the votes for now" and "the Romanians are not ready (though it is possible an acceleration of reforms may compel a second look)." Bulgaria "was not interested" and Slovakia had "fallen back into the pack" due to Meciar's authoritarian behavior. Slovenia, the authors concluded, was a dark-horse candidate. "Although previously inward-looking, the Slovenes have recently expressed serious interest in pursuing NATO membership."

By making the central theme of the Madrid summit "adaptation" as opposed to "enlargement," the Administration hoped to enlist the support of allies such as France who considered the Alliance's internal reform more important. It could also take "some of the sting" out of Russia's response "by demonstrating to Moscow that NATO has indeed been transformed from its Cold War structure and is, in fact, becoming increasingly 'European' and focused on new missions such as peacekeeping and crisis management." The paper concluded: "While unlikely to fully assuage Russian doubts about enlargement, this shift in emphasis, 'the new NATO,' could help pave the way for a more graceful Russian acceptance of the inevitable."[120] On July 22, the Deputies Committee endorsed the NSC's game plan.[121]

The Administration's move did not take place in a political vacuum. With the U.S. Presidential election campaign approaching, Republican criticism was getting louder. On June 4, Dole, Gingrich, and Lech Walesa—flanked by a phalanx of key Republican members of Congress—held a press conference in the U.S. Capitol to unveil the "NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act."[122] Gingrich blasted the Administration for "already being several years behind schedule" on enlargement. "I see no excuse and no reason for blocking this act, for slowing this act down. Now is the time to do it."[123] Three weeks later, Dole castigated the Administration for pursuing a foreign policy of "indecision, vacillation and weakness" and called for NATO and a tougher policy toward Russia.

If elected President, Dole promised to bring Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into NATO by 1998—the 60th anniversary of the betrayal of Munich, the fiftieth anniversary of the communist takeover, and the 39th anniversary of the Soviet invasion in 1968. "It is an outrage," Dole concluded, "that the patriots who threw off the chains of Soviet bondage are told that they must wait."[124]

On July 3, Yeltsin was reelected as President of Russia with nearly 55 percent of the popular vote. Clinton called him on the evening of July 5 to congratulate him: "I'm proud of how hard you fought back after being down in the polls." Yeltsin thanked Clinton for his support: "I appreciate that throughout the campaign up to the last day you said the right things and never sent the wrong signals."[125] Shortly thereafter, Mamedov was in Washington to discuss NATO-Russia issues. Talbott arranged for Mamedov to meet with President Clinton in the Oval Office. Clinton told Mamedov how happy he was with Yeltsin's election victory. "We were dancing in the White House after the results came in," the President said. Mamedov responded: "I can assure you where our sympathies lie in your own election, and you can count on us."[126] As Talbott escorted Mamedov out of the Oval Office, he joked that he hoped the Deputy Foreign Minister would keep the Russian endorsement of Clinton a state secret lest the Republicans hear about it!

With the Russian elections over and Clinton's promise to Yeltsin fulfilled, the Administration moved to implement its agenda of adaptation, enlargement, and NATO-Russia. On August 7, President Clinton wrote Major, Kohl, and Chirac. "Over the course of the next year, I believe we can and must take important decisions in several areas: completing NATO's internal adaptation, moving forward with enlargement and deepening NATO's relationship with Russia and other partner nations. Each of these elements is essential if we are to achieve our goal of an undivided, secure Europe," he wrote. On NATO enlargement, Clinton stressed that the Alliance had to fulfill its promises to Central and Eastern Europe while avoiding the creation of a new division with countries further eastward. "These two goals," the President concluded, "are not only compatible, they are mutually reinforcing. Properly managed, the enlargement of NATO can encourage all the former Communist states to stay on the path of democratization, market economics, cooperative security and integration. Indeed, we may not have fully appreciated the powerful incentive for political and economic reform that has been provided by making these matters a prerequisite for NATO membership."[127]

