Book VI

THE NATO-RUSSIA ENDGAME

At noon on January 20, 1997, William Jefferson Clinton was sworn in for his second term as President of the United States. In his State of the Union address two weeks later, he listed NATO enlargement as his top foreign-policy priority. He noted that fifty years earlier "a farsighted America" had led in creating institutions like NATO that had helped secure the West's victory in the Cold War. "Now we stand at another moment of change and choice—and another time to be farsighted. In this endeavor, our first task is to help build, for the first time, an undivided, democratic Europe." To that end, he committed the U.S. to launch the enlargement of NATO at the upcoming NATO summit in Madrid in July with the goal of bringing new members into the Alliance on its fiftieth anniversary in 1999.[1]

With six months to go until Madrid, the Administration faced one of the greatest foreign policy challenges of the Clinton Presidency. On paper, almost everything appeared set. Washington had consulted extensively with its allies. It had laboriously tried to negotiate a new, cooperative NATO-Russia relationship with Moscow. It had awaited the outcome of the U.S. and Russian Presidential elections before moving forward. But enlargement was not yet a done deal. Little if anything was fully locked in. And there were still major differences—both between NATO members and Russia and among countries within the Alliance's own ranks—on the outstanding issues. There was still work to do to

complete this project—and ample opportunity for mistakes and failure. The stage was set for one of the most dramatic plays in NATO's history.

In April 1997, I switched from being a RAND analyst and State Department consultant to being a fulltime American diplomat when I joined the Department's European Bureau as a political appointee responsible for NATO issues and European security. Within days, I was off to Moscow as part of the team helping Secretary of State Albright and Deputy Secretary Talbott negotiate what would become the NATO-Russia Founding Act. From the ceremony launching a new NATO-Russia relationship in Paris in late May 1997, we went directly to the Alliance's spring Ministerial in the Portuguese city of Sintra where, for the first time, the latent differences between Washington and some of its allies over the scope of enlargement and its future broke into the open.

In the ensuing weeks, U.S.-French differences over who should be invited to join NATO would escalate into a dramatic diplomatic shoot out between Washington and Paris at the Madrid summit. Following the summit, President Clinton went to Warsaw where he received a jubilant welcome from more than 30,000 enthusiastic Poles. Even more dramatic was the President's reception in Bucharest where an estimated 100,000 Romanians turned out to cheer Clinton and Romanian President Emil Constantinescu—in spite of Washington's rejection of Romania's bid for immediate NATO membership. Clinton wrapped up this week-long tour with a stop in Copenhagen where some 80,000 Danes turned out to cheer him as well. I, in turn, was part of the team accompanying Albright on a tour of Ljubljana, St. Petersburg, Vilnius, and her native city of Prague for an emotional homecoming. Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen completed the Administration's grand tour of Central and Eastern Europe, traveling to Budapest and Sofia, to show the U.S. commitment to building a unified Europe.

Nearly everyone on Clinton's national security team dealing with European security issues had read former Secretary of State Dean Acheson's memoir, *Present at the Creation*, in which he eloquently describes NATO's founding.[2] We shied away from saying it publicly for fear of appearing pretentious, but there was a very real sense of being present at and participating in the birth of a new NATO for a new Europe. Madrid was the culmination of years of political and diplomatic work involving some of the most far-reaching changes in NATO's history. But it was not an easy birth. These six months were filled with drama, diplomatic intrigue, and political confrontation—with the Russians as well as with some of our closest allies. Madrid was one of the most important, and also one of the most contentious summits, in NATO's history.

1. MADELEINE'S VISION

President Clinton's commitment to NATO enlargement was underscored by his decision to nominate Madeleine K. Albright as Secretary of State for his

second term. Perhaps no one better epitomized the U.S. commitment to overcome Europe's Cold War divide. A naturalized American citizen born in Czechoslovakia, Albright had come to the United States at the age of eleven after the communist coup in Prague that led her father, Josef Korbel, then the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Belgrade, to flee to the West. Albright was fiercely proud to be an American. Unlike many Democrats of her generation, her intellectual paradigm was Munich, not Vietnam. She did not harbor any doubts about using America's power to pursue U.S. diplomatic goals. Instead, she saw the U.S. as the "indispensable" nation when it came to advancing the cause of peace and democracy.[3]

Albright knew firsthand Europe's tragic recent history. As a child she had witnessed first Hitler and then Stalin's occupation of her native Czechoslovakia. Her academic training was in Soviet and East European studies at Columbia University, where she wrote her doctoral dissertation on Czechoslovakia. Following a stint working as a legislative aide for Senator Edmund Muskie, she worked for Zbigniew Brzezinski's National Security Council staff in the second half of the 1970s, where she was in charge of legislative affairs. From there she went to Georgetown University where she taught U.S. foreign policy and became the President of the Center for National Policy. In the mid-1980s, Albright started traveling back to Central and Eastern Europe where she met many of the dissidents in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest. She became a friend of and eventually an informal advisor to Vaclav Havel. Following communism's collapse, she was part of a team of experts that examined public attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.[4] Few Americans knew the region better than she did.

By the time she became Secretary of State, Albright had become an enthusiastic champion of NATO enlargement. She saw it as a historic opportunity to anchor a democratic Central and Eastern Europe to the West once and for all. "The purpose of enlargement," she said in her first statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 8, 1997, "is to do for Europe's East what NATO did 50 years ago for Europe's West: to integrate new democracies, defeat old hatreds, provide confidence in economic recovery and deter conflict."[5] Her goal, she once hand-wrote on a memo that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Marc Grossman had sent her, was to ensure that Europe's future was safer than its past: "Let's develop a 21st century better than the 20th—the bloodiest in Europe's history."[6]

Albright also viewed enlargement as a moral imperative. It was an opportunity to erase the lines drawn by the armies of Hitler and Stalin and accepted by the West at Yalta. Following the Madrid summit, Albright spoke in Prague about how NATO's Madrid summit had framed her life and her life's work. She talked about the three journeys that shaped her commitment to NATO enlargement—her family's journey through war to the safe shores of America; Europe's

journey from total war and absolute division to the promise of a new unity; and the Czech nation's journey from independence in 1918 to subjugation in 1948 to taking what she described as "your rightful place in the family of European democracies—fully, finally and forever." NATO enlargement was "a moment of injustice undone, of promises kept, of a unified Europe begun." This single sentence encapsulated the reasons for Albright's commitment to NATO enlargement.[7]

But Albright's commitment to enlargement also reflected her vision of a new U.S.-European relationship. She believed that the U.S. and Europe remained natural partners in the post–Cold War world. NATO enlargement was important to make Europe's eastern half safe and secure. But it was also a stepping stone to modernize the Alliance for a future in which a secure Europe would join the U.S. in dealing with new threats beyond the continent. In the spring of 1997 Albright was reading a biography of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson.[8] In meetings with her senior staff, she often compared the period following the end of the Cold War to the early post-World War II period. In the late 1940s, Truman and Acheson had committed the United States to remain in Europe. They had created NATO as a security umbrella against the very real Soviet threat and as the framework within which European reconciliation and integration could take place. In so doing, they had helped to define fifty years of U.S. international engagement.

The task the U.S. faced, she told us, was to build on that legacy and accomplishment. Sitting with Albright in her private office one day in the spring of 1997, she said to me and other members of her senior staff: "The challenge we face is different than the one Truman and Acheson faced. Thank God we don't face the threat that Stalin posed or the danger of World War III." "But," she continued, "in many ways the questions are still the same. What shape will this new Europe take? What role will the U.S. have? Will we continue to work together to solve the problems of the future?" There was little doubt in her mind what the answer *should* be. America was a European power. It had fought the Cold War not only to defeat communism but to win the peace as well. We had an historic opportunity to lay the foundation for a Europe whole and free in alliance with the United States—and we had to use it.

Albright firmly believed that America's interest and role in Europe transcended the Soviet threat, but that the Alliance had to be reshaped if it was to survive. She believed that NATO needed to be transformed and modernized to meet the challenges of the next fifty years—and the U.S. needed to do so at a time when many questioned whether it was needed at all or if the U.S. should even remain in Europe. "We have a window of opportunity in which to recast the foundation of this Alliance. If we get it right, NATO will last for another fifty years. And we will have succeeded just like the founding fathers of NATO did. If we don't, the U.S. and Europe are likely to slowly drift apart and the Alliance

will atrophy," she once told me. The problem, she often repeated to us, was that too many people on both sides of the Atlantic were complacent and took the U.S.-European relationship for granted.[9]

In the spring of 1997, Albright delivered the commencement speech at Harvard University—on the spot where 50 years earlier Secretary of State George Marshall had launched the Marshall Plan. Albright invoked the vision of Marshall and her own life experience to underscore the role that America still had to play in Europe and around the world. She recalled sitting in a bomb shelter in London during World War II praying for American help. But she also recalled the price the West paid for not being vigilant in standing up early enough to Nazi aggression. America, she underscored, had to continue to lead. A new generation again had to make the choice to lead and shape a new world just as Marshall's generation had done in their time.

"Today," she told her audience, "the greatest danger to America is not some foreign enemy; it is the possibility that we will fail to heed the great example of that generation, that we will allow the momentum towards democracy to stall, take for granted the institutions and principles upon which our own freedom is based, and forget what the history of this century reminds us, that problems abroad, if left unattended, will all too often come home to America."[10]

Critics would at times accuse Albright of pushing for too much change too quickly, and hectoring or riding roughshod over our allies. But Albright was convinced the U.S. had a window of opportunity in which to lay the foundation for a new and transformed trans-Atlantic relationship. The danger in her eyes was not that the U.S. was too ambitious, but rather that it would become complacent. She wanted the U.S. to take the lead in consolidating the global triumph of democracy and forging new alliances to keep the peace as effectively as those of the Cold War. "We have a responsibility in our time, as others had in theirs," she said in her Harvard speech, "not to be prisoners of history but to shape history; a responsibility to fill the role of pathfinder, and to build with others a global network of purpose and law that will protect our citizens, defend our interests, preserve our values and bequeath to future generations a legacy as proud as the one we honor today."[11]

Albright's vision of a unified Europe included a democratic Russia. For Albright, the Cold War had been a fight against communism as an ideology, not against the Russian people. Following her nomination as Secretary of State, the Russian press initially portrayed her as a disciple of Zbigniew Brzezinski and an unreconstructed anti-Russian Cold Warrior. They dubbed her *Gospozha Stal* or "Madam Steel"—a label she was actually fond of. But her commitment to bring Russia into the Western community of nations came as a surprise to some of her Russian interlocutors.[12] In her first meeting with Russian President Yeltsin in February, Albright told him that he should not view her as a former Cold Warrior, but as an American version of Primakov—a tough but pragmatic de-

fender of national interests who was committed to building a friendlier U.S.-Russia partnership. When Yeltsin told her that she needed to recognize that there was a new Russia, she asked Yeltsin to recognize that NATO, too, had changed. "I would like you to think," she told Yeltsin, "that there is a new NATO, not one of we versus you or you versus us, but one where we are on the same side."[13]

Some six weeks later, Albright was back in Moscow for a final round of negotiations on the NATO-Russia Founding Act. She met with a group of Russian strategic intellectuals at the Carnegie Moscow Center. Albright made an impassioned plea for them to put aside Cold War stereotypes and bury their distrust of NATO.[14] In the question and answer session, she talked about how both she and many of them had what she termed "Cold War libraries" filled with books on communism, arms control and the history of a divided Europe in the 20th century. "My library at home is a Cold War library. It is filled with books about totalitarianism, communism and arms control," she said. "I want to make it obsolete. I want people to look at these books and think they belong to ancient history because we have so changed our relations for the better."[15]

How important was Albright for NATO enlargement? Her role was critical for three reasons. First, her appointment was widely seen in Europe, Russia, and in the U.S. as confirmation of Washington's determination to see NATO enlargement through. While many conservative critics had openly questioned whether President Clinton was truly committed to enlargement, no one doubted *her* determination to seeing it through. She was the high-level champion on this issue the Administration needed at home and abroad.

