CONCLUSION

At NATO's founding on April 4, 1949, President Harry S. Truman described the creation of the Atlantic Alliance as a neighborly act taken by countries deeply conscious of their shared heritage as democracies that had come together determined to defend their common values and interests from those who threatened them. The Washington Treaty was a very simple document, he noted. But it was a treaty that might have prevented two wars had it existed in 1919 or 1939. Its goal was to establish a zone of peace in an area of the world that had been at the heart of those two wars. Protecting this area, the President said, was an important step toward creating peace in the world. And he predicted that the positive impact of NATO's creation would be felt beyond its borders.[1]

Fifty years later, NATO decided to extend that zone of peace and stability from Western to Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. It opened its door to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as part of a strategy of uniting Europe and recasting the Alliance for the post–Cold War era. By underscoring that NATO's door remained open to other European democracies willing and able to meet the criteria set out in the Washington Treaty, allied heads of state affirmed their wish to extend that zone even further in the future. NATO enlargement, in President Clinton's words, was designed to ensure that the eastern half of the continent

would become as secure as its western half and that Europe's future would be better than its past.

By opening NATO's door to new members, the Clinton Administration saw itself as fulfilling the vision President Truman had articulated decades earlier. Rather than disengage from Europe in the wake of the collapse of communism and Soviet power, the U.S. opted to use its influence to help consolidate democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and to expand the zone of peace and stability on the continent. To do that, it initiated some of the farthest reaching changes in NATO strategy since its founding and one of the largest increases in the U.S. security commitment to the old continent in decades. The Alliance not only embraced new members in Central and Eastern Europe but also deployed its forces beyond its borders in the Balkans to halt ethnic cleansing and genocide. Originally established as an instrument to defend Western Europe from a Soviet threat, NATO was being recast into a tool to promote Europe's unification, manage security across the continent, and defend common trans-Atlantic values and interests beyond its borders.

The enlargement of NATO was neither inevitable nor preordained. It took place because the United States, as the lead ally in the Alliance, made it a top strategic priority that it pursued in the face of strong Russian opposition, at times tepid European support, as well as significant criticism at home. Although the idea of opening NATO's door originated in Central and Eastern Europe, it became an American project after the Clinton Administration embraced it. It flowed from an American vision of a Europe whole and free in permanent alliance with the United States. That vision was rooted in the belief that the U.S. interest in Europe and its security transcended communism and the former Soviet threat, and that the destinies of America and Europe were increasingly intertwined. From that conviction came the conclusion that stabilizing democracy and extending stability to Central and Eastern Europe was just as critical to America's own security as that process had been to Western Europe in the preceding half century. And from this view logically flowed the conclusion that it was necessary to open those Western structures and institutions that had so successfully guaranteed peace and security in Europe's western half to aspiring democratic nations in the other half.

U.S. policy in the 1990s was driven by a second conviction—the importance of adapting America's alliances to meet the needs of an increasingly interdependent and globalized world. The Clinton Administration believed that Europe was America's key partner and NATO its premier alliance. In its view, consolidating democracy and winning the peace in Europe was not only an important strategic interest, but also had broader consequences for America's position around the world. Confident that Europe was secure, the U.S. would be much better off if and when it had to confront other major threats beyond Europe. Achieving a Europe whole and free also made it more likely that

America's allies on the continent would now join the U.S. in working together to meet new challenges beyond Europe.

In other words, the Clinton Administration believed that America's interest in an alliance with the old continent was enduring—both to keep Europe secure and as part of a post–Cold War partnership to tackle new challenges to common interests. In its view, there was perhaps no part of the world with which the United States had as much in common and with which a strategic alliance was more important. U.S. policy therefore had to shift from simply viewing Europe as a place to defend and instead start to view it as a partner with which the U.S. worked together to meet those challenges. A unified Europe, as Secretary of State Albright often put it, could become America's geopolitical base in a new strategic partnership that could address the new threats of a new century.

From the outset, therefore, the Clinton Administration saw an enlarged NATO as part of a broader effort to reshape the Alliance in a radically different strategic context. Washington was not simply enlarging the old NATO, Administration officials repeatedly emphasized, but building a new NATO for a new era. Because NATO's rationale as well as its roster was being updated to reflect new realities, enlargement was matched by a parallel effort to update NATO's missions and shift the focus of the Alliance toward dealing with new post–Cold war threats. The goal was to modernize NATO—to make it as effective in meeting future threats to the trans-Atlantic community of nations as it had been in countering the USSR during the Cold War.