In early September Christopher delivered a major speech in Germany reinforcing the President's message. The Clinton Administration had considered, and rejected, a Presidential speech at home for fear of being accused of allowing electoral considerations to drive Administration policy.[128] Instead, Christopher spoke in Stuttgart on the same day and stage that U.S. Secretary of State Byrnes had delivered his famous "speech of hope" fifty years earlier. "NATO enlarge-

ment is on track and will happen," Christopher now stated and laid out the Administration's vision of an adapted and enlarged NATO working cooperatively with Russia. He now proposed an Atlantic Partnership Council as a replacement for the NACC as a way to expand cooperation and reach out to those countries not joining NATO. But the big news was Christopher's announcement that a NATO summit would be held in mid-1997 at which the Alliance would extend invitations to the first new members.[129]

If the NATO enlargement piece of the Administration's agenda was moving forward, the grand compromise that Washington had hoped to achieve bringing Paris fully back into the Alliance was starting to unravel. Both Paris and Washington had hailed the June 1996 Berlin ESDI compromise as a success.[130] In Lyons in late June Chirac had reassured Clinton that he was "ready, within the Berlin framework, to reenter [NATO] fully and without reservations. There are some technical problems to work out," Chirac noted. "But let us leave it to the experts to think this through. We are ready, as I said, to go all the way into NATO."[131] During July and August, however, the common ground between Washington and Paris started to crumble as it became clear that Chirac's desiderata included the U.S. giving up major command slots in NATO. To this day, it remains unclear whether Paris' upping of the ante was a response to domestic criticism that Chirac was "selling out" French interests in his bid to reenter NATO, or whether the French President had always wanted a major additional step beyond the Berlin compromise.[132]

These differences came to a head over who would occupy the top military command posts in a restructured NATO. Traditionally, the U.S. had filled the position of NATO's two strategic commanders—the Supreme Allied Commander-Europe (SACEUR) and the Supreme Allied Commander-Atlantic (SACLANT). In return, the Europeans had filled the post of NATO Secretary General. Command slots below that level were filled by both Americans and Europeans depending on who provided the most forces for a particular region. Based on this rule of thumb, the Germans had traditionally held key command positions in Central and Eastern Europe and the British in Northern Europe. The U.S. had held the senior job in Southern Europe, in part due to the importance of the Sixth Fleet, stationed in Naples for Mediterranean security.

After reviewing a variety of different options, NATO had proposed the creation of two new regional commands for Northern and Southern Europe—AFNorth and AFSouth—below the level of SACEUR. This reduction from three to two key regional commands now created a major political problem. If the U.S. continued to provide both of NATO's strategic commanders, as well as the commander for NATO's new southern command, it meant that the number of European commanders was being reduced. This ran counter to Chirac's goal of increasing the European profile in the Alliance. In the summer of 1996,

therefore, French officials floated the idea of creating a new single, overall NATO strategic commander—a kind of super-SACEUR—with a European SACEUR and a U.S. SACLANT subordinated to him. Another option was to alternate the slots of NATO Secretary General and SACEUR between an American and a European. The third option was to stick to the Berlin compromise of a European Deputy SACEUR but to complement it with Europeans assuming both major regional commands.[133]

On August 28, President Chirac wrote President Clinton noting that it seemed "difficult" for Washington to accept a new American "super-SACEUR." The French President added that he could support the creation of a European Deputy SACEUR and the setting up of two regional commands, but only if both commanders were Europeans. He concluded: "If those proposals could be adopted, France would be willing to take its full place in the renewed Alliance. The adaptation of the Alliance would also allow enlargement to commence under favorable conditions."[134] In Paris in early September, Secretary Christopher told French Foreign Minister de Charette that Washington would insist on keeping NATO's southern command.[135] But Paris would not budge either. When NATO Secretary General Solana visited Paris in late September, Chirac reiterated his interest in a "super-SACEUR" and insisted that, at a minimum, AFSouth be led by a European.[136]

