

Testimony by Ambassador R. Nicholas Burns

United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

On the Future of NATO

to the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

April 1, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me here today. I am honored to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss the future of NATO, our most important Alliance and a central pillar of U.S. foreign and defense policy. America needs a permanent Alliance willing and able to take on the dangers posed by terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and other new threats. The Administration's policies are designed to ensure that NATO can continue to meet this challenge.

Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, I want to acknowledge your leadership in defining a sensible American policy on NATO. I very much appreciate the advice and guidance that my team received from you when you visited us in Brussels last year. Your commitment to NATO throughout your Senate career has been steadfast and very much appreciated by all of us in the United States Foreign Service.

I would like to thank Senator Biden for his leadership of this Committee last year, when the Senate supported both NATO's transformation and NATO enlargement in preparation for the Prague Summit.

Let me also say that I greatly appreciate the participation of the Congress in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. We are proud that Congressman Doug Bereuter now serves as President of this important forum.

Mr. Chairman, we are meeting at a moment when the United States faces momentous challenges overseas. American and coalition soldiers are in harm's way in Iraq, undertaking by force what Saddam Hussein refused to do peacefully -- to disarm as demanded by the international community for over 12 years.

Differences with a number of our long-standing Allies over how to deal with the grave threat posed by Saddam have put a serious strain on Trans-Atlantic ties. Just as we will have to rebuild Iraq, we will have to bring NATO back to the consensus and unity that marked the Prague Summit just four months ago, when we agreed that NATO needs new members, new capabilities and new relationships to meet the threats of the 21st century.

Today I would like to give you a view from Brussels on where NATO is right now, where we want it to go, and how we believe the seven invited nations will help us get there. I will try to make the case today that the seven invited nations are ready to become full NATO members, and that their accession is in the best interests of the United States. I will also tell you why I believe NATO remains our most important Alliance, and how we seek to transform it to meet the new threats so evident after September 11, 2001. Finally, Mr. Chairman, I will give you my thoughts on the key challenges that NATO faces in the period ahead.

THE U.S. ENLARGEMENT STRATEGY

Mr. Chairman, last week, on March 26, I had the honor of signing on behalf of the United States in Brussels the Protocols on the Accession to the North Atlantic Treaty of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. I strongly encourage the U.S. Senate to provide its advice and consent to the ratification of these protocols. I am convinced that bringing these seven nations into the Alliance will make NATO a stronger collective defense organization and will increase the security of the United States.

When President Bush and NATO leaders invited the seven countries to begin accession talks with the Alliance at last November's Prague Summit, it was truly a historic step forward. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and communism more than a decade ago, the U.S. and our Allies have pursued the strategic aim of creating a Europe whole, free, secure and at peace. This has been President George Bush's objective as it was of President Clinton and of President George Herbert Walker Bush, with wide bipartisan support – to firmly anchor the nations of Central and Eastern Europe in both NATO and the European Union.

NATO's enlargement, coupled with enlargement of the EU, will move Europe beyond the divisions and instability that made the 20th century one of history's bloodiest. This is a profound achievement for the United States and our European Allies.

We have pushed these countries hard to be ready for NATO membership. Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly since becoming candidates for NATO membership, the

seven invited nations have joined Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in consolidating democracy and free markets in that half of Europe closed behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. The prospect of Alliance membership has helped to erase old dividing lines and shift Europe and NATO's center of gravity eastward, broadening security and stability on a continent that has seen too little of both.

Mr. Chairman, my recommendation of ratification is based on months and years of work by our government with the invited countries. Twice last year, in February and in October, I led a U.S. interagency team to the seven invited nations -- as well as to Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia -- to assess their readiness for NATO membership. During these visits, as well as in Brussels and at the Vilnius-10 Summit in Riga last July, our team met with every President, Prime Minister, Foreign and Defense Minister of the seven nations -- in well over one hundred separate meetings. Our goal was to learn as much as we could about these countries' readiness for NATO membership, and to encourage them to press ahead with their historic reform efforts.