That vision and strategy was not the product of a single decision or a sudden epiphany. Instead, it evolved over the course of President Clinton's two terms in office into an increasingly coherent policy in response to events on the ground and as the Administration's own views matured. President Clinton and his national security team did not come into office with a grand vision for the future of the Alliance or the U.S.-European relationship. On the contrary, the President was initially focused on his domestic agenda. His initial top foreign policy priority was not Europe, but bolstering American support for democratic reform in Russia.

But by the end of Clinton's first year in office, the issue of NATO's future had nonetheless landed at the center of the Administration's foreign policy deliberations and agenda. It was put there by Central and East European leaders such as Havel and Walesa as well as influential Western voices such as Volker Ruehe, Richard Lugar, and RAND. But events on the ground played an equally key role. The spreading conflict in Bosnia, growing instability in Russia, and a slowdown in the European integration process combined to create a sense that Europe was at a potentially dangerous turning point. It convinced the Clinton Administration that it had to step forward with a new vision for the Alliance that would help anchor Central and Eastern Europe to the West and in which U.S. power and influence would be harnessed to project stability across the continent as a whole in order to secure a new post–Cold War peace.

It was against this background that President Clinton took the initial steps in opening NATO's door to new members in the East. In January 1994, he told the Visegrad heads of state in Prague that enlargement was no longer a matter of "whether but when and how." That statement in and of itself did not fully resolve the fight in the Administration's ranks over the wisdom of enlargement. After all, the issues of "when and how" went to the core of the differences that still divided the Administration. Proponents of enlargement nonetheless seized this statement as a mandate to move forward. In the spring, National Security Advisor Lake asked his staff to come up with a game plan that contained, in rudimentary form, the key elements of what would become a full-fledged U.S. strategy—a rationale, a list of initial candidates, a target date when they might join, as well as a strategy for addressing Russian concerns.

During a visit to Warsaw in July 1994, Clinton pushed the ball forward by publicly suggesting it was time for NATO to take the next steps on enlargement. Over the summer Dick Holbrooke was brought back to Washington to implement the shift in U.S. policy and to bring the allies on board. In September Clinton also told Russian President Boris Yeltsin for the first time that he intended to move forward with enlargement but wanted to do so in a way that would not rock the boat in U.S.-Russian relations. At the same time, the Administration's push coincided with growing pressure from Newt Gingrich and Republicans on Capitol Hill, as reflected in their Contract with America, to more clearly embrace enlargement.

This shift in U.S. policy had a cascading effect on attitudes across the European continent. Allies in Western Europe, taken by surprise, were initially reticent to follow the U.S. lead. The result was a compromise reached at a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in December 1994 to launch a study on enlargement to start the process. Even this modest step, however, elicited an angry outburst from Yeltsin several days later at the OSCE summit in Budapest. Moscow's hostile reaction, in turn, led Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, the remaining enlargement skeptic in the Administration's ranks, to make a final appeal to the President to reverse course. But Clinton stood by the decision to press forward.

Washington had crossed its own internal Rubicon in deciding to enlarge NATO. But this did not mean that enlargement was a done deal. Officially, Washington was pursuing a dual track approach in which preparations for NATO enlargement would be matched with the building of a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship. As the Administration labored to put the building blocks for this strategy in place, opposition to NATO enlargement was growing. Nowhere was this more true than in Moscow, where enlargement was opposed with growing vehemence across the political spectrum. As a result, Yeltsin started to back away from his assurances to Clinton that enlargement was an issue the two men could manage. Instead, it became clear that enlarging NATO

was becoming a major obstacle in Russia's relations with the West and could undercut Russian reform. While enlarging NATO and building a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship in tandem made great sense on paper, but was increasingly elusive in practice.

Moscow's growing hostility, in turn, reinforced skepticism about enlargement in Europe and the United States. The Administration now found itself in a growing crossfire of criticism between those who wanted it to move faster on enlargement and adopt harder-line policies vis-à-vis Moscow and those who did not want it to move ahead on enlargement at all. In the spring of 1995 Clinton reached a private understanding with Yeltsin to put off further decisions on enlargement until after the Russian Presidential elections in the summer of 1996 if Moscow would move forward with NATO-Russia ties. It was intended to help Yeltsin politically and give the two sides time to defuse at least some of Moscow's concerns.

The Alliance had an additional, more pressing issue it also needed to fix before it could enlarge. It was what Warren Christopher had called "the problem from hell"—stopping the war and bloodshed in Bosnia. The Dayton peace agreement, signed in late 1995 following NATO air strikes that helped turn the tide against the Bosnian Serbs, finally brought peace to that war-torn country. It also helped clear the way for NATO to enlarge. It restored a much-needed sense of unity and purpose across the Atlantic and strengthened the case that NATO had to act to consolidate stability beyond its old borders. And the U.S.-brokered deal on Russian participation in IFOR moved the idea of NATO-Russia cooperation from the realm of theory to reality on the ground.