Washington now decided it had to make its position on the AFSouth issue crystal clear. On September 24, Secretary of Defense Bill Perry told French Defense Minister Millon at an informal NATO Defense Ministers Ministerial in Bergen, Norway that there was no flexibility in the U.S. position. He justified the U.S. stance by pointing to the preponderance of U.S. military power in the region and the danger that the American public's commitment to NATO would be undermined if the U.S. was left with no senior commanders on the ground in Europe. Millon was equally inflexible, demanding to know why the U.S. Congress and public were not satisfied with having NATO's two strategic commanders—SACEUR and SACLANT. He also suggested putting the U.S. Sixth fleet directly under SACEUR's command. When Perry would not budge, Millon told him he would call President Chirac immediately. But he warned that if U.S. policy was indeed set, France would have to reconsider its policy of moving back into the Alliance.[137]

Later that day, Perry told Solana he feared that a U.S.-French confrontation was in the making, but that the French threat not to reintegrate would not dissuade the United States from its position.[138] President Clinton also wrote Chirac on September 26 in an attempt to avoid a confrontation. He underscored how far the two countries had come in harmonizing their views, but tried to steer the French President away from the idea of a European AFSouth commander. "The weight of the U.S. force commitment, the stabilizing role of the U.S. presence in the region and the need to maintain public and political sup-

port here in the United States for our continued military contribution to the Alliance argue overwhelmingly for the maintenance of a U.S. Commander in AFSouth," the President wrote. At the same time, President Clinton hinted that the U.S. might consider other steps to meet French concerns.[139]

Chirac's response arrived on October 10. The French President repeated his argument for a greater European role in NATO. At the bottom of the letter, the French President wrote by hand that: "The issue of the Southern Command is, in my view, of capital importance."[140] With the U.S.-French fight spilling over into the public, Tony Lake slipped into Paris unannounced on November 1 to see what could be salvaged. Chirac told Lake that he was willing to re-enter NATO if the terms were right in spite of the political risk he faced but only if AFSouth were run by a European. Lake made it clear that the U.S. position on AFSouth would not change but asked that the two sides continue to try find an alternative package that might be attractive to Paris. "We can proceed with NATO enlargement and NATO-Russian relations without French reintegration, but it would be better to do so with it." He held out the prospect of Madrid becoming "a Super-summit" with France's reintegration, enlargement, and a NATO-Russia agreement all taking place. "This would be of huge historic significance," he argued.

Chirac responded: "Regarding the Southern Command, I understand your position—if I were in the United States, I would adopt the same position. What is important in a command system is who is in charge." U.S. policy, Chirac continued, had changed in word but not yet enough in deed. France needed something more: "I am prepared to adopt anything that you propose but not enter the system if there is not a real change. This is not worth a crisis between us. NATO has worked well without France for many years and this will continue." France and the U.S. were working well together in Bosnia without French reintegration. The French President concluded: "I repeat, France is ready to discuss returning to NATO if there is a real change and that means a change in the command structure. If this is not possible, it will not pose any difficulties for France. We just will not rejoin."[141] But the two sides were deadlocked. Soon the public rhetoric over who was to blame for the breakdown in U.S.-French talks started to escalate. Solana now suggested to Christopher that both sides try to de-escalate the situation for the December Foreign Ministers meeting and return to it after the Christmas holidays.[142]

Moscow also continued to make Washington's life difficult. Talbott, the Administration's point person in NATO-Russia talks, was frustrated by the inability to move Moscow beyond its attempts to hinder enlargement and to force it to negotiate seriously. He believed that the way to maximize U.S. leverage was to make it clear that enlargement was going to take place irrespective of whether Russia negotiated a NATO-Russia agreement. For this to be credible, Washington had to first shore up support among the allies. The best way to do

so was for Washington to go the extra mile in developing a NATO-Russia package that demonstrated the U.S.'s desire to address Moscow's concerns. If Yeltsin and Primakov turned down the package, it would be clear that failure to reach agreement could not be blamed on Washington. But Talbott emphasized: "We're not going to solve this problem unless we think outside of the box, and unless we are willing to question some of the orthodoxy." The exercise also had to be restricted to a small circle of senior officials on both sides of the Atlantic. In justifying this back channel, Talbott told Christopher: "There is too much neuralgia and theology and turf consciousness for me to want to risk a more traditional intramural or interagency vetting of these ideas at this point."[143]

