North Atlantic Council

Responsible expansion of NATO membership

Research Report

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Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance currently consisting of 28 European and 2 North American countries. It was originally established in 1949 by 12 founding members with the intention of providing collective security against and preventing the expansion of the Soviet Union. In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the alliance remained in place and has been continuously expanding ever since. As of 2022, 18 countries have joined the alliance and 5 more have expressed desire to become a member of NATO, those countries being Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ukraine, Sweden and Finland. At one point in time even the Russian Federation had the opportunity and intention to join the Alliance, but neither party made the necessary measures to make that happen. After Vladimir Putin rose to power, the possibility of an alliance between Russia and NATO started to diminish. Following the Annexation of Crimea, NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia. With the currently growing tension between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, granting NATO membership to countries has become an increasingly important question.

Definition of Key Terms

Accession Talks:
Formal discussions intended to produce an agreement between NATO and non-member countries.

The Washington Treaty:
Otherwise known as the North Atlantic Treaty, forms the basis of NATO. It was the treaty signed by the 12 founding members (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States) in 1949. Despite the always changing security environment, the Treaty has never been modified and is still in its original state.

Warsaw Pact:
Otherwise known as the Treaty of Warsaw, was a contract signed by the Soviet Union and seven other European countries during the Cold War. The pact was a counter-response to the creation of NATO and was mostly dominated by the Soviet Union.

Eastern Bloc:
Also known as Communist Bloc, it was a group of socialist countries under the influence of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

General Overview

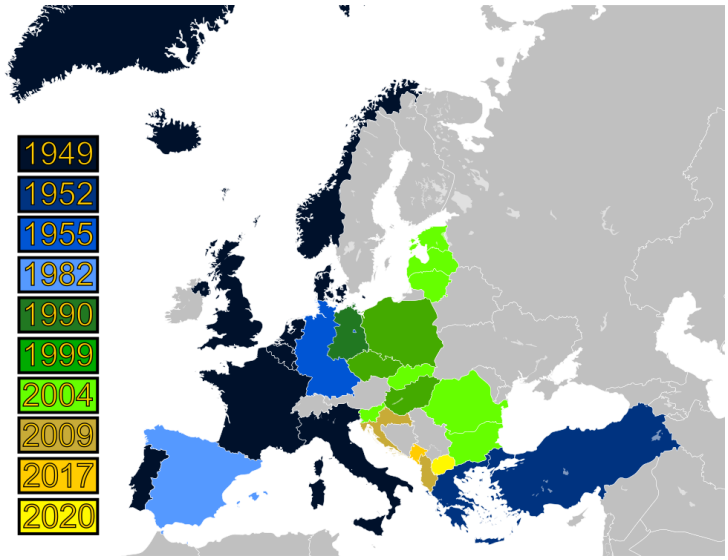
History of NATO

After the Second World War many European countries struggled to rebuild their economies and ensure their countries' safety and security. Although the United States provided aid, European countries still had a long way to go before they could regain their pre-World War II. states and settle their internal and external disputes. The Soviet influence all across Europe also became stronger and posed a great threat against national security. Many governments were taken over by Russian forces, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. To solve this issue, several Western European democratic states came together to discuss greater plans for a military and collective defense alliance. After much discussion and debate, The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949 on the 4th of April. In the Treaty's renowned Article 5, the new Allies agreed that "an armed attack against one or more of them shall be considered an attack against them all" and that following such an attack, each Ally would take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force" in response. One such example of NATO in action came in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. NATO collectively responded, and many NATO allies deployed military forces to Afghanistan.

Today, NATO's fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies' freedom and security by political and military means.

NATO membership

NATO's "open door policy" is based on Article 10 of its founding treaty. Any decision to invite a country to join the Alliance is taken by the North Atlantic Council on the basis of consensus among all Allies. Generally, NATO formulates a common set of criteria which the aspiring NATO members must fulfill in order to join the Alliance, but every Ally has the right to veto the accession of a non-member state. For instance, Greece vetoed North Macedonia's acceptance until the country officially changed its name from 'Macedonia' to 'North Macedonia'. Since the Treaty was signed there have been 8 rounds of enlargement, spanning from 1955 to 2020. In July 2022, Sweden and Finland have also started the ratification process with the intention of becoming a member of the Alliance by next year. In September 2022 Ukraine also applied for a NATO membership.