But the drama surrounding NATO enlargement only continued to grow. Andrei Kozyrev's replacement by Yevgeny Primakov as Russian Foreign Minister in January 1996 signaled a tougher-edged Russian approach. With Alliance decisions on enlargement put on hold for the Russian and U.S. Presidential elections, Primakov pursued a strategy best described as "negotiate and fight." While exploring with the U.S. the contours of a NATO-Russia agreement that might allow Moscow to live with enlargement, the Russian Foreign Minister also pushed the European allies to roll back NATO's plans by repeatedly warning of the dire consequences for Russian democracy and Moscow's relations with the West.

Such threats from Moscow were not entirely without effect. In private, key allies such as Germany and France wondered out loud whether NATO might consider postponing its enlargement plans or, alternatively, that the Alliance only move forward if an agreement with Russia could be worked out in advance. But the U.S. held firm to its commitment to move ahead. Following Yeltsin's reelection in July 1996, Clinton wrote his key allied counterparts to confirm his determination to move forward. In September, Christopher announced that NATO would hold a summit in the first half of the following year

where the first invitations to new members would be extended. In November, President Clinton publicly confirmed his commitment to move ahead with enlargement early in his second term.

The Administration made the implementation of its vision for a new NATO a top foreign policy priority during Clinton's second term in office. The President's appointment of Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State underscored the priority attached to this goal. The early months of 1997 saw a frenzied burst of diplomatic activity as the U.S. now took its enlargement plans off of the drawing board and started to turn them into reality.

The key diplomatic breakthrough that smoothed the way to NATO enlargement was the Helsinki summit between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin in March 1997. With Helmut Kohl now firmly on his side, President Clinton held his ground against Yeltsin's last attempt to convince him to drop enlargement or at least to limit its future scope. The Russian President now gave a green light to negotiate the details of a NATO-Russia agreement, leading to a frenzied round of negotiations involving NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and Russian Foreign Minister Primakov with the United States playing a key behind-the-scenes role to achieve a final outcome.

The ink was barely dry on the NATO-Russia Founding Act when the U.S. faced a fight with some of its closest allies over which Central and East European countries to invite at Madrid and how firm a commitment NATO would make to future enlargement. The U.S. was now confronted by France and other allies who argued that a larger round of enlargement including Romania and Slovenia would provide a better geopolitical balance and help stabilize southeastern Europe. Washington's opposition to this larger group set the stage for one of the most historic yet contentious summits in NATO's history. At the end of the day, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland received invitations and the allies reached a compromise highlighting NATO's commitment to future enlargement to southeastern Europe but in a manner that did not prejudice the chances of other counties such as the Baltic states.

For the United States there was one final hurdle—Senate ratification. At home NATO enlargement had sparked one of the most passionate debates on any national security issue since the end of the Cold War. Opposition to enlargement was real and often passionate. While the political platforms of both parties had embraced enlargement in the 1996 Presidential campaigns, influential Senators in each continued to oppose it. Many influential figures in the U.S. foreign policy community, as well as the media, were also strongly opposed. The intellectual battle was fought in dueling op-eds, journal articles and in debates at leading think tanks in the strategic community. The stage was set for a major political battle over ratifying enlargement.

While the U.S. was the NATO ally leading the push for enlargement, a two-thirds majority vote for ratification in a politically independent Senate meant

the Administration had to meet a higher bar than other allies. Democrats and Republicans had important differences on how to approach enlargement that needed to be ironed out before a true bipartisan consensus could jell. Partisan politics was also a factor, and increasingly so. Even Republicans inclined to support enlargement sometimes asked why they should help the Clinton Administration achieve a major foreign policy victory.

But in the end Republicans and Democrats came together in a remarkable display of bipartisan cooperation to ratify NATO enlargement. In doing so, they affirmed a long tradition of support across the aisle for the Atlantic Alliance. While the final vote tally of 80–19 in the spring of 1998 gave the President a comfortable victory, ratification was nevertheless harder fought—and the Administration more vulnerable to defeat—than those numbers suggested, as the President himself confessed to the then Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, the week after the final Senate vote.

With the Senate vote ratifying the entry of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as NATO members, the curtain came to a close on one of the most important and far-reaching chapters in NATO's history. The United States and its European allies had extended the Alliance's security umbrella to Central and Eastern Europe, the source of so much conflict in Europe's turbulent past. They had done so in a time of peace, not war. And they had done so as an act of integration to help build a more democratic and unified Europe, not as an act of aggression or confrontation.