During the first half of July, Talbott sent Christopher a series of memos laying out a framework for bridging the gap between NATO and Russian positions. There were four core ideas. First, while the Alliance could only accept one class of members, it could unilaterally elaborate on its intention not to deploy nuclear weapons in the new countries to meet Russian concerns. And both sides could update the CFE Treaty to reach a mutually acceptable understanding about the deployments of conventional forces. Second, the Alliance could give Russia a "seat at the table" in the emerging European security architecture through a NATO-Russia mechanism or a new European Security Directorate under the auspices of the OSCE. Third, Talbott suggested that NATO's door be left open to Russia over the long-term. While nearly every European ally opposed this, it was important for Yeltsin and domestic reformers in Russia that they not be seen as being *a priori* excluded from the West. Fourth, Talbott wrote that the Alliance needed to package NATO's own adaptation and a greater European role through ESDI to emphasize that NATO was no longer aimed against Russia.[144]

Following consultations with Solana and key allies, Talbott floated the elements of this package as a trial balloon with Primakov in Moscow in mid-July 1996. The Russian Foreign Minister responded: "Your list of topics is interesting. I think it's constructive." But he insisted that Russia needed something more concrete on NATO military infrastructure on the territory of new members. "Your remarks make Russia's desiderata clear," Talbott responded: "But there can only be one class of membership in NATO. We're not going to discriminate against new members or underline the fundamentals of the Alliance." Primakov responded: "You know that we do not want to see the U.S. leave Europe. We think your presence is in our interest." He understood that NATO's adaptation could be used to project a different image of NATO to the Russian public. "Let's think how all these factors can help us resolve the issue. For example, peacekeeping as a mission for NATO is entirely acceptable—indeed welcome—to us."

"What's not acceptable to us," he continued, "is having Poland in the same category as England. The fact is that there are already different classes of members of NATO. Countries have different limits to which they are subject. With

respect to nuclear weapons, Germany has one set of limits. Norway has another." Primakov also warned that Moscow would never accept the Baltics or Ukraine joining NATO. "In reality it is not acceptable to us that NATO is open to everyone," he told Talbott. Moscow had both vertical and horizontal red lines with respect to NATO enlargement. "The vertical ones include such items as infrastructure. The horizontal ones include such issues as the Baltics and Ukraine." Talbott responded that "then we've got a collision of red lines" and the two sides would be "at an impasse if not a train wreck." Primakov backed down and agreed that the overall approach Talbott had suggested made sense and that Christopher and he should try to agree on the way ahead.[145]

By late July, a final version of the Talbott paper, now dubbed "the bible" in interagency discussions, laid out the U.S. strategy for achieving a NATO-Russia accord on Western terms. The "U.S. and its allies," the paper stated, "will make a best effort to work out a NATO-Russia relationship that induces Russia to adjust cooperatively to expansion" by answering Russia's concerns "on what we deem to be its legitimate security concerns and to find ways of accommodating Russia's desire for inclusion and active participation in new/enhanced European security structures, insofar as such arrangements support our overall security and political interests." The paper listed a number of NATO "redlines" that the Alliance could not cross: no veto, no second class NATO membership, no subordination of NATO to other bodies, no dilution in NATO command structures, and no secret deal over the heads of allies or new members.

