Forum:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Issue:	On the topic of admitting new members to the North Atlantic Treaty
Student Officer:	Jasmine Wu
Position:	Deputy President

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established in 1949, stands as the cornerstone of transatlantic security. NATO, originally founded to counter the influence of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, has now evolved into a comprehensive security framework, especially with regards to recent conflict developments in Europe— namely the Russo-Ukraine war. In an era of global order transitioning to an increasingly multipolar and fragmented world and the breakdown of neoliberal Intergovernmental Organizations through opposition from major global powers like the U.S., NATO's mission and membership has become contentious and more relevant to the discussion of world affairs than ever. This report examines the historical evolution of NATO's enlargement policy, the strategic imperatives driving aspirant nations, and the complex intra-alliance dynamics that shape accession decisions.

Definition of Key Terms

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

An intergovernmental military and political organization consisting of majority European Nations and the United States. It was founded in 1949, with the primary objective being the collective defense of Europe and North America. NATO members are officially and commonly referred to as the Allies.

Article 5

In NATO's charter, Article 5 details the principle of collective defense. This means an attack to one member state in NATO is considered an attack on all member states, and if such situations occur, other member states are obliged to assist. Members do not necessarily need to use force to assist, and assistance could include any action that Allies deem necessary to maintain peace and security of the North Atlantic Area.

Article 10

This is the legal foundation for NATO's "Open Door Policy". It states that NATO's membership remains open to any European State that can further the Treaty's principles and the security of the North Atlantic Region. Unanimous consent from member states is required for the invitation of a new state. Since 1949, NATO has grown from 12 founding members to 32 members in 2025 — with the latest joiner being Sweden.

Membership Action Plan (MAP)

To join NATO, prospective members must follow the MAP, which outlines a series of criteria aspirants should meet to qualify for membership. This may include political, legal, military, defence, and security reforms to meet NATO's principles of member states having functional democratic systems, fair treatment of minority populations, and the capacity to make military contributions to NATO. Though some states, like Finland and Sweden, for example, did not use MAP when joining NATO. Additionally, going through MAP does not necessarily guarantee membership.

Collective Defense vs. Collective Security

For NATO, it is important to recognize the difference between collective defense and collective security. Collective defense means

Partner States

NATO maintains relationships with over 40 non-member countries, officially referred to as partner states. These partners cooperate with NATO on relevant security issues but are not covered by or bound to Article 5. Partners participate in programs such as The Partnership for Peace (PfP) and NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC), supporting the NATO's mission of peace and security. Partner States can also include states pursuing NATO membership like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine.

Collective Defense vs. Collective Security

For NATO, it is important to recognize the difference between collective defense and collective security. Collective defense means

Non-alignment and Neutrality

Non-alignment refers to the strategy of not adhering to major power blocs politically and militarily. Notably, NATO member state Sweden has been a militarily non-aligned and neutral state for 212 years prior to its formal accession to NATO on March 7, 2024. Understanding the implications of this could frame delegates' debate in terms of potential motivations for states seeking to join NATO.

History & Developments

Phases of NATO Enlargement

Origins of NATO and the Soviet security threat

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded in 1949 in direct response to the perceived geopolitical threats of the early Cold War. Following the Second World War, Europe was politically fragmented, economically weakened, and the region was increasingly polarized between Western bloc (consisting of the USA and Western Europe, mainly western liberal democracies) and the Eastern bloc (Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,

mainly communist authoritarian states). The superpower USSR had extensive political and military influence across Eastern Europe, and had consolidated control through the establishment of satellite states and later the Warsaw Pact. Western European states, lacking the military capacity to deter the Soviet Union, feared further Soviet invasion and thus perceived an urgent need to establish the collective defense system of NATO. NATO's Article 5 would deter Soviet influence, as an attack on one member would be treated as an attack on all. The presence of the United States and Canada in the alliance provided a critical security guarantee as well, linking North American military power to the defense of Europe. During this period, NATO's membership was deliberately being limited to states aligned with the Western bloc, as at the time, the alliance's priority was to deter Soviet aggression more than enlargement. The Cold War shaped NATO as a closed, security-driven alliance formed in opposition to a rival superpower.