Second, while much of the conceptual work and diplomatic foundation was completed prior to her becoming Secretary of State, it was Albright who got the actual job done. Her relationship with Primakov helped broker the final compromises that made the Founding Act possible. She was critical in holding the line in favor of three candidates for NATO's first round at Madrid—and convinced skeptics that Washington's commitment to further enlargement was credible. To use an American football metaphor, she came in as the team quarterback in a red zone offense and put the ball in the end zone—a metaphor of the sort she teased her male colleagues for using.

Third, Albright's passionate ability as a communicator made her the ideal spokesperson on NATO enlargement. She became the public face selling the policy to the U.S. public, to the Europeans, and to the U.S. Senate. She enjoyed taking on NATO enlargement's critics and explaining why, in her words, a bigger NATO was a better one.[16] She could reach across the aisle to conservatives in a way that other Administration officials could not. Republicans who disliked President Clinton liked Albright, her patriotism and her defense of America's role in the world—as shown by her 99–0 confirmation by the Senate. A picture of her holding hands with Senator Jesse Helms became a popular

poster during the Senate ratification campaign. While Albright's star as U.S. Secretary of State would subsequently fade as criticism of her and her policies grew, she was at the top of her game during the first years of her tenure when NATO enlargement was implemented.

2. CHANCELLOR KOHL COMES THROUGH

On January 6, 1997, Chancellor Helmut Kohl called Clinton with a firsthand account of his recent trip to Russia where he had met privately with Yeltsin at his country home in Zavidovo on January 4. It was Yeltsin's first meeting with a western leader since heart surgery two months earlier. Kohl had found Yeltsin looking older and frailer than previously. The Russian President had expressed his anger over what he referred to as the "monster" of NATO enlargement that "our friend Bill" had unleashed. Yeltsin appealed to Kohl to help him. "I have to be able to look my people in the eye and tell them that their interests are being protected," he said. "We can't keep cooperating with the West unless I can assure them of that."[17]

Kohl assured Clinton that he had stood firm on enlargement. But he described Yeltsin's position in vivid terms: "His position is quite clear; he is against it. He thinks it is unnecessary and fraught with enormous psychological problems. He is afraid that a new Cold War is imminent and that the people won't understand it." The Chancellor told the President he still supported NATO enlargement, but Western leaders had to deal directly with Yeltsin to reach an understanding and not rely on normal diplomatic channels or the NATO bureaucracy. Absent a deal with Yeltsin before the Madrid summit, he warned, there was a real risk of a breach in the West's ties with Moscow. The German Chancellor asked Clinton to send Talbott to Bonn to meet with him as soon as possible.[18]

Kohl's phone call came at a critical juncture. The wrestling match between Washington and Moscow over NATO enlargement was not over. Although Primakov had signaled to Washington in private that he recognized enlargement was going to happen, Moscow remained adamantly opposed in public. By this time, Yeltsin and Primakov had staked out such strong rhetorical and public opposition to NATO expansion that it was going to be difficult for them to back down without suffering political damage.[19] Meeting with an American official in early 1997, Russian communist party head Gennady Zyuganov noted smugly that whereas in Washington there still appeared to be a range of views on enlargement, in Moscow there was only one view—everyone was opposed.[20]

That opposition continued to be accompanied by ominous hints at possible retaliatory steps. After a Kremlin meeting on NATO enlargement chaired by Yeltsin on January 6 , anonymous Defense Ministry sources were quoted in the Russian press as saying that the Russian President's advisors all favored "tough

countermeasures" against NATO. "If NATO moves eastward, Russia will move westward," one Kremlin source was quoted as saying. Moscow was also reportedly considering creating an anti-Western alliance with China, Iran, and India. Even if it could not stop enlargement's first round, the same source concluded, Moscow would reserve the right to use "any means" to prevent the Baltic states from "joining the military orbit of the U.S. and NATO."[21]

The endgame was starting. The Madrid summit was scheduled for early July 1997. NATO had six months to try to finalize a NATO-Russia deal and complete preparations for enlargement. But the gap between NATO and Moscow was still large. By this time Talbott had concluded that the only way to induce Moscow to work seriously to bridge that gap was to make it crystal clear that enlargement was going ahead, irrespective of whether NATO and Russia came to terms or not. Only the absolute certainty that enlargement was coming would lead the Russians to shift away from attacking enlargement and instead focus on what kind of relationship they wanted to have with an enlarged NATO. In other words, American diplomacy had to convince Moscow that the timetable and outcome of the Alliance's enlargement plans were set in concrete—and that the real choice facing Russia was whether it would protect its own interests by seeking a closer and cooperative relationship with the Alliance or watch enlargement go ahead without it.

For that strategy to work, Washington needed to be confident that its allies would not blink if negotiations with Moscow stalled. But the U.S. was still not sure how solid Western European allied support was. The Russians had spent almost four years trying to convince the Europeans that expansion would destroy Moscow's relationship with Europe. NATO Secretary General Solana had warned Ambassador Hunter in early November that European support for enlargement remained weak. Faced with conflicting choices, he said, some Europeans seemed prepared to choose Moscow as their first priority.[22] Solana repeated that concern to Senator Bill Roth (R-DE) later that month. If the Europeans had to choose between NATO enlargement and conflict with Russia, the Secretary General said, NATO enlargement might just lose.[23]

The Administration faced a paradox. To get the allies on board it needed a NATO-Russia agreement—or at least to be able to demonstrate that it had done everything possible to try to get one. But to get Moscow to negotiate seriously on a NATO-Russia agreement, it needed to convince Moscow that allied support was solid and enlargement inevitable. The Administration also needed a mechanism for negotiating with Moscow that included the allies but was not overly cumbersome. Kohl had told President Clinton that this issue was too important to be left in the hands of NATO bureaucrats and that he wanted it handled privately among the U.S., the major European powers and the Russians.

Talbott, too, had concluded that the NATO bureaucracy was not agile enough for this effort. He was looking for a vehicle that would put NATO, not

the U.S., in front yet still allow Washington to drive the process from behind the scenes. In early January 1997, Solana visited Washington. Talbott proposed empowering him to be the Alliance's point person in dealing with Moscow—with the U.S. playing an active behind-the-scenes-role. While Solana was open to the idea, he emphasized it would only work if the other NATO allies, especially France, went along with it. And Talbott's scheme was not the only one on the table. French President Chirac had suggested that the U.S., France, Germany, and the United Kingdom hold a five-power summit with Moscow to try to hammer out the details of a NATO-Russia agreement. The Administration was not enthusiastic. In talking to Chirac, the President had told him that he did not rule out such a meeting but wanted to try to first make progress in the U.S.-Russia channel.[24]

One week later Talbott departed for London, Paris, and Bonn. His mission was to get Washington's closest allies to agree to the Administration's proposed strategy and mechanism for negotiating a NATO-Russia agreement. He arrived in London on January 13 for meetings with British Foreign Secretary Rifkind and senior British officials. They made it clear to him that London supported Washington's approach and was prepared to let Solana and the U.S. take the lead in hammering out a NATO-Russia agreement. While underscoring the British interest in reaching an agreement with Moscow, London also signaled that it was prepared to go ahead with enlargement with or without a NATO-Russia agreement.[25]

Crossing the channel, however, Talbott arrived to a chillier reception in Paris. While President Chirac was more supportive on NATO than his predecessors, Paris' reticence to follow the U.S. lead *en principe* was also well known. From the beginning, France had been the most reluctant of Washington's major allies on enlargement, and Chirac had already floated the idea of postponing the Madrid summit with Polish President Kwasniewski some weeks earlier. Chirac had his own, often strongly held, views on how to deal with Moscow, too. Complicating matters, the White House and the Elysée were conducting quiet back-channel talks between Sandy Berger and Jean-David Levitte, President Chirac's diplomatic advisor, to explore a compromise that would still bring France back into NATO's integrated military command by Madrid. It was a delicate moment in U.S.-French relations.

In the Elysée, the French President listened politely as Talbott argued that only a clear and unified allied position would induce Moscow to seriously negotiate a NATO-Russia agreement before Madrid. Chirac's response made it clear that he saw the problem lying not only in Moscow, but in Washington as well. The problem was a "fundamental lack of understanding between Russia and the United States," the French President said. He disapproved of what he termed a lack of American "finesse" in dealing with the Russians. "My conviction is that the U.S. does not take full account of Russian sensitivities," he said.

"The Russian people are profoundly hostile to NATO enlargement. It reflects a fear of encirclement—a traditional fear of the Russians—as well as a fear of humiliation." He recalled running into a busload of forty Russian *babushkas* in Paris who had told him that NATO was encircling Russia and had asked: "What will Yeltsin do when American nuclear weapons start falling on Moscow and St. Petersburg?"

Chirac warned that if Washington simply went ahead and enlarged NATO, the consequences could be the collapse of the Yeltsin government. "If one imposes NATO enlargement on the Russians, the Yeltsin regime will not be able to resist the public reaction and will not remain in power for very long," the French President suggested. Washington could not simply impose NATO enlargement on Russia and not worry about consequences that would be felt first and foremost by the Europeans. "Do not forget that it is we Europeans who are Russia's neighbors and who are most concerned about the consequences," Chirac concluded. "You should not blind yourself to the possibility that this could lead to a resurgence of deep-rooted Russian nationalism."