The accession process happens in the following ways:

1. Accession talks with a NATO team
2. Invitees send letters of intent to NATO, along with timetables for completion of reforms
3. Accession protocols are signed by NATO countries

4. Accession protocols are ratified by NATO countries
5. The Secretary General invites the potential new members to accede to the North Atlantic Treaty
6. Invitees accede to the North Atlantic Treaty in accordance with their national procedures
7. Upon depositing their instruments of accession with the US State Department, invitees formally become NATO members

Functions of NATO

NATO is a political and military Alliance. Its political functions are to promote democratic views and values and help members to cooperate on defense and security related issues, so they could prevent major conflicts in the future. NATO is committed to peaceful resolution of disputes, but if diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defense clause of NATO's founding treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations. Every day, member countries consult and take decisions on security issues at all levels and in a variety of fields. Hundreds of officials, as well as civilian and military experts, come to NATO Headquarters each day to exchange information, share ideas and help prepare decisions when needed, in cooperation with national delegations and the staff at NATO Headquarters.

Current NATO activities include:

1. Supporting Ukraine in the delivery of humanitarian and non-lethal aid
2. Leading military and surveillance operations in Kosovo and the Mediterranean
3. Training security forces in Iraq
4. Assisting the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe
5. Conducting air policing mission in coordination with the African Union

The current complications regarding the Russian - Ukrainian war

NATO stands united in its support for Ukraine and strengthening the alliance's collective defense in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As an emerging democracy, Ukraine has been a strong partner of NATO ever since the 1990s. It has met several, but not all, criteria required to become a member nation, but maintains a strong friendship with the Alliance. When Russia illegally and illegitimately annexed Crimea in 2014, NATO helped to reform Ukraine's armed forces and defense institutions, including with equipment and financial support. Allies have also provided training for tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops. In June 2021 at the Brussels summit NATO members agreed that Ukraine will be a part of NATO with the help of MAP (Membership Action Plan) and that Russia will not be able to veto the country's accession, since Russia was not part of the Alliance. Before further actions on NATO membership were taken, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Since the attack, NATO and Allies have been providing unprecedented levels of support to Ukraine.

Major Parties Involved

Ukraine:

The cooperation between NATO and Ukraine goes back as far as the early 1990s when the country joined the Partnership for Peace programme. This alliance deepened in the following years as Ukraine actively contributed to several NATO-led missions and operations. After Russia's unprovoked annexation of the Crimea region in 2014 and the recent attacks in the Donbass region, NATO condemned the war of aggression against Ukraine and suspended most practical cooperation with the Russian Federation.

United States of America:

The United States of America played a pivotal role in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. After the Second World War the country became a superpower with a flourishing economy and a strong military. The US financially aided European countries to protect them from communist threats. The formation of NATO permanently tied Europe and the United States together.

United Kingdom:

The United Kingdom was among the 12 founding members of NATO and has been an active contributor to the Alliance ever since. Being an island with colonies spread across the globe the country had an advanced naval force, however the Second World War introduced a greater need for land-based forces. During the post-war period the UK maintained troops in West Germany until 1955 when the country joined the Alliance. To this day, Great Britain is one of the most important members of NATO.

France:

France is the third-largest contributor to NATO's military and civil budgets, only falling behind the United States and Germany. France was also one of the 12 founding members who signed the North Atlantic Treaty in 1947. The country had always played an important role in the Alliance's affairs, such as hosting the first permanent headquarters in Paris during the Cold War, encouraging the integration of post-Soviet countries after the dissolution of the USSR and supporting a strategic partnership with the EU. Although France left the integrated military command in 1966, it rejoined in 2009.

Germany:

After the Second World War Germany was divided into two parts. West Germany was under the control of British,French and American forces, while East Germany was mostly occupied by Soviet soldiers. In 1955 the NATO forces officially ended their military occupation of West Germany, and 4 days later the country gained a membership to the Alliance only, – 10 years after the war. West Germany was on the front line of the Cold War in Europe, helping NATO by hosting troops and deterring aggression from the Soviets. East and West Germany was only reunified in 1990, one year before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

The country first expressed desire to join NATO in the 1990s, and has been dedicated to do so ever since. In 2006, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Partnership for Peace programme and was invited to join the Membership Action Plan in 2010. Defense Minister Sifet Podžić participated in the 2022 NATO Summit of Madrid, where the Allies agreed to help the country continue pursuing democratic and defense reforms to fulfill its aspirations to become a well-functioning, independent state.

Sweden and Finland:
Following Russia's sudden invasion of Ukraine, the Swedish and Finnish Ambassadors conveyed their respective countries' inventions to join the Alliance. On the 4th of July 2022 both countries completed the Accession Talks and confirmed their willingness to meet the legal, political and military obligations as NATO members. The next day, on July 5th 2022, NATO Ambassadors signed the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden.