Post–Cold War enlargements and Eastern European integration

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, ending the Cold War. This fundamentally altered NATO's strategic policy directions. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union came along the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, creating newly independent states in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO then faced questions regarding its purpose and geographic scope. Rather than disbanding, NATO redefined itself as a stabilizing force in the entirety of Europe, putting an emphasis on the democratic governance, military reform, and collective security of states in the region.

Therefore, beginning in the late 1990s, NATO expanded eastward in several waves. Former Warsaw Pact members and Soviet republics sought NATO membership as a means of securing sovereignty, preventing future domination by Russia, and aligning themselves with Western political and security institutions. The NATO enlargement process was framed as voluntary and was based upon shared values, including democracy, civilian control of the military, and respect for international law, as outlined in the MAP.

However, NATO expansion was received very differently by Russia. While NATO believes its enlargement enhanced regional stability, Russia increasingly views eastward expansion as a threat to its security and interests. Because of this, the post–Cold War enlargement phase laid the basis for ongoing tensions between NATO and Russia today, particularly on issues involving former Soviet republics.

Recent Nordic expansions and shifting security perceptions

The most recent phase of NATO expansion occurred in the context of renewed geopolitical instability in Europe. Finland and Sweden, being long-standing neutral or non-aligned states, applied for NATO membership in 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This marked a significant departure from their historical security policies (of non-alignment and neutrality for centuries) and reflected Europe's broader reassessment of neutrality in an era of renewed conflicts. Russia's actions in Ukraine demonstrated to Europe that geographic proximity and neutrality no longer guaranteed security, prompting Nordic states to seek formal collective defense guarantees, such as joining NATO.

Finland formally joined NATO in 2023, followed by Sweden in 2024. These accessions underscored NATO's continued relevance and institutional adaptability, while also highlighting the alliance's responsiveness to changing security environments. The Nordic expansions reinforced NATO's northern flank and demonstrated that enlargement remains an active and evolving process rather than a closed chapter of the post–Cold War era.

Intra-NATO Dynamics

Divergent Member Views

Despite NATO's official "open door" policy, member states do not hold uniform views on enlargement. All accession decisions must be made by consensus, and individual members have different strategic and political priorities and thus view enlargement differently. States geographically closer to Russia, such as Poland and the Baltic states, tend to strongly support expansion, viewing it as essential to deterring Russia and ensuring regional security. These states advocate for rapid integration of countries like Ukraine and Georgia.

On the other hand, members like Germany, France, and Italy, have historically adopted more cautious positions about expansion for their concerns regarding greater risks of escalation, overstretch of the alliance, and the possibility of other member states being drawn into direct conflict with Russia due to Article 5 obligations. These differing perspectives are influenced by historical experience, economic ties with Russia, and domestic public opinion. As a result, NATO enlargement debates frequently involve lengthy internal negotiations and debates.

Case Study – Ukraine and Georgia

Previously being a partner state, after Russia's aggression and since 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, Ukraine's position turned into explicit member aspiration. After Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukraine pursued non-alignment while cooperating with NATO through the Partnership for Peace.

At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO declared that Ukraine "will become a member of NATO," but offered neither a timeline nor a Membership Action Plan. This is because of the divisions within the Alliance over the risks of provoking Russia if granting Ukraine full membership. After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine formally applied for NATO membership and significantly increased military and political cooperation with the Alliance. However, accession remains unresolved due to the ongoing conflict, territorial disputes, and the implications of extending Article 5 guarantees to a state in active conflict. The case of Ukraine represents the most contentious contemporary example of NATO enlargement, raising questions about deterrence measures, escalation risks, and alliance obligations.

Georgia presents a parallel case with Ukraine. Also promised future NATO membership in 2008, Georgia has pursued political and military reforms and contributed to NATO's military operations, including in Afghanistan. However, its accession has been halted following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which was fought for five days, ending in a ceasefire. After the ceasefire, Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states and has since stationed troops there.