Instead, Chirac wanted France and Germany to step in and act as an honest broker. "Yeltsin needs a meeting with me and Helmut Kohl because Russia knows that France and Germany understand the situation better than others." The French President returned to the idea of a Big Five summit with Moscow. It was also an attempt to reduce Washington's role and leverage. And it completely cut out NATO Secretary General Solana from any official role. When Talbott asked what the summit's goal would be, Chirac responded that "whatever solution we arrive at must not be imposed on the Russians." It was the opposite of what Washington wanted.

Talbott asked what France would do if such a strategy failed. Was Paris prepared to go ahead and enlarge NATO if it proved impossible to conclude a NATO-Russia agreement? Chirac dodged the question: "I can't imagine failure. If we failed, it would raise questions in France as to whether we were back to square one. We will not fail if we approach the issue with finesse. So failure is unthinkable. If there were some fundamental reasons why the Russians were opposed to enlargement, we would have to confront some serious questions. But surely most of the problem is based on misunderstandings."

Washington and Paris were clearly not on the same wavelength. Talbott disagreed with Chirac's analysis—of Russia, of the U.S.-Russia relationship and of the tactics on how to deal with Moscow in the months ahead. He told the French President that he thought it was quite possible that Russia would not be willing or able to negotiate a NATO-Russia deal by July—even if it wanted to, which was not at all clear. "The Russian side is all screwed up," Talbott told Chirac, having "gone through one of the greatest traumas in history, with more sudden change in their internal order, external relations and ideology, and in their definition of statehood, than any country which has not lost a major war."

President Clinton, he continued, was "thinking about what we would do in that situation: faced with the prospect of Madrid but no NATO-Russia deal, and what signal we would send about that all-too-imaginable possibility." Washington's view, he continued, was that Madrid had to take place even absent a deal with Moscow. "If we were to allow the Russian's discontent, or their inability to come to terms, to determine whether we go ahead with NATO enlargement then enlargement will stop in its tracks and never go forward," Talbott went on. "If we make it a condition for enlargement that Russia be completely satisfied and that their satisfaction be written into the terms of a NATO-Russia deal, we will have made enlargement hostage to the Russians and have given them a veto. It will take 100 years—or if you're an optimist 50 years—for the Russians to be completely confident in themselves and the vision that you and President Clinton have for an undivided Europe."

Chirac countered that NATO and Russia could reach an accommodation—so long as the U.S. showed the proper degree of finesse. "You must start," he lectured Talbott, "by understanding Yeltsin." The Russian President, he continued, "is a man who did not attend *les Grandes Ecoles*; he didn't go to Harvard. He is, nonetheless, a man of sensitivity, although not someone who was trained to think in terms of 'one, two, three' in Cartesian fashion. That is why you need a warmer approach to him." In all frankness, Talbott responded, he had been dealing with the consequences of Chirac's previous "warmth" toward Moscow and his statement that the Alliance needed to first agree with Moscow before enlarging. He explained how Primakov had repeatedly distorted France's position to try to slow down and postpone enlargement in talks with him.

The Deputy Secretary concluded by saying: "If we convey any qualifications or ambiguity about our resolve with regard to enlargement, the Russians will conclude that NATO will postpone enlargement, and that will be the end of it. It will never happen. They will have won the game." Chirac replied that he found Talbott's view "a bit abrupt, a bit too black and white." The allies, the French President concluded, needed to look at what he called the "cost-benefit analysis." "I repeat that to impose something on Russia would be a big risk. NATO enlargement is not urgent—although I would never say that in public, of course. We need to look at the cost-effectiveness of proceeding. My conviction is that there is a 99 percent chance that we will resolve this problem if we use the proper skill."[26]

Talbott left Paris worried that Chirac was not on board. He arrived in Bonn the next day with some trepidation. On the one hand, the German Chancellor had made it clear that he viewed Poland's integration into the West and Polish-German reconciliation as a historical task on a par with the rapprochement between France and Germany that his political mentor, Konrad Adenauer, had brought about with Charles de Gaulle. At the same time, Kohl had on several occasions also made it clear that enlargement was only worth doing if it could

be accomplished without a confrontation with Yeltsin's Russia, and had also floated his own proposal for postponing enlargement only one year earlier. Given the close political ties between Paris and Berlin, a Franco-German coalition in favor of postponing enlargement could not be excluded. It would have been a disaster for U.S. policy.

As Talbott entered the Chancellor's office along with Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum, he found Kohl reviewing a German transcript of his conversation with Chirac from the previous day with the key sections underlined with a yellow highlighter. The Chancellor was clearly well informed. But the contrast between the views of Paris and Bonn could not have been more obvious. One of Kohl's cardinal principles was to avoid having to choose between Washington and Paris. And the Chancellor was careful not to utter a single word that could have been interpreted as discord between Paris and Bonn. But his message was the opposite of Chirac's. "I want to stress: I am absolutely against postponing the summit," he told Talbott. Whatever doubts the Chancellor had harbored on NATO enlargement were now gone. He was committed to enlarging NATO—and doing so at Madrid. "If we were to postpone it, it would only make things more difficult. We must have a clear vision and nerves of steel. Aware that Paris had at times suggested that its support of enlargement was tied to a successful resolution of the AFSouth issue, he said: "I know that internal adaptation of NATO is also important, but enlargement must be the number one priority."

In contrast to Chirac's push for European solidarity to balance Washington's approach, Kohl emphasized that the key to success was close U.S.-German cooperation. He told Talbott that he had been thinking a good deal in recent days about the United States and the importance of U.S.-German cooperation. He had supported Clinton during the recent Presidential elections and considered him a friend. Clinton, he noted, was different from previous American leaders. "I appreciate a President who can listen. He understands that while the U.S. is important, it needs genuine partners, not subordinates." Yeltsin trusted the U.S. President, too, he added: "He trusts Clinton—he thinks he is the best American leader. He has great mistrust of others, especially some in Congress whom he calls warmongers."

The Chancellor underscored that Washington and Bonn were at a "historical crossroads" in European security comparable to the Euromissile crisis of the early 1980s or German unification. It was again imperative that Washington and Bonn work together closely. "I must tell you that in our country, or elsewhere in Europe, there is an undertone of anti-Americanism," the Chancellor continued. Failure on NATO enlargement would only encourage that trend. "If we fail," Kohl concluded, "others will say that the Americans have not done a good job, then they will say that Helmut Kohl was asleep and should never have let it happen. Finally the French will say that they knew better all the time but the Americans would not listen."

He did not want that to happen, Kohl added. "If NATO enlargement fails now, we will have a dismal situation for many years. Again the Americans will be blamed and the President will be blamed. Certain circles will make much of the failure. Please tell Bill Clinton as a friend: I don't want that to happen. I want to use these four years to capitalize on American leadership."

Kohl now told Talbott that the time to enlarge NATO had arrived. "We can't tell the Poles and the Czechs that they are not welcome [in the West] after what they did to survive communism." But NATO enlargement was also a question of German national interest, especially in terms of Germany's relations with neighboring Poland, Kohl added. "This is not just a moral issue," he said, "it's in our self-interest to have this development now and not in the future."

Kohl was well known for his strong European credentials. European integration, he underscored, was of "existential" importance to Germany. Many in Western Europe, he added, were hypocritical about their support for Central Europe, especially in the EU. "If there were today a truly secret vote among my EU colleagues, I am not sure we would have a majority for expansion." The Chancellor brushed aside arguments that EU membership could serve as a substitute for NATO. "Even if the EU could manage expansion, it would not be enough to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe. My clear position is that EU is no substitute for NATO enlargement. It is important that you understand that this is our clear position."

"Time is running out," the German Chancellor continued. There were two key reasons why the Alliance had to act now. The first was that trends in Russia were pointing in the wrong direction. "The situation in Russia is getting more difficult all the time, both concerning NATO and in other areas. New waves of nationalism are mounting in Russia." The problem was the psychology of the Russian people trying to recover from the debris of seven decades of communism. "You can make politics with a people's psychology—just look at 20th-century Germany."

The second reason was that it was not clear how much longer Yeltsin would be around. Yeltsin was "the best of the current political figures that might come to power" in Russia—but not the only one imaginable. "I don't think Yeltsin will last out his term," Kohl said. He recalled how moved Yeltsin had been to see him and how the Russian President had confided in him that he had underestimated the severity of his illness and was not sure how long he would live. His last meeting with the Russian President in Moscow had been an emotional one. "I am no doctor but I believe we should make good use of the time remaining. If the chances are going to be good, it is now."

The Chancellor was flexible on the modalities for moving forward. The key thing was that Western leaders worked together in a small group with Yeltsin. He underscored the importance of giving France and Chirac a special role, but made it clear he was not opposed to using Solana as NATO's lead negotiator if

Moscow accepted that approach. The important thing was to move while Yeltsin was in office and make him feel included in the decisionmaking process. "We have to give priority to embracing Yeltsin in the positive sense of the word—and we have to do so before July, well before July. Time is running out on us." Yeltsin should be able to say afterwards, Kohl concluded, "that he played a special role in the process. He can say: 'I helped decide. I am a big guy.' That's very important to him." If Yeltsin knew that NATO would proceed with or without a NATO-Russia agreement, he would "join us rather than turning his back to us or letting himself be left behind as Europe moved forward without him."[27]

Talbott left Bonn relieved. The German Chancellor had endorsed the essence of Washington's strategy. Chirac and France would still require special handling, but Washington had enough support from Solana and key allies to launch the effort. The U.S. Deputy Secretary returned to Washington on January 16 to report to the President and his national security team in the Cabinet Room on his trip. Sandy Berger, now sitting opposite President Clinton at the cabinet table as the President's National Security Advisor, warned the President that the road ahead would be difficult. Managing the twin commitments to enlarging NATO and sustaining cooperation with Russia, he said, was going to be like Scylla and Charydbis and among the most difficult foreign policy challenges Clinton would face as President.[28]

3. THE ROAD TO HELSINKI

Clinton and Yeltsin were scheduled to meet in Helsinki in March. Over the next two months a frenzied set of negotiations took place in Moscow, Brussels, and Washington. In late January Talbott and Gore's national security advisor, Leon Fuerth, visited Moscow for three days of intense discussions. "Our conclusion is that, after three years of fighting the problem of NATO, the Russians may finally be prepared to join us in solving it," they wrote upon their return. "This is partly because they seem to have realized that despite their opposition to enlargement and their best efforts to derail the process, Madrid is a fixed point on the horizon—and on the calendar—and they must navigate accordingly."

Russian attitudes had not changed, Talbott and Fuerth noted. "From the Russians' perspective, what will happen in Madrid remains a thoroughly ugly fact. But they are no longer devoting quite so much energy to trying to talk us out of enlargement, or to split us from our Allies. Nor are they quite so baldly threatening to restart the Cold War in retaliation for enlargement." Instead, Moscow seemed to be groping for a way to insulate the U.S.-Russia relationship and its ties with the West from the fallout of enlargement.

