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Trends. NATO Expansion: The Ins and the Outs of It

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With NATO leaders in Madrid inviting Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to join the alliance, there is still controversy. This controversy concerns not only which countries should be invited to join now and in the future, but also whether NATO should be expanded at all. As to the latter question, pro-expansionists claim that with this future lies (a) peace, (b) ever-expanding democracy, (c) ever-increasing conflict thresholds before war becomes a reasonable option, (d) lessened fear of a hegemonic and resurgent Germany, (e) lessened probabilities of intra-European ethnic and nationalist conflicts, and (f) even an expanded NATO which includes Russia against a threat from the People's Republic of China. Anti-expansionists cite (a) the needless provocation of Russian nationalists, (b) a Russia that is not a military threat and that has serious economic problems, (c) the decreased probability that nuclear arms limitations treaties will be ratified by Russian authorities, (d) the increasing difficulties in gaining consensus among an expanding NATO membership, (e) the posited fact that seekers of NATO membership desire European Union (EU) membership as well and that NATO membership is a sop awarded by European countries seeking to impede EU membership, and (f) the diminishing credibility of a NATO nuclear umbrella over countries such as Slovenia, Bulgaria, Albania and others desiring NATO membership .

One psychological Issue that sometimes gets short thrift is that regardless of whether NATO does expand or how much it does, there will be an inevitable boundary of in and out, ingroups and outgroups. The social psychology of this inevitable phenomenon is that the threat of negative stereotyping and various conflict-provoking misperceptions will be present regardless of what decision is made. Lovers of peace might do well to develop research applications and economic and politico-military contingencies against inevitable threats instead of waxing eloquent about the heaven on earth that awaits the right decision on NATO expansion. (See Whitney, C. R. (July 9, 1997.) 3 former members of Eastern Bloc invited into NATO. The New York Times. (<http://www.nytimes.com>.)