In doing so they had redrawn the political map of Europe and taken a major step in overcoming Europe's Cold War divide. As Polish President Aleksandr Kwasniewski had put it, if the great accomplishment of Ronald Reagan was to help bring down the Soviet empire, and that of George Bush was to unify Germany in NATO, then Bill Clinton's legacy was to have brought these three countries into NATO to complete the changes in Central and Eastern Europe that began with the triumph of Solidarity and the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

Historians often debate the degree to which historical outcomes are shaped by the actions of individual leaders or more objective underlying trends. In the case of NATO enlargement, future diplomatic historians may well debate the degree to which the events described in these pages were determined by people or the more anonymous forces of history and whether the outcome that occurred was or was not inevitable. As a witness to and participant in many of the events described in these pages, it is hard to escape the conclusion that people and choices—intellectual, diplomatic, and political—made the key difference. What in many ways remains remarkable about the history of NATO enlargement is how an idea that initially encountered such strong opposition actually became U.S and NATO policy, and was then successfully implemented in practice without the cataclysmic consequences that critics and opponents predicted.

Looking back upon this period, the United States' handling of three challenges stand out as crucial for enlargement's success. The first was dealing with Russia. The challenge Washington faced was not only or even primarily a matter of asserting U.S. or Western strength. By the early 1990s it was increasingly clear that the West enjoyed economic and military superiority over a weakened Russia. Instead, the key issue was how to enlarge NATO in a way that did not appear as part of a punitive peace, reminiscent of Versailles, or which produced an anti-Western backlash. President Clinton's vision of a Europe free, democratic, and undivided was open to a democratic Russia, too. The Administration did not see Yeltsin's Russia through the prism of a residual threat but rather as a potential partner. President Clinton believed that "getting Russia right" after the end of the Cold War was as important as integrating Germany had been following World War II.

Thus, when President Clinton embraced NATO enlargement, he did so as part of an effort to consolidate democracy and project stability to Central and Eastern Europe, not as a strategic response to a real or imagined Russian threat to the region. He believed that there was enough overlap between his vision of an undivided Europe and what Yeltsin was seeking for Russia that NATO enlargement did not have to be a zero-sum game where the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the West had to come at Russia's expense. The American goal was not only to anchor Poland and its neighbors to the West, but to integrate a democratic Russia into a larger European framework as well. From the Administration's perspective, an enlargement of NATO that secured Poland but led to a train wreck in U.S.-Russian relations would have been a failure.

Avoiding a rupture with Russia was also critical to shoring up European support for enlargement. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's statement that enlargement was only worth doing if it did not lead to a confrontation with Moscow was a view many allies shared. Negotiating the right NATO-Russia deal was also important to obtain the broad-based domestic political support needed to ensure Senate ratification. While Republican conservatives wanted Clinton to enlarge faster, Democrats worried about the impact on Russia. The Administration therefore had to simultaneously address Republican suspicions that it was giving Moscow too much influence in NATO on the one hand, and Democratic concerns that enlargement could derail Russian reform, arms control, and spark a new U.S.-Russia confrontation on the other. Many Senators did not fully commit to NATO enlargement until it was clear that a confrontation with Moscow had been avoided.

The challenge of integrating a country the size of Russia into the West was of a different magnitude than integrating Central and East European countries. When Administration officials spoke of the possibility that Russia might one day itself be eligible for NATO membership, it was meant as a political signal that the West supported Russia's westernization in principle, not a short-term issue of

operational diplomacy. Secretary of State Albright, when asked about the possibility of Russia one day joining NATO, often responded that if we ever reached the point where Russia aspired to and qualified for NATO, then it would be a different Russia, a different Europe, and both Russia and the West would have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. Under such circumstances, NATO's future would have to be rethought once again—but those would be the problems of success.

The issue, therefore, became how to enlarge NATO to Central and Eastern Europe while creating a parallel cooperative NATO-Russia relationship that would give Moscow a voice in European security but not over the Alliance's own internal affairs or decisionmaking. Washington made it clear that it was prepared to build a close NATO-Russia relationship that could grow over time.

But the U.S. was also prepared to enlarge over Moscow's objections if it had to. American policy was to work for success with the Russians but to be prepared for failure. NATO enlargement was designed as part of a strategy of integration that could potentially include Russia. At the same time, it also functioned as a hedge in case trends in Moscow moved in the wrong direction. While pledging to enlarge slowly, U.S. officials made it clear to Moscow that this process could be accelerated if events in Russia took a turn for the worse. And when it came to the details of NATO military strategy, the U.S. and its allies were careful to ensure that the Alliance had the flexibility to provide a credible defense for these countries if Russia ever again became a threat.