"The devil, however, is not just in the details—it's in the fundamentals," the memo continued. Moscow was still insisting on demands that were complete

non-starters. Left to their own devices, Primakov and Rodionov were unlikely to negotiate a deal on NATO's timeline. They were too interested in haggling over the details, especially regarding the military details of enlargement. But the good news was that Chernomyrdin and Yeltsin were increasingly involved—and they had different concerns that were easier for the U.S. to address. Their priority was that they "credibly be able to claim to their own people this spring that they have defended Russia's security and honor in the face of a looming development that their domestic political adversaries will characterize as a defeat and humiliation."[29]

Shortly thereafter, Yeltsin sent out the first feelers suggesting he wanted a deal. In a letter to Clinton on January 30, the Russian President underscored the need to ensure that the U.S.-Russian partnership remained "irreversible." He noted that both sides were "deadlocked" on the issue of NATO expansion, but recalled President Clinton's past assurances that enlargement would be carried out in a fashion not inimical to Russia's interests. "I believe you, and trust that our justified concern will, as you said, not simply be noted but will be taken into account in a clear and precise form," Yeltsin wrote. "It would be best if this were done, as you yourself stated publicly, in the form of an official agreement between Russia and NATO."[30]

They were not the words of a leader about to break off relations with the West. In a closed briefing to the Duma in early February, Primakov stated that Moscow had decided to try to negotiate a NATO-Russia deal in the hope that "the West will take into account our objective, serious concerns related to NATO enlargement."[31] When Chernomyrdin arrived in Washington in early February, he took a tough line at the official GCC meetings, but was more conciliatory in private. Meeting with Clinton, Chernomyrdin made it clear that Moscow did not want a confrontation with the West. But he underscored that the communist-led opposition in the Duma "will take advantage of anything" to try to "change the whole regime."[32] Flying to Chicago with Gore the next day, Chernomyrdin told him: "I understand that the decision [on enlargement] has been made; and we know you can't reverse it. But we need help on managing our own domestic politics on the issue." Gore responded: "Victor, we'll do that, so long as you can find a way to declare victory in what we can offer."[33]

It was now clear that Moscow wanted to negotiate with the U.S., not Paris or other European capitals. For all of his previous efforts to exploit divisions between Washington and its European allies, Primakov now referred to Solana and Washington's NATO allies with contempt. He would continue to talk to others, he told Talbott, but he considered Solana a "stool pigeon" and the role of countries like France "ornamental." Moscow knew who was making the real decisions. "That's why we'd rather talk directly with you. We're not so naïve as to think that you don't call the shots. Sure, I'll keep talking to Solana, but just so we all understand that a deal depends on the U.S. and Russia coming to

terms—and that means our two Presidents when they meet."[34] When he received Albright on February 21 during her first visit to Moscow as Secretary of State, Yeltsin made the same point: "Russia and the United States have problems to discuss which can only be resolved by the Presidents. If we are to come to closure on NATO, he and I are the ones who will decide."[35]

To maximize Washington's ability to manage this process, Talbott assembled a team of trusted aides to serve as his brain trust in bridging the remaining divide between NATO and Moscow. In the State Department, this team consisted of Eric Edelman, Talbott's chief of staff; Lynn Davis, Undersecretary of State and the key advisor on arms control issues; John Bass, a young and talented foreign service officer who served as the primary drafter of our position papers; Victoria Nuland, my counterpart in the State Department's bureau dealing with the Newly Independent States (S/NIS); Craig Dunkerley, the U.S. envoy for conventional disarmament negotiations, and myself. Sandy Vershbow was the head figure at the NSC. The key figures at the Defense Department were Walt Slocomb, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, his deputy Jan Lodal, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Kramer. Lieutenant General Richard B. Myers was the representative of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was later replaced by Lieutenant General "Doc" Vogelsong as the senior military representative on the team.

The gap between what NATO was proposing and what Russia was seeking was still huge in conceptual and practical terms. The short-term U.S. goal was to prevent a rupture in the West's relations with Russia over enlargement. One did not need to be a strategic genius to understand that if Russia saw NATO as responsive to its legitimate concerns, it was more likely to be a constructive partner than one that felt rejected and isolated. But the broader, long-term U.S. goal was more ambitious: namely to build a cooperative relationship that, in spite of our disagreement over enlargement, would chip away at Russian hostility toward the Alliance through concrete cooperation. The Administration did not see this as a negotiation simply to "compensate" Russia for acquiescing to enlargement. Instead, the objective was to create a relationship that would, over time, build greater trust and help change Russian attitudes toward NATO.

At the same time, the U.S. wanted to protect the Alliance's decisionmaking autonomy and its military ability to act. Internally, it used two benchmarks to evaluate proposals for NATO-Russia cooperation. The first was whether the idea made sense on its own merits and could be justified even if NATO were not being enlarged. The second was to avoid anything that would hinder the Alliance from being able to carry its commitment to defend new members in case they were threatened. This mix was summed up as the "three yes's" and "the five no's." The U.S. and NATO were saying "yes" to a new partnership with Russia, "yes" to institutionalized consultations, and "yes" to expanded coopera-

tion. The U.S. wanted Russia, as a major European actor, to be included and have a voice in deliberations on European security.

At the same time, the Administration also had five red lines it would not cross. It would reject any proposals that might give Russia a direct or implicit veto over Alliance decisionmaking, subordinate the Alliance to another institution such as the UN, slow down the enlargement process, create second-class members in Central and Eastern Europe, or close the door to future enlargement to countries such as the Baltic states. These five "no's" framed a pentagon within which NATO-Russia talks could take place. The Administration wanted to make this package look as attractive as possible to Moscow. It was prepared to be forward leaning on symbolism, but determined to remain firm on substance.

In one sense a NATO-Russia agreement was simply the next logical step in what NATO was already doing. Already under President George Bush in the early 1990s, NATO had declared that Russia was no longer an enemy and established the first NATO-Russia links. NATO and Russian Foreign and Defense Ministers were already meeting regularly. And Moscow had established a presence at NATO headquarters through PfP. But by proposing to institutionalize and take such links to the next level, the Administration was crossing important political and psychological thresholds that made people nervous—in Washington, Western Europe, and especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Administration's critics at home suggested that closer NATO-Russia consultations were a slippery slope that would lead to Moscow having a de facto veto. No one was more vocal or adamant in his criticism of Administration policy on this point than former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.[36] Talbott was confident NATO could devise an arrangement that ensured that it was the Alliance, not Russia, that would be in the driver's seat and control the scope and pace of cooperation. In March 1997, he addressed Kissinger's critique in a note to Albright. A NATO-Russia agreement, he wrote, should be viewed as a form of "time release medicine" with the U.S. and its allies controlling the dosage and when it was administered. NATO's opening to Moscow would be both gradual and conditional—and depend on Russia's own behavior in the NATO-Russia Council as well as its own democratic transformation. He wrote that the Charter:

> will create a foundation on which we can construct a closer relationship—over time, in a deliberate process, the pace and contents of which will remain very much under our control. Additional measures will require the good intentions and hard work of both parties. Think of it as a pay-as-you-go plan—with the Russians under a reciprocal obligation to "pay" in the coinage of good behavior—as opposed to one that requires a big down payment on our part. There are no fixed deadlines by which we

> commit ourselves to begin the activities that are of interest and benefit to the Russians. Rather, we commit to general undertakings, with no mention of how quickly—or slowly—they will occur.[37]

Moscow, of course, had very different objectives—and we knew it. It hoped to use this dialogue to accomplish its goals by other means à la Clausewitz. Once Moscow accepted that it could not stop enlargement, it still sought to limit it numerically and geographically and hollow it out militarily. It tried to restrict the Alliance's ability to deploy military equipment beyond its old borders, limit the activities of new members to the Alliance's political tasks, and prevent them from fully participating in alliance military planning. It wanted a ban on nuclear weapons, conventional forces, or "infrastructure" to the territory of new NATO members. It wanted to make sure that a first round of NATO enlargement would be the last. Most critically, it wanted to maximize Russian influence over the Alliance through what it referred to as "co-decision making," which was a euphemism for getting as much say as possible over future NATO actions.

One of Moscow's demands on enlargement had been that NATO leaders not exclude Russia from eventual membership. Clinton had obliged Yeltsin on this point, while making it clear that this was not a realistic prospect any time soon. Internally, I often told my staff that we had the 10, 25, and 50-year plans. The first was for Central and Eastern Europe, the second for Ukraine, and the third for Russia. At the same time, both we and our allies were nervous that Moscow might try to use this offer by NATO to create mischief by actually applying for membership. In the summer of 1996, Primakov suggested to Talbott that Russia was thinking about applying for NATO membership. After Talbott responded that Russia would have to get into the same queue and meet the same criteria as other candidates, Primakov acknowledged that he was not really interested in membership. "In reality," he continued, "it is not acceptable to us that NATO is open to everyone." Referring to the Baltic states and Ukraine, he stated that "this is an issue that could disrupt or destroy everything. We must be very, very careful."[38]

In the run up to Helsinki, Primakov again warned Talbott about the Baltic issue: "If any countries of the former Soviet Union are admitted to NATO, we will have no relations with NATO whatsoever. I know this can't be in the NATO-Russia document but it must be a common understanding." Both Vietnam and Cuba had wanted to join the Warsaw Pact, he insisted, but Moscow had not taken them in. Washington, he suggested, now needed to show similar restraint. Talbott reminded him that the U.S. never recognized Moscow's annexation of the Baltic states. "But the more general point" he continued, "is that we don't accept the idea of any sovereign independent state being told by someone else that it can never join an international organization or alliance. The Russian Foreign Minister dismissed what he referred to as "high

theory and legalisms." If NATO expanded to the Baltic states, he insisted, the Yeltsin government would have no chance of weathering the ensuing storm in the Duma.[39]

The question was whether the Clinton Administration could somehow reconcile these two very different agendas—and package that common ground in a document Yeltsin would be willing to sign before Madrid. In late January, Talbott's team drew up a NATO-Russia scorecard that laid out where we disagreed and why, areas where compromise might be possible, and areas where there was no give in the NATO position.[40] As the spring unfolded, this scorecard would be regularly updated as both sides resolved some issues and clarified what they could, or could not, agree on. We also outlined a draft NATO-Russia document with five sections: a preamble, the principles governing the relationship, the consultation mechanism both sides were creating, a list of areas and topics where NATO and Russia would seek to cooperate, and military issues. It drew as much as possible on themes and language agreed to in other contexts and which could now be tailored to create a foundation for NATO-Russia cooperation.