Based on these meetings and visits, and on our wide-ranging contacts with these nations at all levels of the U.S. Government, I believe that all of the invited nations meet NATO's high standards for membership. All seven are reforming and modernizing their defense establishments to add strength to NATO's collective defense capabilities. All have demonstrated a firm commitment to NATO's community of values by addressing such issues as corruption, minority rights, regional relations, trafficking in persons, the legacy of the Holocaust, property restitution, and good governance. All have responded

positively and constructively to a very intrusive U.S. examination of their efforts, often beyond the rigors of NATO's Membership Action Plan that all of the invited nations have endured since 1999.

This is not to say that the invited nations have solved all their problems. Despite the remarkable progress we have seen, each of them remains a society in transition from communism to an open democratic and market-oriented system. Their levels of progress differ, and many challenges remain. Together with our Allies, we will need to continue to encourage and support their reform efforts in the years ahead.

The invited nations are the first to recognize that the job is not done. They are committed to reform. Their efforts have not slowed, but rather accelerated, in the months since NATO's historic decisions in Prague. Each of the Invitees has made new commitments in writing, at the highest level, to specific reform measures on a range of issues. These individual *Timetables for the Completion of Reforms* were submitted to NATO prior to the signing of Accession Protocols on March 26. They constitute important political commitments that will guide their efforts throughout the accession period and beyond -- and will help inform Allied parliaments about the status of these nations' preparations for membership.

Take a look at Romania's reform timetable and you will find budgetary commitments to enable its anti-corruption office to do its work. Read Bulgaria's and you will see specific steps that the government is taking to curb illicit arms sales and safeguard NATO secrets.

The timetables of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania outline their strategies for educating their children about the Holocaust and restituting communal property. Read Slovenia's timetable and you will find a specific commitment to increase defense spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2008. See Slovakia's for a detailed description of the government's efforts to improve the situation of its Roma minority.

THE INVITEES

Mr. Chairman, the President's Report to Congress on NATO enlargement, which was submitted last week, contains a detailed analysis of each of the invited nations. Rather than review all the findings of that report, let me try to give you a brief snapshot of these seven countries, each of which brings a different set of strengths to the NATO table.

Their participation in the MAP and in the Partnership for Peace "PfP" program has enabled them to make significant strides in reforming their militaries and in enhancing the interoperability of their armed forces with NATO. Furthermore, each of these countries has also made important political and military contributions to the security challenges we face – in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in some cases in all three theaters.

Romania, the largest of the invited nations, self-deployed over 400 combat troops to Afghanistan and now has a 70-strong nuclear/biological/chemical defense team on the ground in Kuwait in support of the coalition, with more personnel en route. Again and again, Romania has demonstrated the ambition, and the means, to play a major role in

NATO as a close Ally of the U.S. The government is also showing a clear commitment to tackling its remaining reform challenges, including corruption and cementing the rule of law, where much work remains to be done.

Like Romania, Bulgaria has been with us every step of the way on Iraq -- despite calls from some other parts of Europe to remain on the sidelines. Bulgaria has played a key role in UN Security Council deliberations, joined our Coalition, and contributed a nuclear/biological/chemical defense team to the Iraqi theater of operations as well as airfields for our movements to and from Afghanistan. Bringing Bulgaria and Romania into NATO would further extend stability into Europe's most troubled region -- southeast Europe. Bulgaria's government has taken numerous painful steps on defense reform, including destroying its SS-23 and SCUD missiles and reducing the size of its armed forces by the thousands. Moreover, Bulgaria is working closely with us to tighten export controls and protect NATO classified information. These are tough challenges, but I am confident that the government will succeed on both counts.

Like Bulgaria and Romania, Slovakia has faced the challenge of reducing a large, antiquated military machine inherited from its Warsaw Pact past -- and is accomplishing this task with success. Slovakia's military is capable of making a significant contribution to Alliance defense, including through its mechanized infantry battalion for NATO-led operations and its nuclear/biological/chemical defense team now on the ground in Kuwait in support of the coalition. Slovakia is also on a very positive political and economic trajectory, having put the autocrat Vladimir Meciar out to pasture in last September's

elections, and is making good progress on remaining problems such as integration of the Roma and fighting corruption.