In a nutshell, the strategy was to convince Moscow that enlargement would take place and that if Russia wanted to be part of a new European security architecture it was going to have to significantly modify its goals. "If Russia wants to maximize its participation in and benefit from the larger evolutionary/integrative process underway in Europe, it should solve the problem of NATO enlargement, not fight it," the paper concluded. At the same time, the paper pointed to two major problems. One was that Moscow still needed to be persuaded "on all counts—and may, in the timeframe we envision, be incapable of accepting our bottom lines." Second, many European allies, especially Germany and France, had doubts about the preferred U.S. pace on enlargement and could therefore be vulnerable to Russian efforts to slow down the pace or block it from happening.[146]

For much of August and September, Talbott shuttled between meetings with Mamedov and consultations with Solana and the NATO allies to hammer out a framework that might be acceptable to both sides. During long hours of debate at the Russian Ambassador's residences in Ottawa and Paris, Talbott and Mamedov argued over the substance of a possible package, and eventually agreed on a framework paper.[147] Talbott was increasingly convinced that there was enough common ground between him and Mamedov to make a NATO-Russia agreement feasible.

But Talbott was also worried that Moscow was playing a double game. On the one hand, Primakov continued to tell Washington that Moscow valued U.S.-Russian cooperation and wanted to work closely to build a new, cooperative NATO-Russia relationship. Mamedov was claiming that Moscow realized that enlargement was going to happen and he had been authorized to "brainstorm" with Talbott on what such a relationship might look like. On the other hand, Primakov continued to attack NATO enlargement, warn of its destabilizing consequences, and probe Washington's European allies for signs of division and weakness. Mamedov's counterpart in the Russian Foreign Ministry responsible for European affairs, Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Afanas'evsky, was touring European capitals with a tougher message and a long laundry list of Russian demands designed to tie NATO in knots.

"What we've got it seems," Talbott had written Christopher in late August, "is Primakov letting Afanas'evsky run the European play while Mamedov runs the American one, with Primakov himself reserving on which playbook he will take to Yeltsin this fall."[148] And it was not entirely clear that Primakov's strategy would fail. At the top of Moscow's target list were two allies, Germany and France, whose support for enlargement was essential, whose leaders prided themselves on their own special relationship with Yeltsin, and who had shown their ambivalence about NATO enlargement moving forward absent a NATO-Russia agreement.[149] Primakov's goal was, in Talbott's words, to "keep looking for (and, I fear, finding) weak spots on the NATO front; he'd like to exploit these to see if he can slow down or even stop enlargement, or extract from us concessions that would make a mockery of our determination—that new members of the Alliance have all the rights and protections of current members." Washington had to force Primakov to choose—and to choose the path of NATO-Russia cooperation.[150]

The Deputy Secretary suggested to Christopher that he use his upcoming meeting with Primakov in New York to force the issue and to try to clarify Primakov's position. Christopher agreed. Meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister at the Waldorf Towers on September 23, 1996, the U.S. Secretary of State asked to see Primakov alone. He told him that this was one of the most important meetings they ever had. President Clinton was committed to a positive NATO-Russia relationship, but time was starting to run out. NATO enlargement was going to move forward and if the two sides were going to achieve progress in parallel on NATO-Russia, they needed to move quickly. Washington was receiving mixed signals. If Moscow was prepared to move forward on such a track it was imperative to "clarify the road ahead and provide an impetus to steady, timely progress." Primakov recalled that at their first meeting in Helsinki, he had told Christopher that enlargement would be like "sleeping with a porcupine." The task they now faced, he said, was to "make the porcupine as small as possible."[151]

But Christopher's plea for parallel tracks was not good enough for the Russian Foreign Minister. "What I don't like about parallelism is that it means you're saying that once NATO expansion has started, you would set the conditions and Russia has nothing to say about what happens. . . . That is not acceptable." Pointing to a picture on the wall, he insisted that Russia needed to have more details on just what enlargement as well as NATO-Russian cooperation would entail. "Look at that picture on the wall," he said, "if there's only a frame but no painting in it, what good is it? In addition to seeing the frame, we would at least like to have a rough sketch inside."