Georgia:
Georgia regained its independence in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The country joined the Partnership for Peace programme in 1994. In 2008, at the Summit of Bucharest, NATO members agreed that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance, provided it meets every necessary requirements. The country's cooperation with NATO has been repeatedly beneficial for both parties.

Russian Federation:
Although the peaceful relations between NATO and the Russian Federation were established after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the relationship between the two parties has never been simple. The country joined the Alliance's Partnership for Peace programme 1994 with the intention of eventually joining NATO, but the tension between the two parties only grew in the following decades. In 2014 after the Annexation of Crimea, NATO suspended all practical relations with Russia, and later in 2022, the Russian Invasion of Ukraine created the most drastic deterioration in Russian-NATO relations up to this date.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Partnership for Peace:

The PfP is a program designed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which aims at creating peace between the NATO members and other European states, especially the so-called Eastern Bloc countries which were under Soviet control in the 20th century. The program was launched on the 10th of January 1994 during the summit in Brussels. The Partnership for Peace Framework Document presented 5 main areas of cooperation, such as:

- ensuring transparency in national defense proceedings and budgeting procedures;
- allowing defense forces to be controlled through democratic methods;
- enhancing the ability for states to provide humanitarian missions such as peacekeeping and search and rescue as the main goal through building a cooperative militaristic relationship with NATO and other states involved;
- building forces that can work with members of the NATO in the long run;
- consulting with and reporting to NATO if threats made to the security, territory or sovereignty of a participating state are detected.

Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP):

IPAPs were launched in 2002 at the Prague Summit. These are plans developed between NATO and other countries which outline the objectives and the communication framework for dialogue and cooperation between both parties. Countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Moldova have stated they have no current aspirations to join NATO, but all of them participate in NATO's IPAP programs.

Intensified Dialogue:

The Intensified Dialogue was introduced in April 2005 during a meeting of foreign ministers in Vilnius. This consisted of discussions of military, political, financial and security issues relating to a possible NATO membership. The first such summit was held in 1997 in Madrid, where the participating countries agreed to "continue the Alliance's intensified dialogs with those nations that aspire to be members of the NATO or those who otherwise wish to pursue a dialog with NATO on membership questions". Current ID members are the following: Georgia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Membership Action Plan (MAP):

The Membership Action Plan was the biggest step towards formalizing the process of NATO membership acceptance. A country's participation in MAP entails the annual presentation of reports concerning its progress on five different measures:

- Willingness to settle international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means, commitment to the rule of law and human rights, and democratic control of armed forces;
- Ability to contribute to the organization's defense and missions;
- Devotion of sufficient resources to armed forces to be able to meet the commitments of membership;
- Security of sensitive information, and safeguards ensuring it;
- Compatibility of domestic legislation with NATO cooperation.

Following the presentation, NATO provides feedback and advice based on the individual progress made by each country. Currently there is only one country participating in MAP who is not already a NATO member, that country being Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Timeline of Key Events

1947 – The start of the Cold War

1949 – The 12 founding members sign the North Atlantic Treaty, creating NATO

1952 – Greece and Turkey join NATO

1955 – Federal Republic of Germany joins NATO

1955 – The Warsaw Pact is formed

1982 – Spain joins NATO

1991 – The dissolution of the Soviet Union

1991 – The end of the Cold War

1994 – Russia joins the Partnership for Peace program

1999 – The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland join NATO

2004 – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia join NATO

2009 – Albania and Croatia join NATO

2014 – Annexation of Crimea, NATO suspends practical relations with Russia

2017 – Montenegro joins NATO

2020 – North Macedonia joins NATO

2022 – Russia invades Ukraine

Possible Solutions

Increasing military presence on the Russian border:

Currently, Russia has an approximately 750 miles long land border with NATO. If Finland and Sweden are accepted into the Alliance, the border's length would almost double. In the past the Russian government repeatedly threatened the two countries, saying they would retaliate if Finland and Sweden joined NATO. Accession of countries which share a border with Russia might further trigger the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, therefore their acceptance should be a slow and well-thought-out procedure. It would also be strategic to increase the military presence in Finland until the Accession Talks are over.

A map showing how NATO's current border with Russia compares to its border if Sweden and Finland join (https://i.insider.com/6284b0b11aa29100196a27dc?width=1000&format=jpeg&auto=webp)

Preventing a war between Allies:

Twice in the last century was Europe a hotspot for difficult and dangerous political and territorial situations that later led to great wars. The expansion of NATO to these areas would greatly diminish the odds of Europe becoming a battlefield once again.

Reaching out to newly formed democracies:

The existence of NATO itself could be a reassuring anchor to newly independent democratic states. NATO supporting such countries' efforts to modernize and reform its defense and security institutions would lead to a better relationship between allies.

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