It was on Russia that the Administration parted ways with other enlargement supporters, ranging from Lech Walesa to leading Republican conservatives. Many of them believed that Moscow did pose a threat to Central and Eastern Europe and that NATO should enlarge as a hedge against Russian neo-imperialism—the sooner the better. They felt the Administration had a naïve view of Russian intentions and its ability to change age-old Russian geopolitical habits. They feared that by moving slowly and seeking to work with Moscow, the Administration was frittering away a window of opportunity to lock-in the security of these countries and giving Russia a chance to reassert its influence. Conservative critics believed that the better strategy was to enlarge NATO quickly, create facts on the ground, and deal with Moscow's concerns later. In Walesa's words, the West had to first "cage the bear" before trying to tame it.

The Clinton Administration rejected this approach out of concern that it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy that would turn Moscow into a new strategic rival. It believed that the U.S., by simultaneously championing Russia's overall integration with the West, could enlarge the Alliance without a rupture in Russia's relations with the West. It opted to enlarge NATO gradually and in tandem with an offer to build a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship. This approach was designed to coax Moscow into a dialogue where NATO could address legitimate Russian concerns and bring Moscow to the point where, even if

it disliked enlargement, it would remain engaged and not take steps that would seriously damage East-West relations.

Diplomatically, this was easier said then done. While Russians had accepted the fact that NATO was going to remain in existence after the end of the Cold War, the argument that enlarging it to Central and Eastern Europe could solve the age-old problems of security on Russia's western borders was a bridge too far for most Russian leaders. At a time of rising nationalist and anti-Western sentiment, many Russians came to see enlargement as a western attempt to exploit Moscow's weakness and vehemently opposed it. Many senior Russian officials, first and foremost Foreign Minister Kozyrev, knew better and would admit in private that NATO enlargement was largely a political and not a strategic issue. But such voices soon faded in Moscow.

At least initially, President Yeltsin did not strongly oppose NATO enlargement. His early conversations with Clinton on the issue suggested that this was an issue the two men could manage together. As the anti-Western and anti-NATO mood in Moscow grew, however, Yeltsin was increasingly driven to oppose NATO enlargement, too. At the same time, Yeltsin hesitated to embrace the harder line voices urging him to take tougher steps to deter the U.S. and its allies from moving forward. In replacing the pro-Western Kozyrev with Primakov, Yeltsin gave a green light to a more vigorous political effort to stop enlargement, and undoubtedly would have been delighted if the Russian Foreign Minister had succeeded. But he was careful to ensure that Primakov's tactics did not spill over to the point where they could directly threaten on the overall U.S.-Russia relationship or his personal ties with President Clinton.

Washington was therefore stymied in its early efforts for far-reaching NATO-Russia cooperation. It concentrated on creating a NATO-Russia relationship that would allow enlargement to move forward and that would lay the foundation for further cooperation down the road. Achieving even this more limited goal became a matter of diplomacy at the highest levels. It was not until the fall and winter of 1996, however, that Foreign Minister Primakov began to indicate that he knew that Moscow's campaign to stop enlargement was failing—a point Yeltsin finally conceded to Clinton at the Helsinki summit in March 1997. It nevertheless took two more months of carefully orchestrated diplomacy at the highest levels led by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana to reach closure on the NATO-Russia Founding Act. At the end of the day, the personal relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin and their key advisors were essential ingredients in ensuring this soft landing and laying the foundation for future NATO-Russia cooperation.

The second major challenge the United States had to surmount to successfully enlarge NATO was with Europe. Washington had to build a consensus in Western Europe behind the decision to enlarge and then translate that decision into a set of practical policies on the modalities of enlargement that all allies

could support. In parallel, the Administration had to convince candidate and partner countries in Central and Eastern Europe that the Alliance's overall approach was sound and that they, too, were better off with a measured approach that gave both sides time to prepare and do their homework and that kept the door open for further enlargement down the road.

While the first major Western political figure to call for enlargement was a European, German Defense Minister Volker Ruehe, overall European support was scattered at best. The instincts of many of America's European allies were not to turn to NATO as the instrument to embrace Central and Eastern Europe and knit the continent back together. A majority of European countries initially thought that the EU was a more logical candidate for the job. They only turned to NATO after it became clear that the United States was serious about pursuing enlargement, that the EU was too weak to take on the challenge in the near term, and that the clear top priority of many Central and East Europeans was to join the Alliance first.