But there were a multitude of issues over which the two sides simply disagreed. They included what the document would be called, which key principles would be highlighted, and how the newly formed NATO-Russia Council would operate. Moscow, for example, wanted language underscoring how NATO was changing since it wanted to argue domestically that a new, more political Alliance was emerging. The NATO allies were willing to consider language along these lines, but wanted reciprocal language on how *both* the Alliance and Russia had evolved after the end of the Cold War. The Alliance, in turn, wanted language from the OSCE Charter of Paris recognizing the rights of countries to determine their own alliances. Although Moscow had signed these documents, it was loath to put that language into what became the NATO-Russia Founding Act for fear that this would be interpreted as its acquiescing to NATO enlargement.

Establishing the rules for a NATO-Russia consultative mechanism was harder. The Alliance was willing to give Russia a voice, but not a veto, in NATO deliberations. This meant that NATO was prepared to consult with Moscow—but as an alliance and only after the allies had consulted with each other and reached a common position. In diplomatic parlance, this was referred to as a relationship of "16 plus 1." Moscow initially insisted on some version of co-decisionmaking in which it would be part of the consultation process before NATO had closed ranks. It demanded a voice in any NATO actions beyond its borders. And it wanted the Alliance to be subordinate to the United Nations, which given Moscow's seat on the Security Council would also ensure that it could not act without Moscow's consent. On these issues, the U.S. and its allies simply had to hold firm.

The most contentious issues were the military ones—or what soon was referred to in shorthand as Section V of the NATO-Russia draft. Moscow insisted upon a complete ban on the deployment of NATO nuclear weapons, troops, and infrastructure on the soil of new members. That was unacceptable to NATO. At the same time, the Alliance had flexibility in terms of how it carried out Article V guarantees when it came to its own strategy. The withdrawal of Russian military power eastward, the strategic depth provided by an independent Ukraine, and the ongoing erosion in Moscow's military capabilities had left NATO with conventional superiority in military terms. There was no cookie cutter model for how NATO carried out its security guarantees. The Alliance had defended countries in different ways over the years depending on a wide range of factors. Some allies had foreign forces on their soil, but others did not. Some countries had deployed nuclear weapons on their soil but this was not a precondition for membership.[41]

The NATO enlargement study from 1995 had established the principle that there was no *a priori* requirement for the deployment of either nuclear or conventional forces on the territory of new members. Both U.S. and NATO military authorities were comfortable relying on the capability to project military power to these countries in a crisis to carry out NATO's defense commitment to new members. Such a strategy assumed that new members would provide for their own national defense in the initial stage of a conflict until reinforcement arrived—and that the infrastructure existed that would allow NATO troops to deploy quickly and operate effectively thereafter. The Alliance had no intention of initiating a major military build-up in Central and Eastern Europe.

The question was whether NATO could articulate this in a fashion that addressed Russian concerns without arbitrarily tying the Alliance's hands. NATO allies were prepared to lay out Alliance thinking to reassure Moscow on this point, but politically, the allies could only do so if such statements were, and were seen as, voluntary Alliance decisions acceptable to new members and not the results of "concessions" given in NATO-Russia talks. Such constraints also had to be conditional. The Alliance needed to be able to abandon them if the security environment took a turn for the worse. If Moscow were to resort to its previous imperial ways or initiate its own military build-up, all bets were off.

Both sides now turned to the Vienna arms control negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) as a way to manage the military modalities of enlarging NATO. Politically, it was an acceptable forum because the prospective new members of the Alliance were at the table and had a full voice in these deliberations. Whatever restrictions were agreed to would be blessed by all the parties involved. Above all, the CFE negotiations were a two-way street. NATO's willingness to codify how many forces it would or would not deploy also depended on what kinds of restrictions Moscow would agree to for the

forces on its territory. It also provided Moscow with the firm legally binding agreements it was looking for.

By now, Washington and its allies had agreed to scrap the old CFE framework and work on a new structure replacing the old treaty's group limits with separate national limits. NATO planners realized that this offered a way to square the circle with Moscow on enlargement's military consequences. To meet Alliance standards, the NATO candidate countries were building smaller militaries more in line with those of the West Europeans. The combination of these lower national force levels, plus planned NATO reinforcements, was still below the existing level of entitlements under the CFE treaty. In other words, NATO could enlarge and meet its obligations to defend new Alliance members. While highly technical in nature, these negotiations held the key for a possible deal. The Alliance could show that NATO enlargement, far from leading to a new military build-up that Moscow feared, was actually taking place in conjunction with a military draw-down. Moscow, in turn, could tell its public that it would not be facing a single additional Western tank after enlargement.

An even thornier issue was what the Russian side called "infrastructure." Moscow wanted a ban on what it called "offensive" infrastructure. This, too, was a non-starter for NATO for several reasons. No previous arms agreements had ever provided a working definition of "defensive" or "offensive" infrastructure, and it was probably not possible to come up with one at all; and certainly not on the timeline NATO and Russia were working on. More importantly, there was an inverse relationship between forward deployed troops and infrastructure. NATO could limit one or the other—but not both without being rendered militarily impotent and creating de facto second-class allies. If NATO refrained from the forward deployment of conventional forces on the territory of new members, it needed to have the infrastructure to project power quickly into these countries.[42]

In December 1996, NATO took the first in a series of steps to reassure Moscow about the military consequences of enlargement for Russia. At the NATO December Foreign Ministers meeting, the Alliance reaffirmed that its nuclear umbrella would be extended to new members but that enlargement would "not require a change in NATO's current nuclear posture and, therefore, NATO countries have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members."[43] In mid-February, NATO tabled a CFE proposal that was clearly designed to show that NATO enlargement would not lead to an eastward shift or to a build-up of NATO conventional forces.[44]

By early March, these military issues had moved to the forefront of NATO-Russia talks. Meeting with Talbott in Brussels on March 5, Solana told him that he could see his way through to an acceptable compromise on most of the political issues. But the one where he was making the least headway with Primakov was on the issue of conventional forces.

Was there a way, Solana asked, to take the model that NATO had used to address the nuclear issue and apply it to conventional forces? It was a tricky issue. The Alliance had always retained the option of small deployments of conventional forces for new members. While Solana and Talbott talked, NSC Senior Director Sandy Vershbow scribbled out a sentence that captured the essence of the Alliance's thinking and handed it to Talbott. It read: "In the current and foreseeable security environment, the collective defense of the Alliance and the participation of all its members in the Alliance's military activities will be based on interoperability and a capability for reinforcement rather than on the permanent stationing of substantial, large combat units where they are not currently deployed."

Talbott quickly dubbed it the "sentence from hell" and it soon became known as the SFH.[45] While it hardly would qualify as a literary breakthrough, the meaning was sufficiently clear. As long as Russia did not threaten its neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe with new military steps, NATO would not deploy large numbers of troops on the soil of new allies, and rely instead on its reinforcement capability to make them feel secure.

When Talbott informally floated the idea with Mamedov in Moscow a few days later, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minster immediately responded: "This could be what we're looking for." He asked Talbott to repeat the sentence and carefully wrote it down. He wanted Talbott to define "large" and "substantial," but the Deputy Secretary demurred. The next day a well-briefed Primakov also pushed Talbott for greater specificity. "We need to be able to explain to the Russian public that there will be no nuclear weapons, no forces, no troops moving closer to Russia's borders."

Talbott responded that Moscow had to stop defining partial success as failure. "You must stop trying, in both what you're saying and what you're doing, to nullify the military dimension of membership for the countries that will be coming into NATO as new members. You've got to accept that these countries are coming into the Alliance as genuine equal members, including in the military dimension."[46] During a refueling stop on his way back to Washington, Talbott nonetheless called Solana to report that the "sentence from hell" had clearly elicited Russian interest and looked like a promising way to proceed.

But first the U.S. had to make sure the Central and East Europeans would not interpret this step as a sellout. These countries had been following the quickening pace of NATO-Russia talks with mixed feelings. While they supported them in principle, they feared that some of their own interests might be short-changed in the rush to reach an agreement. This, they feared, could result in them joining the Alliance but as "second-class" members. As one senior Polish official put it: "The smell of Yalta is always with us."[47] The Alliance had consulted closely with them in crafting its new CFE proposal to regulate the military side of NATO enlargement in a way that respected their sensitivities.

But as rumors of NATO issuing a second unilateral statement on its conventional posture spread, they grew nervous.

In Washington, Polish Ambassador Kozminski had caught wind of the fact that a NAC statement on NATO's future conventional force posture in an enlarged alliance was in the works. By this time the original SFH had gone through several iterations. Kozminski saw an early version containing the phrase "new members." Alarm bells started to go off. He feared that such language would violate Poland's own "red lines." These were simple: no second-class membership or limits that would discriminate against Poland in the Alliance or singularize it in ways that would create a domestic backlash. And for the Administration, keeping Poland happy was key for many reasons, not least of which was that it was the best key to keeping Republican critics at bay.

Kozminski arranged for Polish Foreign Minister Darius Rosati to fly to Washington to see Albright and other senior U.S. officials before the Helsinki summit. At meetings with the officials on March 13, Rosati argued that the proposed U.S. statement was unlikely to placate Russian concerns but would instead be pocketed by Moscow, which would then ask for more. He added that it also ran the risk of creating a second-class status for Warsaw that could produce a negative backlash in Polish public opinion. NSC Senior Director Fried was the first to meet with Rosati over lunch at the Mayflower Hotel. Fried took him through the logic of Washington's approach and explained how it protected the Alliance's ability to come to Poland's defense in a crisis. Rosati was not persuaded. After lunch, Fried called Edelman to warn that he had made little headway. Edelman responded: "That's ok. You are our blast shield—and you've absorbed the first Polish blast."

Later that afternoon Rosati met with Deputy National Security Advisor Jim Steinberg at the White House, as well as Albright and Talbott at the State Department. They walked Rosati through the sentence, again pointing out the protections and qualifications that were built into it. But Rosati was still opposed. Albright reassured him that NATO's proposal was merely a repackaging of things already said many times and that its purpose was to preempt Russian efforts to impose unacceptable limits on NATO by having the Alliance close ranks around a statement that did not cross the Alliance's own red lines. Rosati replied that Moscow was trying to make NATO militarily irrelevant by "pulling out its teeth" and that the U.S. approach looked like "appeasement," a charge that Albright vehemently rejected.[48] Afterwards, Albright confessed to Talbott that it had been easy for her to empathize with Rosati since she sympathized with the Central and East European concerns "in my bones and in my genes."[49]

On March 14 NATO unilaterally issued a simplified version of the "sentence from hell" in which it unilaterally defined its policy on the forward deployment of troops on the territory of new members. It read: "In the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defense and

other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces."[50] The next day Albright met with Primakov in Washington. While the two Foreign Ministers were officially negotiating a bilateral U.S.-Russian statement on European security for the Helsinki summit, everyone understood that the upcoming Clinton-Yeltsin meeting was critical if there was to be a breakthrough in the talks on a NATO-Russia Charter.