By this time, Talbott and Mamedov had joined the two Foreign Ministers. In an attempt to illustrate how the U.S. saw the process moving forward, Talbott took a piece of paper and drew four lines to symbolize NATO enlargement, NATO's internal adaptation, NATO-Russia, and the CFE Treaty moving in parallel. He then drew a line symbolizing Russia's intent to stop or slow down enlargement. "We have a four letter word," he told Primakov, "for what this would amount to: veto." Primakov lost his temper: "You want to expand NATO and tell us that nothing we do or think or say will have any affect on your plans. Yet you also accuse me of wanting to veto it. Are you playing us for fools?" The Russian Foreign Minister regained his composure: "Okay, let's go back to square one: You can't let go of NATO expansion and we can't agree to support it in advance and then applaud it when it happens. That's not a veto. We realize we have no veto power. . . . But that does not mean we have to agree to a scheme that merely provides cover for NATO to expand."

Talbott drew a large oval around the four parallel lines: "This represents a single context in which these parallel processes are going forward," he said. "That context is the post–Cold War evolution of Europe, of NATO, of Russia, of the OSCE, of the European Union. Let's imagine these lines continue out into the mid-21st century. What Europe is like at that point in the future will depend a lot on what Russia is like; what NATO is like will depend a lot on how Russia has developed. And what Russia is like will depend to a significant degree on how its relations with NATO have developed. So, yes, there's connection," Talbott concluded.

"I finally see your point," said Primakov. "When in the year 2050 Russia becomes more democratic and is transformed in fundamental ways, then NATO as an organization will also be transformed. Of course we cannot insist that everything has to happen right now, that all the changes that will happen in the future are pre-programmed right now."

Primakov and Talbott started to debate the nuances in Russian between parallelism and correlation, but Christopher interrupted to say: "I am the only one in this room who does not speak the Russian language but I still understand the issue." He suggested that Talbott and Mamedov continue their work. "Yevgeny," he told Primakov, "don't sell short the importance of this charter serving to in-

dicate the overall direction in which we want to move."[152] It would take another eight months before a NATO-Russia agreement was finalized. And senior Russian officials would hint that Moscow might simply prefer to put relations with NATO on hold until after enlargement had taken place rather than sign an agreement that appeared to give Washington a green light to move forward.[153] But Moscow had finally started to accept that NATO enlargement was going to happen.

On October 22, 1996, two weeks before the U.S. Presidential election, Clinton spoke before a group of foreign policy scholars and Democratic party activists at an election rally in Hamtramck, Michigan. He publicly set a target date for bringing new members into NATO. "By 1999, NATO's fiftieth anniversary and 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first group of countries we invite should be full-fledged members of NATO."[154] The Dole campaign alleged that Clinton was "waffling" and "foot-dragging" and concluded: "Under Bill Clinton NATO enlargement will never happen."[155] On November 5, 1996 Bill Clinton was reelected President of the United States. Ten days later, a Principals Committee meeting on NATO policy decided the U.S. should call for a NATO summit to be held no later than July 1997 at which the first invitations to join the Alliance should be extended.[156]

In early December Talbott and Primakov met in Oslo for another go-round on enlargement. Talbott told Primakov that while they had made progress in scoping out the possible content of a Charter, the U.S. side was increasingly unsure whether Russia actually wanted a political accommodation with the West. Primakov complained that the NATO enlargement issue was increasingly permeating the U.S.-Russian relationship and making it difficult to achieve progress on any issue. Talbott responded that he did not believe that the average Russian was concerned about enlargement, but that the Russian political elite was the problem—and that Primakov had fed those fears himself with his harsh rhetoric. "You've worked yourself into a corner. By warning that NATO enlargement will be the end of the world, you've defined the problem in a way that defies solution," he said. Primakov responded: "We need to escape from this dilemma. . . . This is the question of questions."[157]