Even then, European support was often tepid and remained so through much of the debate. Among Washington's major allies, London supported enlargement, but less due to strategic conviction than a desire to preserve its influence with Washington. France was skeptical from the outset, fearing it would strengthen American influence in Europe, distract from European integration and antagonize Moscow, although President Chirac's Gaullist instincts made him more open to the vision of a broader Europe than his predecessor, François Mitterrand. Support was the strongest in Germany, but even there Chancellor Helmut Kohl remained very cautious, caught between the historical desire to integrate Poland and the need to avoid steps that would lead to a confrontation with Moscow. Several smaller European allies were at times more supportive of enlargement but it was clear that Washington would be expected to do the diplomatic heavy lifting.

Once the decision in principle to enlarge had been made, Washington moved to gradually firm up support on the continent by answering the key questions Europeans had and addressing their concerns. Those concerns related not only to Russia's reaction, but also to what was expected from existing members to carry out new commitments and how enlargement would impact on the vitality and effectiveness of the Alliance. NATO committees worked their way through a maze of practical problems ranging from how these countries would be defended to how costs would be assessed. As those concerns were addressed and answers found, the political will to move forward with enlargement started to grow as European allies could see just how it could be accomplished without damaging their own interests.

Perhaps the key question was whether the consensus across the Atlantic would hold if a real crisis with Moscow started to unfold. Until very late in the game, Washington was not sure how deep the Alliance consensus was and

whether it would hold if Moscow opted for an all-out effort to prevent enlargement. That was exactly the strategy that some harder-line voices in Moscow had advocated. And NATO Secretary General Solana had warned Washington on more than one occasion that he was not sure what choice allies would make were they forced to choose between enlargement and Russia. Fortunately, the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act meant that this question was never put to the test. Sometimes success in diplomacy is best measured by the questions one never has to address.

It is therefore somewhat ironic that the issue where Alliance consensus would break down was over which Central and East European countries would be invited to join the Alliance at Madrid and what the prospects for further enlargement down the road would be. The original impetus for NATO enlargement was the strategic need to anchor Poland and to secure Germany's eastern frontier. Indeed, many of enlargement's original proponents in the West saw it as a move limited to Warsaw and its neighbors. While they supported expanded NATO cooperation with other countries in the region, not everyone saw such cooperation leading to full membership.

That changed once the Clinton Administration and other allies made it clear that the vision of an enlarged NATO applied to the continent as a whole—and that *all* countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea were potential members. However, this only underscored the need for a credible and transparent process for adjudicating who would receive invitations, when, and why. The U.S. was determined to ensure that performance and not just geopolitical considerations were the basis for enlargement decisions. Washington wanted to use the incentive of eventual NATO membership as a kind of golden carrot to encourage Central and East European countries to reform themselves into more attractive candidates. The goal was not only to get these countries into NATO, but also to use the process to fix as many internal or bilateral issues as possible, thereby improving European security.

Many Central and Eastern European countries were at first uncomfortable with the Administration's approach. Candidate countries initially had little understanding of what NATO membership entailed and the homework that needed to be done, both by them and the Alliance. They harbored fears that NATO would raise the bar to a point where they could no longer meet it. Yet in many ways NATO's approach turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Many countries figured out how to use the goal of NATO membership to justify difficult reform decisions at home or fix minority or border issues that otherwise might have festered. As they came to understand the requirements of NATO membership involved, they were often grateful they had more time to prepare.

But while NATO's benchmarks and criteria were good enough to motivate Central and East European countries, they were insufficient when it came to harmonizing allied views on who would be invited at Madrid. The U.S. ap-

proach was to embrace the widest possible open door in principle, but to insist on keeping NATO's performance standards high as a safeguard. That preference was driven by the desire to keep NATO strong militarily, to ensure that NATO's open door approach was credible, and to maximize the chances of a successful ratification in the U.S. Senate. But European allies had other preferences and made their own political calculations. If the U.S. had its eye on Capitol Hill, other European allies had their eye on the likely lineup of candidates in the EU or their own bilateral relations with major European powers who they did not dare alienate because they needed cooperation on other issues.

What appeared to one country to be a clear-cut case of a candidate qualifying or not qualifying for membership was hotly contested by another. In the final analysis NATO's standards were too loose, the national interests of different allies too divergent, and the temptation to lobby for favorite candidates too strong to avoid what Secretary Albright had termed the "beauty contest." As a result, the decision on who to invite was driven to the highest levels, where it became a brutal test of political clout in which Washington ultimately prevailed. Looking back, most of the U.S. officials involved in those decisions would have few regrets and would argue that the U.S. stance was proven right by the subsequent events in the region. Yet the Madrid summit goes down in history less as a case of far-sighted U.S. leadership than as an example of how a summit where Washington got its way in the end but paid a political price in doing so.