These "frozen conflicts" remain a major obstacle to admitting Georgia, as admitting Georgia could obligate other NATO members to defend disputed territories under Article 5. While NATO has repeatedly affirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and called for Russian withdrawal, it has refrained from issuing a formal invitation. Together, Ukraine and Georgia illustrate the central dilemma of NATO enlargement: balancing the Alliance's open-door policy with the security risks posed by accession in contested geopolitical environments.

The consensus rule and vetoing expansion

NATO operates on the principle of unanimous consent, meaning that every member state effectively holds veto power over enlargement decisions. This rule is designed to preserve alliance unity and ensure that all members fully support collective defense commitments. However, it also creates significant political constraints, particularly when disagreements about enlargement arise.

The consensus rule allows members to delay or block accession for strategic, political, or domestic reasons. While this ensures that new members are accepted with the backing of the full alliance, it can also politicize the enlargement process and undermine predictability for aspirant states. For candidates such as Ukraine and Georgia, this creates uncertainty regarding timelines and conditions for membership, despite repeated political assurances from NATO. Sweden's entry to NATO was also delayed to due strong objections from Turkey and Hungary, despite Sweden meeting all criteria to join NATO. Turkey raised concerns related to Swedish policies toward Kurdish groups, arms embargoes, and counterterrorism cooperation. Hungary cited diplomatic disputes and political grievances, though its objections were less clearly defined.

Enlargement therefore is not merely a technical assessment of readiness, but a deeply political process shaped by internal bargaining, external pressures, and differing national interests. Understanding this dynamic is essential for evaluating both past and future NATO expansion efforts.

Major Parties Involved

NATO Member States (Allies)

NATO member states remain divided over admitting new member states. Some are pro-expansion; some are anti-expansion. Pro-expansion allies include: The U.S., UK, Baltic states, Poland, Romania, and others who generally support swift admission of candidates like Ukraine or Georgia. Allies that are more hesitant about expansion are Germany, France, Italy, and some Western Europeans who expressed concerns about being drawn into war. The moist objecting allies are Turkey and Hungary,

Russia

Russia is the most significant external actor opposing NATO expansion. Russia believes NATO poses a threat to its state security, especially if Ukraine joins the alliance as Ukraine neighbors Russia. It has warned against admitting Ukraine/Georgia and has used military force in 2008, 2014 and 2022 to prevent Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO.

Ukraine

Ukraine is a significant aspirant state currently at war with Russia. Ukraine's leaders and constitution now make NATO membership a key goal and have attempted to follow NATO's criterion, including reforming armed forces.

Other Aspirants (Georgia and Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Georgia has generally fulfilled NATO criteria and was promised membership "in the future", but the presence of Russian military in its states made accession difficult. For Bosnia-Herzegovina was invited to MAP in 2010 and remains in the queue and has not met all criteria.

United Nations

The UN General Assembly has repeatedly condemned Russia's aggressions and supported NATO's stance. However, delegates should be reminded that Russia holds veto power in the Security Council, significantly limiting the UN's involvement in security issues involving Russia, such as the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Timeline of Events

Depending on the subject, this section may not be entirely necessary. Bringing clarification is still advised, though. Please chronologically list the major events that occurred for the topic.

Date	Event Name	Description
1949 April	Washington Treaty	NATO was founded by 12 countries
1952–55	Early enlargements	Greece, Turkey, West Germany join
1991	End of Cold War	Soviet Union falls
1997	NATO-Russia Founding Act	This act was introduced for NATO to manage relations with the Russian Federation for cooperation and security. It is a political commitment, not a binding act. Due to its repeated violations, namely Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, it is considered a "dead letter".
1999	First post-Cold-War expansion	Czechia, Hungary, Poland joins
2004	Second major expansion	Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania joins
2008	NATO Bucharest Summit	Allies agree that "Georgia and Ukraine will become members" in the future, however, they withhold

