

# Reflection essay on expansion of nato

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



## **Introduction**

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed on 4th April 1949 after the Second World War as a realization of the importance of close ties between United States of America and Europe for the stability and security of world [1]. It was a watershed event in both the US history and in the history of 20th century, as it marked the isolationist strategy that had characterized US foreign policy since more than 2 centuries [2]. The alliance was seen as a counter strategy to protect Western European democracies against the growing threat of communism under USSR[3]. Later on this strategic-military alliance proved an important tool in the wake of Cold War between USA and USSR where it was seen as only safeguard for US and its allies against the expansionist designs of communist countries spearheaded by USSR.

However with the disintegration of USSR, unification of Germany and end of Cold War in 1989-1991, the functional utility of NATO were re-examined to decide its future role in the new world order. However, end of the Cold War did not signify end of role of NATO and soon it witnessed the wide ethnic and religious conflicts in the Eastern Europe, especially in Balkan nations [4]. By 1995, NATO was required to intervene directly in many of these affairs as well as play the role of peacekeeper in the newly independent countries.

Later on in the decade, the issue of terrorism raised its head, and presented further challenges to roles, responsibilities and scope of NATO's future strategies [5]. Through the entire decade of 1990s NATO was shaping up its own future action course and on June 8-9, 1997, it took decision to expand and include new democracies of The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, all

former USSR allies, as part of NATO[6]. Since this decision has risen much debated and heat over its contextual application in the changed world order, and criticisms have been abundant on the merit of expansionist strategy of NATO in the 21st century world [7]. This paper shall examine the various issues involved with expansion strategy along with their merits and demerits.

The decision to expand the NATO has created heated debates and arguments, both in favor and against of the decision. Many hold the opinion that an expanded NATO would be beneficial for world order, global peace and security and economic development and free trade, while others view threats of greater regional tension and hegemony of certain nations if NATO continues to expand[8].

The expansion of NATO came after long negotiations with former communist nations that included Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union. NATO took a series of steps, such as formation of North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994 to develop an amicable and peaceful environment for effective interaction and cooperation for these countries[10]. The decision to finally include Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland came after long deliberations and amidst a growing consensus that these nascent democracies needed to be integrated in the western democratic framework to help them achieve rapid and lasting economic development[11].

Although the debate on this expansion has been widely across political and strategic spectrum, it should be noted that it was not for the first time that

NATO had expanded. Article 10 of NATO's foundation document has given it implicit rights to include new members on their meeting certain criteria[12].

As one of the central premises of NATO is that attack on any of its member would be considered as attack against all and hence NATO would be justified in taking military action against the aggressor, it attracted many European non members to the organization to safeguard their democratic values, freedom, heritage and civilization[13]. Thus NATO has undergone three major expansions since its formation to fulfill its commitment to stability and continued growth of economy and trade in the member countries.

By 1990s most of the eastern European nations were convinced that in joining NATO remained their only hope to protect their integrity, and ensure their survival in an increasingly chaotic political order. On its part, NATO was also eager to embrace these countries as it perceived that most of problems afflicting Europe were occurring in non NATO member countries and therefore by increasing the scope of alliance, NATO would contribute towards increasing the stability and security in the Eastern Europe[14]. Further, the new responsibilities gave NATO the much-required opportunity to present a changed face and more responsible and comprehensive attitude in the post-Cold War world affairs[15].

In wake of these developments, notwithstanding the criticism and debates surrounding the earlier expansion strategy to include the three former communist nations, USA has confirmed its commitment to further expansion of NATO in the coming years[16].

As the Cold War ended in 1989, it became apparent that Eastern Europe was headed for comprehensive restructuring and reformulating the strategies that were no longer applicable in the new context[17]. Abatement of hostilities between Western and Eastern Europe provided an unprecedented opportunity to policy makers to work towards attainment of long standing objective of European unification, in which NATO was considered as a powerful catalyst.

NATO provided the vital platform where the political, economic and military interests of both Western and Eastern Europe came together and its own regional development took priority with view to strengthen the economic and strategic coalition of European states[18]. NATO was the instrument that facilitated this ideological and strategic unification of Europe.

In the view of changed political order in Europe and risks of terrorism, NATO has formed a long term future expansion strategy that makes it open to every European country which seeks NATO's help in protecting its identity and culture while making transition towards democracy[19]. Although the immediate and pressing needs of any plan of expansion have receded, especially after the successful handling of Balkan crisis by NATO and demonstration of its continued relevance as a capable peacemaker. Also, the latest enlargement, as discussed before, addressed one of the pressing issues on NATO, to form an active collaboration with former USSR supporting countries.

Yet the future expansion of NATO is inevitable, as many non -NATO European countries would begin to meet the conditions for entry into the

Alliance and may question its commitment to peacekeeping if denied admittance[20].

Therefore considering the requirement of expansion, NATO has planned the procedure in distinct steps, with no-surprise strategy. Aspirants may request for membership two years before the decision making years that are set as 2002, 2008-09, and 2012-14. As strategists point out that these expansions would be limited to introduction of maximum one or two nations at a time, rather than multiple entry[21]. These expansions would increase the membership of NATO to 25 countries, making it one of the most organized and important military alliances in the modern times.

## **Conclusion**

Expansion of NATO has to be seen from a broader and longer perspective. NATO has become an indispensable tool, especially in the changing nature of terrorism that is taking global dimension. As once the free democracies of Western Europe and USA combined to thwart designs of Communism, its equally vital in the present scenario for them and the new members to form an alliance that thwarts evil purpose of global terrorism for which an armed, military equipped and strategically capable military authority is necessary. NATO, by expanding its membership, is in the process of gaining that crucial strategic leverage, as well as create conditions in the first place that would prevent many countries to be affected by menace of terrorism in the changed world strategic order.

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