If there is one political relationship that stands out as key in bridging U.S.-European differences on these issues, it is the tie between Washington and Bonn, and especially the bond between Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl. The U.S.-German relationship was not only a key motor behind enlargement's first round, but the German Chancellor showed himself to be the President's closest confidant and ally not only in handling Russia but also in brokering the key compromises at Madrid. It was Kohl's dramatic intervention in the heads-of-state meeting that ensured that only three countries would receive invitations, and his subsequent intervention with Jacques Chirac that ensured that the open door compromise balanced the needs of Romania and Slovenia with a perspective for the Baltic states.

U.S. leadership was important in one final area—ensuring that NATO's open door pledge was credible. Washington had pledged to enlarge NATO in a manner that would enhance the security for all countries in Europe, not just those who received the first invitations. It was determined to make sure that enlargement to some Central and East European countries not simply draw another line further eastward that would undercut others, as critics alleged. On more than one occasion Albright, Talbott, and other senior U.S. officials would remark that the problem of what to do with those countries not receiving invitations was as, if not more, difficult than dealing with the countries that were going to get one.

The answer was to embrace practical policies and steps both inside and outside the Alliance that reached out to these countries. By pushing increasingly deeper integration through the Partnership for Peace within the Alliance and by negotiating the Baltic Charter or a separate strategic partnership with Romania bilaterally, the U.S. helped to put meat on the bones of the Alliance's open door policy. Other allies joined in with their own matching efforts. The success of this policy was demonstrated when countries such as the Baltic states supported the first round of enlargement moving forward even though they did not receive invitations, thereby undercutting the argument of the critics that a limited enlargement to a handful of countries was a mistake because it ran the risk of destabilizing those countries not included.

The third major policy challenge the United States had to surmount was embedding NATO enlargement within a broader vision and sense of purpose for an Alliance that was being modernized for a new era. If one had asked the average American or European during the Cold War what NATO was for, the reply would have been that the Alliance had been founded and designed to deal with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. By the early 1990s that state and alliance were gone and so was the threat that they posed. For many the symbol of NATO's purpose during the Cold War had been the Fulda Gap—a small town in Germany where the Soviet invasion of Western Europe was expected to start and where U.S. forces formed an initial line of defense.

What was NATO's purpose in a world where its previous adversary, Soviet communism, had disappeared? It was a question that confronted President Clinton from his first day in office. The President's early embrace of reform in Russia as his top foreign policy priority underscored his desire to treat Moscow as partner, not a former adversary. At the same time an out-of-control war in Bosnia and the desire of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to be anchored to the West through the Alliance showed clearly that while the old threat from Moscow was gone, the continent was not yet secure and that new threats on the continent could still undermine European security.

Intellectually, the issue was framed in the slogan that NATO had to go "out of area or out of business." It was a catchy way of pointing out that the strategic challenges of the day all lay beyond NATO's West European borders, and that the Alliance had the choice of exporting security to address them or it would run the risk of importing new insecurity. And the best way to export security was to expand the zone of stability by embracing those countries willing and able to become members as well as being ready to use force to stem conflicts such as those in the Balkans.

What seems pretty straightforward in retrospect was a paradigm shift at the time for an Alliance that for forty years had focused solely on preparing to defend Alliance territory in Western Europe from external aggression. Suddenly, the Alliance was being urged to expand to the territory of former adversaries and

deploy forces in peacekeeping and peace support scenarios potentially across the continent. Often the need to act on the ground in response to the real world ran ahead of official NATO theology as evidenced in the remark by one senior French official who, after an agreement on an action in Bosnia, remarked that it would work fine in practice but he was not sure how to square it with Alliance theory.

The Clinton Administration was determined to define a purpose for NATO that was future-oriented, politically sustainable in the U.S. Congress and with the American people, and which was not tied primarily to the danger that democratic reform in Russia might fail. As Albright frequently put it, the U.S. needed to answer the question about what NATO was going to do for the next fifty years, not why it had been important for the previous five decades. President Clinton wanted a rationale for NATO that fit with his own vision of Europe, of America's internationalist role, and of the value of U.S.-European partnership in a new era.

In articulating that purpose, the Administration returned to first principals, at times literally going back to the words and texts of NATO's founding fathers to capture the essence of what the Alliance was all about. The answer it came up with was a simple one, namely that NATO's core purpose was to defend the freedom, territory, and interests of its members from whatever threatened them. In 1949 it was Stalin and Soviet communism that had posed that threat. But in the post–Cold War world the threats to those goals were different. The Alliance had to adopt an approach recognizing that NATO in the future would have to respond to threats from potentially many different directions and sources. Taking on new missions in response to those new threats was fulfilling NATO's original purpose in a new strategic context, not a radical break from the intent of the Alliance's founding fathers.