		invitations to these two states as member states disagree. In August of 2008, Russia invades Georgia, further straining Russia-NATO relations.
2009	Further enlargement	Albania and Croatia join NATO
2014	Russia annexes Crimea	Russia annexed Crimea and continues to back separatists in Ukraine. NATO enhances assurance measures to Eastern Allies, reaffirming support for Ukraine and Georgia without concrete timelines.
2017-2020	Further Expansion	Montenegro and North Macedonia join.
2022	Russia invades Ukraine	In response, Finland and Sweden apply for NATO membership. Some member states call for expediting membership for Ukraine.
2023	Finland becomes 31st member, NATO upgrades NATO-Ukraine relations.	In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland joins NATO, making a historic shift from its long-standing policy of military non-alignment. At the same time, NATO enhanced its partnership with Ukraine through increased military aid, training programs, and strategic dialogues to bolster Kyiv's defenses without granting full membership.
2024	Sweden becomes 32nd member, NATO continues to pledge support for Ukraine	NATO reaffirmed its commitment to Ukraine via summits and declarations, promising ongoing arms deliveries, financial assistance, and pathways toward deeper integration
Present	32 members of NATO	NATO has 32 members. Ukraine and Georgia remain aspirants "on track" for future membership. NATO still faces the challenge of Russian aggression.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Partnership Programs

NATO has deepened cooperation to countries short of membership. Examples include Partnership for Peace since 1994, NATO-Ukraine Commission in 1997 (later replaced by NATO-Ukraine Council in 2023) ☒, and NATO-Georgia Commission in 2008. These were established during critical times of conflict to provide support for aspirant states.

Alternate Arrangements (ANPs):

After Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, NATO created the Annual National Program (ANP) as a stopgap for Ukraine and Georgia. The United States pushed for this to integrate Ukraine without offering full membership, as no consensus of membership invitation could be reached at this current point. This can be seen as an informal attempt of NATO keeping Ukraine's membership path alive under a different name.

Bucharest/Wales/Warsaw Declarations:

Several NATO summits reaffirmed that Ukraine and Georgia's future is with NATO, such as the Bucharest declaration in 2008 and Wales in 2014 ☒. These political promises kept the door "open" but did not solve membership timing and provide specific accession steps. They served as reassurance from the allies to aspirants and a diplomatic signal to Russia.

Security Guarantees Outside NATO:

Some other efforts focused on external security arrangements, completely outside of NATO to support aspirant countries like Ukraine. The 1994 Budapest Memorandum (between U.S., UK and Russia) promised to respect Ukraine's borders after Ukraine gave up nuclear arms. This is an early attempt of security guarantees through measures outside of NATO. More recently, some discussions suggesting for Ukraine to pledge neutrality (not joining NATO), then with Western security guarantees over gaining membership as a means for long term peace. However, this is highly contested and public opinion within Ukraine strongly supports Ukraine joining NATO.

Possible Solutions

The committee should explore a range of policy options, balancing security needs with political priorities.

Membership Action Plan Reforms: Reforming the MAP process itself is the most straightforward way to change the process of admitting new members into NATO. NATO could introduce a new accession framework for conflict-affected states like Ukraine, including MAP benchmarks that can be completed even during hostilities (such as focusing on governance reforms and rebuilding forces), thus speeding up the process of such member states joining the alliance in cases as delegates see fit. The alliance might also codify the precedent set for Finland/Ukraine where EU membership or similar fulfilled criteria waived some MAP requirements☒. This would

signal commitment while preserving standards. The Vilnius 2023 decision to waive a MAP for Ukraine suggests NATO could prove flexible to the membership process.

Enhanced Security Partnerships (still short of Full Membership): NATO could develop intermediate security guarantees to aspirant states if no consensus on admitting the state could be reached. Examples include bilateral defense pacts (like U.S.-Ukraine style agreements), or expanded NATO Partnership for Peace roles. NATO could expand its "Enhanced Opportunity Partner" concept, which is a non-Article 5 partnership framework, to include candidates. This offers military aid and intelligence sharing without giving full Article 5 coverage. Temporary joint military exercises could strengthen defense ties within NATO. These steps address interim security needs while deferring formal admission.

Conflict Resolution Initiatives: NATO, possibly with the UN or Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), could facilitate negotiations on territorial issues that affect the admittance of new NATO members. For example, in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, NATO could negotiate where Russia might accept new members admitted into NATO if certain concessions were made (like demilitarized zones or neutrality clauses for new members) – though this is highly sensitive and controversial. Alternatively, bolstering peace processes for conflict-ridden states to create conditions for future accession is also a possible solution.