Primakov started out the conversation by noting that the two sides had nearly resolved their differences on the first four parts of the draft Charter—the preamble, the principles guiding the relationship, the nature of the NATO-Russia Council and the areas for possible NATO-Russia cooperation. But the key issue was Section V, the military implications of NATO enlargement. The Russian Foreign Minister insisted that there was one question that needed to be resolved. Otherwise there could be no Charter. NATO's statement from the previous day was "totally unacceptable," he insisted. There had to be a permanent ban on the deployment of NATO forces and new infrastructure. The Alliance could deploy troops temporarily for the purpose of exercises or for peacekeeping operations, but that was it. A clear statement along these lines in the Charter was a *sine quo non* for Moscow.

The Secretary responded that NATO's policies were not negotiable with non-NATO countries, especially Russia. Washington would not agree to anything that would make new members second-class allies. Primakov countered that NATO already had allies who had accepted restrictions imposed on them, such as Germany. In addition, Denmark and Norway had voluntarily agreed to restrictions. This showed, he insisted, that NATO could, in fact, agree to special conditions for certain members. "Look Yevgeny," Albright responded, "Neither the President nor I are going to negotiate over the heads of the Central Europeans about their security arrangements. That's been done in the past and it is not going to happen again, not on my watch."

When Primakov continued to push the Russian position that Washington had previously rejected, Albright cut him off and said: "We've said 'no' to all this stuff before, and if you've come here simply to hear me say 'no' again, I'm happy to do so."

"Madeleine," Primakov countered, "why aren't you willing to meet us halfway."

"Halfway? Halfway," Albright responded, "You keep going back to square one!" Primakov, in response, threw up his hands and said: "I don't really think we can have an agreement."

"Well," Albright snapped, "so be it." Frankly, she continued, the U.S. could live without the Charter. NATO enlargement would move forward on its own. The U.S. supported a Charter because it believed such a document could pro-

vide a roadmap for improving NATO-Russia relations. But if Primakov insisted on trying to negotiate NATO policy, it would not work.[51]

Talbott decided it was time for another private chat with Mamedov. While Secretary Albright and Primakov exchanged rather forced closing courtesies, he pulled Mamedov aside to invite him to his house for an off-line review of the bidding. The next morning Mamedov sat down with Talbott and Berger in Talbott's home. Mamedov said that Primakov and he had put their heads together and came up with an outline for a joint statement for Helsinki. The Russian side, he insisted, had finally done what Talbott had been urging them to do—to work with what Washington was offering to construct an attractive package that would address Moscow's concerns but would not cross the United States' "red lines." Looking at the draft, Talbott saw that it was an improvement. Yet it still took all the things the Russians wanted while ignoring several issues high on the U.S. wish list. Above all, it allowed Russia the option of continuing a war of words on enlargement to try to squeeze out additional concessions down the line.

Berger and Talbott therefore told Mamedov that there had to be an agreement in advance that the harsh Russian rhetoric against enlargement would cease, starting with Yeltsin at Helsinki. They also underscored that the agreements on the military aspects of enlargement would have to be codified at the official CFE negotiations that included the Central and East Europeans. Mamedov told Talbott that Albright and Primakov would have to finalize the understanding that evening over dinner and that the Russian Foreign Minister would, on his return to Moscow, give Yeltsin an assessment of what it would take to get a NATO-Russia charter before Madrid. Yeltsin would then have to decide whether it was worth the price.[52]

That evening, Albright and Primakov, along with Mamedov and Ambassadors Jim Collins and Yuri Vorontsov, arrived at the Talbott residence where Talbott's wife, Brooke Shearer, had prepared a wonderful Italian meal. Albright explained that she would have invited the group to her Georgetown townhouse, but that it was being exterminated for termites. "Aha!" said Primakov. "Like NATO, your exterminators are pre-positioning infrastructure on new territory!" "Just as NATO did long ago in Norway," said Albright. And so it continued: a new metaphor was born. Madeleine interpreted Primakov's attempt to reopen issues the U.S. regarded as non-negotiable as the result of "termites" in the Russian bureaucracy bent on preventing a NATO-Russia deal before Madrid. In response, Primakov proposed a "joint ministerial extermination of all termites on both sides." The two Foreign Ministers went back and forth over the joint statement all evening. Primakov kept gnawing away on core issues which required Albright to review, with mounting impatience, U.S. objections and counter-proposals. But by the end of the evening they had agreed on way ahead.[53]

The next morning the Russian side returned to the official negotiating table with new flexibility. Following a three-hour drafting session between Albright, Talbott, and Primakov, a joint text was agreed upon. Later that day, Primakov met with President Clinton to review the understanding that had been reached. Clinton told the Russian Foreign Minster that the text was acceptable but that Moscow needed to tone down the anti-NATO rhetoric lest it undercut and devalue the impact of a possible NATO-Russia agreement. "If the strategy is to set up the notion that Russia has achieved something meaningful and important to alleviate Russia's concerns, then that's okay. I don't mind getting beaten up in the meanwhile. But after Helsinki, the tone and rhetoric has to change to create the impression of partnership, as in Bosnia." Primakov agreed.[54]

Talbott took it as a good sign that Primakov had not raised the issue of the Baltic states in meetings with Clinton and Albright. In the car on the way to Andrews Air Force base for his flight home, however, the Russian Foreign Minister told him that Yeltsin was going to suggest an agreement to exclude the Baltic states from NATO enlargement. Talbott warned Primakov that such a proposal ran the risk of ruining the summit. But Primakov responded angrily that the two sides then had a real problem. "There are some things that can't be fixed at our level. They're in the hands of the gods—or at least of Presidents."[55]

4. BREAKTHROUGH AT HELSINKI

When Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin sat down in Helsinki on March 21, they had met nearly a dozen times. They liked each other and had an open and frank relationship. In the opening plenary session at the Finnish President's residence, both Clinton and Yeltsin launched their discussions by going straight to the most difficult issue—European security and NATO enlargement. Yeltsin said: "Our position has not changed. It remains a mistake for NATO to move eastward. But I need to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of this for Russia. I am prepared to enter into an agreement with NATO, not because I want to but because it's a step I'm compelled to take. There is no other solution for today."

The one condition he had, the Russian President continued, was that the U.S. promise that NATO would not bring "former Soviet republics" into the Alliance. It was a clear reference to the Baltic states. He proposed that they reach "an oral agreement—we won't write it down" to that effect. "This would be a gentlemen's agreement that won't be made public," he underscored. Clinton initially sidestepped Yeltsin's suggestion and instead sketched out his vision of a grand signing ceremony, somewhere in Europe, before Madrid, at which a NATO-Russia Charter would be concluded that would allow Clinton and Yeltsin to "say to the world that there really is a new NATO and there really is a new Russia."

"I agree," said Yeltsin.

"Good," the President continued. "But I want you to imagine something else. If we were to agree that no members of the former Soviet Union could enter NATO, that would be a bad thing for our attempt to build a new NATO. It would also be a bad thing for your attempt to build a new Russia. I am not naïve. I understand you have an interest in who gets into NATO and when. We need to make sure that all these are subjects that we can consult about as we move forward. 'Consult' means making sure that we're aware of your concerns, and that you understand our decisions and our positions and our thinking. But consider what a terrible message it would send if we were to make the kind of supposedly secret deal you're suggesting. First, there are no secrets in this world. Second, the message would be, 'We're still organized against Russia—but there's a line across which we won't go.' In other words, instead of creating a new NATO that helps move toward an integrated, undivided Europe, we'd have a larger NATO that's just sitting there waiting for Russia to do something bad."

"Here's why what you are proposing is bad for Russia," the U.S. President argued. "Russia would be saying, 'We've still got an empire, but it just can't reach as far West as it used to when we had the Warsaw Pact.' Second, it would create exactly the fear among the Baltics and others that you're trying to allay and that you're denying is justified. A third point: the deal you're suggesting would totally undermine the Partnership for Peace. It would terrify the smaller countries that are now working well with you and with us in Bosnia and elsewhere."

Pointing out that they were meeting in Helsinki, the U.S. President recalled what Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari had told him the previous evening—that the U.S. was doing the right thing by ensuring that NATO's door remained open in the future. "He said that Finland hasn't asked to be in NATO, and as long as no one tells Finland it can't join NATO, then Finland will be able to maintain the independence of its position and work with PFP and with the U.S. and with Russia."

"Under no circumstances," the U.S. President continued, "should we send a signal out of this meeting that it's the same old European politics of the cold war and we're just moving the lines around a bit." Yeltsin's proposed gentlemen's agreement, President Clinton insisted, "would make us both look weaker, not stronger. If we made the agreement you're describing it would be a terrible mistake. It would cause big problems for me and big problems for you. It would accentuate the diminishment of your power from Warsaw Pact times. The charter will be a much more powerful and positive message. It's without precedent, it's comprehensive, and it's forward looking, and it's hopeful. It will move us toward a situation that's good for both of us."

"Bill," Yeltsin conceded, "I agree with what you've said. But look at it from my standpoint. Whatever you do on your side, we intend to submit this document to the Duma for ratification. But the Duma will take two decisions. First, it will ratify the document, then it will attach a condition that if NATO takes in

even one of the former republics of the Soviet Union, Russia will pull out of the agreement and consider it null and void. That will happen unless you tell me today, one-on-one—without even our closest aides present—that you won't take new republics in the near future. I need to hear that. I understand that maybe in ten years or something, the situation might change, but not now. Maybe there will be a later evolution. But I need assurances from you that it won't happen in the nearest future."

"Come on, Boris," said Clinton, "if I went into a closet with you and told you what you wanted to hear, the Congress would find out and pass a resolution invalidating the NATO-Russia charter. Frankly, I'd rather that the Duma pass a resolution conditioning its adherence on this point. I'd hate for the Duma to do that, but it would be better than what you're suggesting. I just can't do it. A private commitment would be the same as a public one. I've told you—and you have talked to Helmut and Jacques, you know their thinking—that no one is talking about a massive, all-out, accelerated expansion. We've already demonstrated our ability to move deliberately, openly. But I can't make commitments on behalf of NATO and I'm not going to be in the position myself of vetoing any country's eligibility for NATO, much less letting you or anyone else do so. I'm prepared to work with you on the consultative mechanism so as to make sure that we take account of Russia's concerns as we move forward."