The closer the U.S. came to completing the first round of enlargement and launching the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the more pressing the question of the Alliance's longer-term purpose and strategic direction started to become. What was NATO going to become in a world where Europe was increasingly peaceful and secure, Russia was becoming a partner, and where the greatest threats to our future security came from Europe's periphery or beyond? At the same time, it was also starting to become clear that the threat to both sides of the Atlantic from weapons of mass destruction and rogue states beyond the continent was growing and could, over time, become a far greater threat to our nations. During the course of the Senate debate on NATO enlargement r atification the issue of the Alliance's future rationale become the focal point of questioning and debate. Indeed, many of the final amendments the Administration battled on the Senate floor had little to do with the first round of enlargement. Instead, they reflected a growing questioning over NATO's future strategic direction.

The Administration's victory in the Senate marked the conclusion of the political battle over the first round of NATO enlargement. But it did not end the debate over NATO's future or the Administration's efforts to reform the Alliance. Albright, in particular, came away convinced that the Administration needed to take on this issue and that NATO had to start to confront issues such as weapons of mass destruction in the hands of hostile states beyond Europe that could nonetheless threaten NATO members. Following the vote in the Senate, the Administration decided that its top priority for the NATO fiftieth anniversary summit scheduled for Washington in the spring of 1999 had to be setting NATO's future rationale and that it was better to defer decisions on future enlargement pending agreement with our allies on NATO's role in a broader and updated U.S.-European partnership.

The United States would therefore spend much of 1998 and the spring of 1999 seeking to articulate a new vision for the trans-Atlantic partnership, in which the U.S. and Europe would, while completing the job of building a Europe whole and free, increasingly start to look beyond the confines of the continent and develop a common agenda on new challenges and threats beyond Europe. These two goals—building Europe whole and free and working together beyond Europe—were seen as mutually reinforcing. As part of this new partnership, NATO's role was seen as the natural institution of choice the U.S. and Europe would turn to when they had to act militarily.

To prepare the Alliance for this role, the U.S. came up with a package of proposals for the Washington summit in the spring of 1999 designed to highlight its view of a new NATO for the new century. The core of that package was a new strategic concept that emphasized an enlarged NATO assuming new missions to project stability beyond its immediate borders as one central pillar of a new Euro-Atlantic community. To back up that concept, the Alliance adopted a series of initiatives to retool its military forces to better address a broad spectrum of new threats ranging from instability on Europe's periphery to threats from weapons of mass destruction.

The need for NATO to assume military missions beyond its borders was reinforced by the escalating violence in Kosovo as Slobodan Milosevic unleashed his campaign of violence and terror against Kosovar Albanians. After months of efforts at a diplomatic solution, NATO launched its air campaign against Milosevic's forces only weeks before the Washington summit in the spring of 1999. The ensuing months were among the most dramatic in NATO's history as the coalition strained to keep together and sustain the military pressure in Milosevic and his army. Moscow broke off ties with NATO in protest and the PJC was put on ice. After 78 days of the NATO air campaign, the Serbian dictator capitulated. One year later, he was toppled by a pro-democracy movement in Serbia, thereby bringing an end to the series of wars in the Balkans that he himself had instigated at the beginning of the decade.

NATO's victory in the Balkans, along with its successful enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, underscored how the Alliance had remade itself into the security guarantor of the continent as a whole.

As the Clinton Administration left office, it could look back at a Europe and a NATO that were very different than when it took office. The cornerstones of its vision of a Europe whole and free in alliance with the United States and in partnership with Russia had been laid. The entry into NATO of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland had helped put Central and Eastern Europe on track for being integrated into the West. The Baltic states had successfully moved out of the shadow of the former Soviet Union and were increasingly credible candidates for EU and NATO membership. In southeastern Europe, the Balkan wars had been stopped and those countries now had the chance to rejoin the European and trans-Atlantic mainstream. Europe was safer, freer, and more secure. NATO's door remained open for additional qualified members and the Alliance had remade itself for a new era.

Building on that foundation would be left to the next President of the United States and his European counterparts. The need to complete the job was underscored by the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001, which led NATO to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in its history — not in response to a Soviet attack against Europe but a terrorist attack against the United States. In a dramatic way, this tragedy underscored the importance of completing the job of enlarging the Alliance to secure peace in an undivided Europe at a time when the U.S. faced great threats elsewhere in the world. But the September 11 attacks also underscored the importance of allies and alliances to fight the war on terrorism—while reinforcing that fact that NATO had to continue to change so that it could be as effective in meeting the threats of the future as it had been in helping win the Cold War. More than anything else, the events of September 11 confirmed the need for NATO to complete the job of reshaping itself for a new era—and for the U.S., in cooperation with its NATO partners, to continue to lead the way.