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Trends. NATO Expansion and Rabelais: Approaching the United States Senate Vote

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The United States Senate will soon vote on whether to expand NATO by adding the countries of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. As of this writing, the two thirds majority necessary to approve the expansion (along with approvals from all other NATO members) seems very likely. In this context, note that IBPP has provided very detailed and hopefully persuasive arguments against NATO expansion. (See references below.)

Both supporters and opponents of NATO expansion cite historical examples or principles with historical validation to back their views. The tragedy, however, is that supporters and opponents alike may be hoisted on their own historical petards.

Psychological research has clearly shown the significant historical nature of social perception. Primarily, dispositional and causal attributions have much to do with preexisting schema. Mixing research traditions, an observer might posit a totalitarianism of ego functions--perception continuously being buffeted by a revisionist morphogenesis. Escaping from psychological jargon, one might conclude the following. From a functional perspective, history is less consulted for guidance towards decisionmaking than for confirmation of it. Moreover, the opinion to be confirmed is itself a product of historical processes largely out of awareness.

Citing the Marshall Plan, the Treaty of Versailles, or theories of political boundaries, democracy, or deterrence as lodestones of logical argument is often a self-deceptive exercise in the use of history. Seeming success at bridging the tension between seeking history's lessons and applying them to a unique situation never before experienced may reflect illusory correlation more than delineation of cause and effect. As Thucydides wrote over two thousand years ago, "...People are inclined to accept all stories of ancient times in an uncritical way--even when these stories concern their own native countries....(they) make many incorrect assumptions not only about the dimly remembered past, but also about contemporary history....most people, in fact, will not take the trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear....(p. 23)". It is in this context that all those engaged in the NATO expansion dialogue--senators, pundits, analysts, and others who are hoisted on their historical petards may humbly contemplate that petard is derived from the Old French, *peter*, to break wind. (See *Against a Moratorium on Further NATO Expansion: The US Secretary of State's Shaky Rationale*. (February 27, 1998). IBPP, 4(8); Albritton, D.W., McKoon, G., & Gerrig, R.J. (1995). *Metaphor-based schemas and text representations: Making connections through conceptual metaphors*. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 21, 612-625; Greenwald, A.G. (1980). *The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history*. *American Psychologist*, 35, 603-618; Holland, D., & Cole, M. (1995). *Between discourse and schema: reformulating a cultural-historical approach to culture and mind*. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 26, 475-489; Mos, L.P. (1998). *On methodological distinctions: Nomothetic psychology or historical understanding*. *Theory and Psychology*, 8, 39-57; *NATO Expansion: The Good, the bad, the ugly*. (July 4, 1997). IBPP, 2(10); *NATO Expansion: The Ins and Outs of It*. (July 11, 1998). IBPP, 2(11); Rabelais, F. (1991). *Gargantua and Pantagruel* B. Raffel (Trans.). W.W. Norton. (Original work published c. 1532-1564); Sebek, M. (1996). *The fate of the totalitarian object*. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 5, 289-294; Thucydides.

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(1967). *The Peloponnesian War* (R. Warner, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books. (Original work published c. 405 B.C.); Words of warning in NATO battle: Senators tilt at Europe's future. (April 29, 1998). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: NATO, NATO Expansion, Political Psychology, Senate, Treaty, United States.)