Clinton also pointed to Bosnia as an example that was important for the future. "That's the worst conflict in Europe since World War II. The Europeans couldn't solve it. The U.S. was finally able to take an initiative there, and Russia came in and helped. It took me years to build support. What if, sometime in the future, another Bosnia arises? If the NATO-Russia understanding is done right, then Russia would be a key part of the solution, working with the U.S. and Europe. But if we create a smaller version of the larger standoff that existed during the cold war, there won't be the needed trust. This process of integrating Europe is going to take years. We need to build up the OSCE. It's not going to happen overnight. But if we make a statement now that narrows our options in the future, it will be harder to do the other good things we want to do."

"I know what a terrible problem this is for you," he continued, "but I can't make the specific commitment you are asking for. It would violate the whole spirit of NATO. I've always tried to build you up and never undermine you. I'd feel I had dishonored my commitment to the alliance, to the states that want to join NATO, and to the vision that I think you and I share of an undivided Europe with Russia as a major part of it."

Yeltsin responded: "Okay, but let's agree—one-on-one—that the former Soviet republics won't be in the first waves. Bill, please understand what I'm dealing with there: I'm flying back to Russia with a very heavy burden on my shoulders. It will be difficult for me to go home and not seem to have accepted NATO enlargement. Very difficult."

The President replied: "Look, Boris, you're forcing an issue that doesn't need to drive a wedge between us here. NATO operates by consensus. If you decided to be in NATO, you'd probably want all the other countries to be eligible too. But that issue doesn't arise. We need to find a solution to a short-term problem that doesn't create a long-term problem by keeping alive old stereotypes about you and your intentions. If we do the wrong thing, it will erode our own position about the kind of Europe we want. I hear your message. But your suggestion is not the way to do it. I don't want to do anything that makes it seem like the old Russia and the old NATO." At this point, Yeltsin appeared to simply give up. "Well," he said, "I tried."[56]

Later that afternoon, Clinton and Yeltsin reviewed what they would say to the press. Clinton suggested both leaders avoid using the word "concessions." "I don't want people to score this as you versus me; I don't want them to say that Boris won on three issues and Bill won on two." NSC Adviser Sandy Berger then played the role of the journalist. He asked the two Presidents the tough questions. One of them was: "Have you made any secret deals here in Helsinki?" With a smile Yeltsin replied: "My answer will be: 'We wanted one but were rejected.'" As the two Presidents got up to face the press corps, Yeltsin grabbed Clinton by the hand and said; "Bill, we have done powerful work."[57]

At the press conference later that afternoon, Clinton led off by explaining why he supported NATO enlargement. "NATO is the bedrock of Europe's security and the tie that binds the United States to that security." That is why, he continued, the U.S. had led the way in adapting and enlarging the Alliance for the post–Cold War era. "We are building a new NATO just as the Russian people are building a new Russia," he added. "I am determined that Russia will become a respected partner with NATO in making the future for all of Europe peaceful and secure."

While he and Yeltsin did not agree on NATO enlargement, there was an overriding agreement between the two Presidents: "We agreed that the relationship between the United States and Russia and the benefits of cooperation between NATO and Russia are too important to be jeopardized," Clinton said. In response to a question, Yeltsin added: "We believe that the eastward expansion of NATO is a mistake and a serious one at that. Nevertheless, in order to minimize the negative consequences for Russia, we decided to sign an agreement with NATO, a NATO-Russian agreement."[58]

In the aftermath of Helsinki, Russian officials put on a brave face. Foreign Minister Primakov called the summit a "breakthrough" and argued that President Yeltsin had successfully defended Russian interests.[59] In private they were more reserved. As Yeltsin told Finnish President Ahtisaari, he had tried to get Clinton to agree to no NATO expansion to former parts of the Soviet Union. "But," the Russian President admitted, "I failed."[60] For President Clinton and his national security team, it was *the* breakthrough. It was as if Yeltsin's opposi-

tion to NATO enlargement had evaporated in front of their eyes. Following his visit to Moscow shortly after the Helsinki summit, NATO Military Committee Chairman Klaus Naumann reported to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels that his Russian military counterparts, for the first time, seemed resigned to the fact that enlargement would take place.[61]

5. PLAYING BOTH SIDES OF THE CHESSBOARD

At Helsinki, Yeltsin had finally accepted that NATO enlargement was going to happen and had decided to seek a NATO-Russia understanding to protect Moscow's interests. He had also agreed that NATO and Russia should sign a document *prior* to Madrid at a separate summit involving heads-of-state. The best time to hold such an event would be in late May, when President Clinton was already scheduled to be in Europe. The tentative date was penciled in for May 27. Out of deference to Chirac, the site envisioned was Paris. Both sides had two months to finalize a NATO-Russia charter.

But Clinton and Yeltsin had not agreed on the content of a charter at Helsinki. Many of the differences that still separated NATO and Russia had merely been papered over. In the weeks following the summit Russian diplomats seemed reticent to engage in resolving these outstanding issues. John Tefft, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Moscow, reported that while Yeltsin had committed in principle to complete an understanding by the late May deadline, the foreign policy bureaucracy lacked the authority to make the compromises required to seal the pact. It was also not clear if Moscow understood how far it still had to move in order to meet NATO's bottom line, or if Yeltsin could overcome Duma opposition to any agreement that NATO would find acceptable.[62]

It was yet another example of how dysfunctional the Russian national security bureaucracy was as well as the antipathy toward closing any deal with NATO that sanctioned enlargement. If a deal was going to be reached, the final push would have to come from the U.S. and NATO. On the plane to Moscow for U.S.-Russia consultations in late April, Talbott said to me: "You have to think in terms of playing a game of chess—but one where you are playing both sides of the chessboard. After you make your move, you run over to the other side of the board and tell your opponent who is really your partner in this game: 'Move your piece there.' That's the only way we are going to get this thing done." In the hectic days that lay ahead, Talbott was the U.S. official coordinating NATO policy with Solana and his counterparts in allied capitals as well as working with Primakov and Mamedov to steer the Russian side toward possible common ground.

Solana and Primakov held another round of consultations in Moscow on April 15, 1997. Afterwards the Secretary General reported to the NAC that his just-concluded talks with the Russian Foreign Minister had been the toughest

so far. While the first four sections of the draft charter were, in his words, "90% complete," the two sides remained deadlocked on the core issues in Section V.[63] In parallel, Primakov had sent Mamedov to Washington where he handed over a Russian draft charter to Talbott. It was unacceptable as it crossed several of our "red lines." It would have created second-class NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe, and prevented further enlargement at a later date. Buried in the technical details of CFE adaptation was Russia's attempt to freeze NATO deployments, numerically and geographically. Moscow was making one last effort to limit any extension of the Alliance's military reach eastward.

It demonstrated again the gap in our respective approaches. The U.S. and NATO viewed enlargement as part of an overall European integration strategy that would transcend the old Cold War bloc-to-bloc divide that projected stability eastward. We had said that NATO and Russia were no longer enemies, but partners. While for us a NATO-Russia agreement was the basis for long-term cooperation, Moscow never made the leap to this new integrationist thinking. It continued to think in terms of blocs and spheres of influence. While Moscow, too, said that NATO was no longer an enemy, such proposals suggested that Russia still viewed NATO enlargement as the extension of a hostile bloc to their borders. We had not bridged this gap and time was getting short.

Talbott now told Mamedov that they were getting nowhere with the Russian draft and that the gains of Helsinki were in danger of unraveling. If Moscow's bottom line was a desire to show that an enlarged NATO would not pose a greater military threat to Russia than the Cold War, then Washington disagreed with the philosophy but could nonetheless think about ways in which this could be accommodated. But Moscow was going about it in a way that was forcing Washington to say no. Mamedov asked Talbott to provide him with an alternative. Talbott, in turn, asked Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Lynn Davis to draft a short paper showing how the current NATO-CFE proposal could produce an outcome where the overall level of forces in an enlarged NATO was not greater than the old NATO collective ceiling. This had to be done in a way that did not cross any of NATO's "red lines."

During a walk in Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek Park later that day with Talbott and his dog, Mamedov told the Deputy Secretary they might be getting somewhere and that he would try to sell the paper back home in Moscow. The two men soon dubbed the document "the walk with the dog" paper—a play on the "walk in the woods" compromise that the U.S. diplomat Paul Nitze and his Russian counterpart Yuli Kvitsinski had developed to break the impasse on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks in the mid-1980s, which Talbott had written about as a journalist.[64]

Talbott and Albright were scheduled to travel to Moscow at the end of the month. The trip was set up so that Talbott and his team would get to Moscow first and try to make progress, with Albright arriving a day later to try to clinch a

deal. A phone call with President Yeltsin had also been arranged so that Albright could appeal to the Russian President to give Primakov the flexibility needed to close the gap on the outstanding issues. In preparing for the trip, we created three scenarios for what Albright might encounter in Moscow. Three factors were singled out as being crucial. The first was how committed Yeltsin and Primakov were to getting a deal. The second was what kind of deal and whether Moscow, at the end of the day, would accept a deal which met NATO's criteria but would be difficult to defend in the Duma, or whether it would insist on something that might be acceptable to the Duma but was unacceptable to the allies. And the third factor was whether Moscow now believed that, absent a Paris deal, the allies would proceed with enlargement at Madrid.

The three scenarios were called: "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."[65] The first scenario, The Good, assumed that after difficult talks and Yeltsin's interventions the two sides would manage to resolve all their differences before Paris. The second scenario, The Bad, assumed that Primakov would stonewall, receive instructions from Yeltsin to hold firm, and the two sides would not reach agreement but nonetheless work out a damage limitation strategy for managing Madrid without a NATO-Russia agreement. The third scenario, The Ugly, assumed that the two sides could not agree, but that negotiations would go down to the wire, severely testing Alliance cohesion, and maybe even require the personal involvement of head-of-states at Paris. Talbott added a fourth scenario that he called "Uglier Still," in which the Russian side, after failing to reach agreement, would launch a campaign to blame the breakdown on the U.S. to shake up the allies and pressure us to make more concessions.

The U.S. delegation arrived in Moscow on a warm spring day. We made little progress during the first day of talks. While Primakov had shown a clear willingness to engage, all of his proposals were variations on the some theme—a desire to impose a collective limit on the forces of an enlarged NATO, place restrictions on any permanently stationed forces, and limit NATO infrastructure on the territory of new members. The Russian Foreign Minister was, in effect, trying to close the loopholes the Alliance had deliberately left itself in its unilateral statements of restraint on conventional forces. As the U.S. delegation broke up into working groups with their Russian counterparts for a final round of talks, I accompanied Talbott back to his hotel to help draft a note to Albright who was departing from Andrews Air Force Base. We agreed that, based on the results thus far, we were headed toward "The Ugly" scenario.[66] The Russian proposal for a collective ceiling, Talbott said, was like a vampire. Every time the U.S. side thought they had killed it, it rose again. He joked that we had to drive a stake though its heart once and for all.