Legal/Constitutional Guarantees: NATO could guarantee aspirant countries for their membership if they can commit (through constitutional amendments or international treaty) to remain non-nuclear or neutral on certain issues within the NATO forum. This serves as a confidence-building measure for Russia, which vehemently opposes NATO enlargement. Though neutrality pledges could be subject to change if there are changes in the government of the aspirant country, it is one measure to make member admittance. However, any guarantee of this sort should require security assurances from NATO to the aspirant.

Enhanced EU-NATO Cooperation: As many aspirants are also European Union (EU) candidates, NATO could coordinate with the EU on policies to enhance the enlargement process. For example, NATO could link EU accession progress (such as rule-of-law reforms) with NATO membership requirements. Further collaboration between NATO and the EU could be achieved through joint training missions (such EU Battlegroups plus NATO troops), further improving the security of Europe.

As an additional resource, delegates may also reference the NATO Strategic Foresight Analysis 2023 (SFA23) report, published by NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT), which includes comprehensive research about the future security environment in the North Atlantic region, with a focus on NATO's military power.

Bibliography

"A Short History of NATO." *U.S. Department of War*, 2025, www.war.gov/News/News-
Stories/Article/Article/1803445/a-short-history-of-nato/. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

Brooke-Holland, Louisa. "How Do Countries Join NATO?" *House of Commons Library*, 20 Dec. 2025, commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9813/. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

Chatterjee, Phelan. "How Sweden and Finland Went from Neutral to Nato." *Bbc.com*, BBC News, 10 May 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61397478. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"How Sweden and Finland Went from Neutral to Nato." *Bbc.com*, BBC News, 10 May 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61397478. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"Collective Defence and Article 5." *Site Name Seo*, 2025, www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/collective-defence-and-article-5#:~:text=Collective%20defence%20is%20NATO's%20most,into%20a%20mutual%20assistance%20obligation. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"Enlargement and Article 10." *Site Name Seo*, 2025, www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/enlargement-and-article-10. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

guillermo. "Off the MAP: Ukraine and the Problems of Expanding NATO - Foreign Policy Research Institute." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 18 Oct. 2024, www.fpri.org/article/2023/07/off-the-map-ukraine-and-the-problems-of-expanding-nato/#:~:text=To%20join%20NATO%2C%20prospective%20members,the%20map%2C%20you%20will%20get. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

Haring, Melinda. "Why the Bucharest Summit Still Matters Ten Years On." *Atlantic Council*, 4 May 2018, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-the-bucharest-summit-still-matters-ten-years-on/. Accessed 21 Dec. 2025.

NATO C2COE. "Strategic Foresight Analysis 2023 (SFA23) – NATO C2COE." *C2coe.org*, 2023, c2coe.org/strategic-foresight-analysis-2023-sfa23/. Accessed 21 Dec. 2025.

"NATO Member Countries." *Organization | NATO*, 2025, www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-member-countries#:~:text=,is%20taken%20by%20the%20North. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"NATO: The Origins of a Political and Military Alliance." *Imperial War Museums*, 2024, www.iwm.org.uk/learning/nato-the-origins-of-a-political-and-military-alliance. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"Non-Alignment | Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential." *Uia.org*, 2024, encyclopedia.uia.org/problem/non-alignment. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"Partnership for Peace Programme." *Site Name Seo*, 2025, www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/partnership-for-peace-programme. Accessed 20 Dec. 2025.

"The NATO Russian Founding Act | Arms Control Association." *Armscontrol.org*, 2025, www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-05/features/nato-russian-founding-act#:~:text=However%2C%20neither%20the%20Council%20nor,decision%2Dmaking%20and%20action.%22. Accessed 21 Dec. 2025.

"The North Atlantic Treaty." *Official Texts and Resources | NATO*, 2025, www.nato.int/en/about-
us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty. Accessed 20
Dec. 2025.

World Population Review. "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Countries." *World Population
Review*, 18 Dec. 2025, worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nato-countries. Accessed 20
Dec. 2025.