Over dinner that evening with Mamedov, however, Talbott made progress in sketching out a fallback compromise the Russian side might be able to live with. He had suggested to Mamedov that the two sides, in the interest of getting an

agreement, scale back their ambitions and instead shoot for a more general and limited "framework argument" on CFE. Mamedov was noncommittal but had agreed to take this idea back to Primakov. Talbott sent Albright a midnight update from Moscow with better news. He sensed that while he had made little concrete progress, the Russians were increasingly "in a bind between Yeltsin's publicly stated desire to go to Paris and their wish to put every conceivable block on enlargement, permanent stationing, infrastructure, etc." He laid out two alternative scenarios for the Secretary: either Primakov would agree to a fairly general "element of a framework" statement that could be first incorporated into a NATO-Russia agreement and then finalized in CFE talks in Vienna, or he would hold firm on Moscow's desiderata even if that jeopardized a NATO-Russia summit.[67]

Albright arrived in Moscow the next morning, May 1, descending the steps of her Air Force plane wearing a red Stetson. Although a small crowd of anti-NATO demonstrators was gathered in front of our hotel when she arrived, most of Moscow was out in the countryside enjoying the national holiday. It was another reminder of how the Russian elite were preoccupied with the NATO enlargement issue but average Russians were not. Albright and Primakov spent a long session going around and around the same issues that had proven so difficult the previous day, but did not reach a breakthrough.[68] Albright placed her prearranged phone call to Yeltsin, who was in his countryside dacha. He told Albright how eager he was to go to Paris and how much he was counting on his friends, including President Clinton, to make sure the meeting went well. As the day unfolded, it was increasingly clear to the U.S. side that Primakov was under instructions from Yeltsin to get a deal.

That evening Primakov invited Albright and part of the U.S. delegation to dinner at his apartment, an unusual gesture of friendship and hospitality for a senior Russian official. After dinner, Albright and Talbott sat down with Primakov for what was supposed to be the final negotiating session. Primakov said that if the U.S. did not yield on the remaining points, he would "become a pessimist" about getting a deal in time for a NATO-Russia summit in Paris. "Me too," said Madeleine, "and in that case, we'll just have to skip Paris and keep negotiating on a charter after Madrid." Primakov sighed heavily and suggested that they hold one more unscheduled meeting the following morning prior to her departure.[69]

During the night, the U.S. and Russian sides worked on compromise language along the lines of an "elements of a framework" that Talbott and Mamedov had discussed. The next morning Albright and Primakov held two hours of grueling final discussions in the Russian Foreign Ministry. Finally, Albright, accompanied by Talbott and Lynn Davis, retreated into Primakov's private office. Primakov was accompanied by Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, well known in the U.S. as the most publicly outspoken anti-NATO figure in the

Russian Ministry of Defense. Albright and Primakov finally agreed on a text. When Ivashov criticized it, Primakov overruled him—and everyone dashed off to the airport.[70] That evening, Albright wrote the President: "If the partial understanding I reached with Primakov holds, it means we are entering the endgame in the negotiation of a charter." But the clock was ticking. Albright noted that they probably needed to decide by May 12 whether or not Paris was on.[71]

Solana was scheduled to meet with Primakov on May 6 in Luxembourg. At NATO headquarters, diplomats poured over the Albright-Primakov language on CFE and eventually blessed it with minor changes.[72] At a meeting on May 6, prior to Solana's departure for Luxembourg, the NAC authorized Solana to explore compromise language on the outstanding issues: the name of the document, the chairmanship, as well as to explore the possibility of NATO adding additional language further clarifying its position on both nuclear and conventional forces.[73] To support Solana on the military issues, U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Keogh was added to the Secretary General's team. In parallel, Talbott sent Mamedov a letter underscoring the need for any restriction on forces in Central Europe to be reciprocal and not single out new NATO members, and the need to reach agreement soon if Paris was to happen.[74]

Despite four-and-one-half hours of talks, Solana and Primakov could not close the deal. While dropping its insistence on the sufficiency rule, the Russian side still insisted on limiting the temporary deployment of allied forces on the soil of new members to one brigade for peacekeeping purposes and pushed for constraints on infrastructure. Solana again rejected the Russian proposals and reiterated that the fact that NATO was not forward deploying troops meant that it would have to maintain adequate infrastructure for reinforcements. At the end of their meeting, Primakov handed over a new Russian draft for Section V of the draft charter. It was still a long way from being acceptable to the Alliance.[75] There was now less than a week to go before the Alliance's internal deadline expired. Solana and Primakov agreed to one last session in Moscow on May 13.

NATO officials scrambled to prepare for this last session and to come up with final steps that could still produce an agreement.[76] In addition to the official guidance sent to Ambassador Hunter, Talbott wrote Solana a letter with some suggestions on how to close the deal. He suggested offering interpretive language on both nuclear and conventional forces that would be an extrapolation of the Alliance's previous statements, as opposed to new statements, on these issues. The language clarified that NATO's three nuclear no's encompassed nuclear storage facilities, thereby addressing a Russian demand. He told Solana that Washington was prepared to live with limits on deployments on the territory of new members under certain conditions. If these could be met, Washington was also prepared to add a statement that the Alliance intended to

build infrastructure commensurate with the military tasks outlined in the March 14 statement if Moscow dropped further demands along these lines.

In parallel, Talbott tried to play the other side of the chessboard as well. He wrote Mamedov on May 8 to suggest what Moscow needed to do to close the deal. He told Mamedov that the draft Primakov had given Solana was a step backward, not forward. He also told the Deputy Russian Foreign Minster where Solana was going to be able to show flexibility and where he was not—hinting at the kinds of compromises NATO was going to table but avoiding the details.[77] When U.S. chargé d'affaires John Tefft delivered Talbott's letter the next morning, the Deputy Foreign Minister asked him to pass a message back to the Deputy Secretary on what he called the "really, truly honestly Russian bottom line." The most important and sensitive issue for the Russian side was the nuclear issue, he told Tefft. Moscow also needed some flexibility on the language on translating the CFE flank agreement to a new adapted treaty. On the question of infrastructure, Mamedov said that Primakov had come up with a possible solution but refused to divulge the details.[78]

Talbott had also promised Solana he would send NSC Senior Director Sandy Vershbow to Moscow to provide on-the-spot assistance for the final round of talks. The Russian side was delighted. Vershbow arrived in Moscow before the Secretary General and was immediately whisked off to see Primakov. His mission was to float some of the proposals Solana was bringing on nuclear and conventional forces to see if Primakov would bite. As Solana's motorcade was approaching the Foreign Ministry, Vershbow snuck out by a side exit and called Solana in his car to give him a readout of what Primakov appeared receptive to. He remained in cell phone contact with Solana that evening through the Secretary General's chief of staff, Jorge Domecq, and then joined up with the Secretary General at 1:00 A.M. to plot strategy for the next morning. Vershbow then phoned Eric Edelman, Talbott's chief-of-staff in Washington, for final instructions.[79]

The next morning the same scene was repeated. Vershbow privately met with Primakov at the Russian Foreign Ministry guest house. He again left by a side door as Solana arrived for the final round of talks to avoid being seen by the cameras—and again called the Secretary General on his cell phone to provide him with some last-minute tips on how to close on the final issues. Several hours later Solana and Primakov had an agreed text. Solana rushed back to Brussels to present the agreed text to the North Atlantic Council for its final blessing.

Later that day in Washington, President Clinton went before the press in the Rose Garden to state, "Today in Moscow, we have taken a historic step closer to a peaceful, undivided democratic Europe for the first time in history." In response to a reporter's question on the details of the agreement and why it was important, the President pointed to the bigger picture and urged his audience to look at the agreement in a new light. "Keep in mind," he said, "that we are all

trying to change the . . . whole pattern of thought that has dominated the international politics of Europe for 50 years."[80] In a background briefing later that day, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger called the Founding Act "a win-win-win agreement" for the U.S., Europe and Russia—and proof that "a new NATO would work with a new Russia to build a new Europe."[81]

On May 19 President Yeltsin wrote Clinton to congratulate him "on our common victory." The Paris agreement would not have been possible without Helsinki and the close relationship the two men had, he wrote. "Now," he continued, "we must demonstrate to everybody, both to the supporters of the agreement and its opponents, that it works."[82] Two weeks later, NATO leaders and Russian President Yeltsin gathered in Paris to sign the Founding Act. Meeting with Albright over dinner the evening before the signing, Primakov told her that negotiating the Founding Act was one of "the biggest achievements of my political life." They also compared notes to see which of them had received more criticism at home for the document.[83]

The next day, at an ornate ceremony in the Elysée Palace, NATO leaders got up one by one to praise Boris Yeltsin as a democrat and a reformer willing to turn the page and start a new relationship with NATO. When it came to his turn, President Clinton said: "I know that some still see NATO through the prism of the Cold War," and that critics viewed the Alliance's decision to enlarge as creating "a Europe still divided, only differently divided." He continued, "I ask them to look again. For this new NATO will work with Russia, not against it." The U.S. and its allies had created a new NATO-Russia relationship, "because we are determined to create a future in which European security is not a zero-sum game—where NATO's gain is Russia's loss, and Russia's strength is our alliance's weakness. That is old thinking, these are new times."[84]

All eyes were on Boris Yeltsin. When it came time for him to sign the Founding Act on behalf of the Russian Federation, he wrote his signature with a flourish and gave Solana a bear hug and a kiss on both cheeks. In his remarks, Yeltsin stated that this document would "protect Europe and the world from a new confrontation and will become the foundation for a new, fair and stable partnership." Russia still opposed enlargement, the Russian President reminded his audience. But he added that he wanted to "pay tribute to the readiness exhibited by NATO countries, despite these difficulties, to reach an agreement with Russia" that took Moscow's interests into account.[85]

Yeltsin then looked around the room. Everyone sensed he was about to improvise. Journalists were waiting expectantly for another Yeltsin one-liner that would make the nightly news. The Russian President announced: "Today, after having signed the document, I am going to make the following decision: everything that is aimed at countries present here, all of those weapons are going to have their warheads removed." No one knew what it meant. Albright and Primakov, who were sitting next to each other, were talking intensely, but the

Russian Foreign Minister did not seem to have a clue either. On this slightly surreal note, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was launched.

Meeting with Clinton later that day, Yeltsin repeated: "Today I am very glad and satisfied with the results. There are opponents. I have some, and Primakov does as well. But still, we managed to find a solution. I said I would never use the word 'compromise'—what we reached is a balanced result and that is very helpful. It is important for NATO and Russia and the world." NATO will enlarge, Yeltsin continued, "and everyone knows it. My position remains that bit-by-bit we will overcome our differences." He pointed to Albright and Primakov and described them as "allies" who had done "immense work" to complete the document.[86]