One week ago, Slovenia surprised many by winning its referendum on NATO membership by a two-to-one margin, a tribute to the efforts of its government and -- I believe -- to the wisdom of its people. The mandate that the government has received bodes very well for Slovenia's future contributions to the Alliance. With its model democracy and strong economy, we can expect Slovenia to continue to serve as a leader in the Balkans, in areas like de-mining and mountain warfare training. We welcome the government's commitment to raise defense spending every year from now until it reaches 2 percent of GDP by 2008.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are well prepared to take up the responsibilities of NATO membership. Though small, they have worked hard for a decade to develop niche military capabilities to fill Alliance shortfalls, and we can expect continuing staunch support from them for U.S. objectives. All three have contributed troops to NATO-led operations in the Balkans and all three are on the ground with us in Afghanistan. All three have joined the coalition to disarm Saddam Hussein, and all are taking steps to deploy military personnel to the theater for purposes of peacekeeping and reconstruction. The Senate and successive U.S. Administrations deserve credit for having been true and loyal friends of the Baltic States. The U.S. never recognized their illegal annexation by the Soviet Union and stood by them as they built their new democracies. These are truly

admirable countries, freed forever from totalitarianism, and ready to enjoy the benefits of freedom and security that they surely deserve.

A MORE ATLANTICIST ALLIANCE

Mr. Chairman, I think it is important to consider not only the objective qualifications of the seven invited nations, but also the factors that have led them to seek membership in NATO, what kind of Alliance they are interested in joining, and how this affects more broadly U.S. national security interests.

In the thousands of miles that my colleagues and I have traveled, and in the hundreds of meetings that we have held -- not only with government officials but with members of the opposition, public opinion leaders, and civil society as well -- we have heard time and again how grateful the invited nations are for the leadership that the U.S. has shown on enlargement and in strengthening security in the Euro-Atlantic area.

When I first took up my assignment in Brussels in the summer of 2001, the conventional wisdom at NATO was that somewhere between one and four nations might receive Prague Summit invitations - certainly not seven. It was President Bush's vision -- first articulated in Warsaw earlier the same year of an Alliance stretching "from the Baltics to the Black Sea" -- that shifted the balance at NATO in favor of a robust enlargement. The horrible events of September 11, 2001 further convinced many at NATO that the Alliance

should expand its ranks with those countries willing to take risks to win the war on terrorism.

From the very beginning, it was the U.S. that championed the most robust possible enlargement - a fact that has not been lost on the invitees. They know that if not for U.S. leadership, NATO membership might not have happened for them. They can thank President Bush and his predecessors as well as the Senate for this achievement.

Let there be no doubt -- these are nations that understand the value of NATO membership and they will never take it for granted. They will be among our most committed allies when they walk through NATO's doors as full members. Senator Voinovich of this committee, who attended the Prague Summit, will recall the remarkably eloquent words of Latvian President Vike-Freiberga at the North Atlantic Council meeting following her country's invitation to join the Alliance. She said,

"Our people have been tested in the fires of history, they have been tempered by suffering and injustice. They know the meaning and the value of liberty. They know that it is worth every effort to support it, to maintain it, to stand for it and to fight for it. We make a solemn pledge and a commitment here today, on this historic and solemn occasion, that we will strive to our utmost to do our part to contribute not just to the strength of the Alliance but to do whatever needs to be done to create a world where justice and liberty are available to all."

Hearing those words again, it is easy to understand why President Bush said at Prague that he expects the invited nations to "refresh the spirit" of NATO itself.

Some say these nations should be seen and not heard. The U.S. believes these nations deserve our respect for all they have done to reassert their own independence and freedom. Theirs is one of the most dramatic and hopeful stories of our time. We need to hear their views on the issues of the day, including on NATO's future. These nations know the meaning of democracy, having been denied it for so long. They know the value of freedom, having had theirs crushed by Soviet communism and totalitarianism. They don't just bring new capabilities to the table; they also bring strong political will to defend our way of life.

Mr. Chairman, in this new century, we should look at NATO enlargement not as how many countries we are obligated to defend, but rather how many countries we can count on to stand with us when the going gets tough. Size and geography and population count less than the political will to defend our principles and collective security.

NEW THREATS/NEW CAPABILITIES

Mr. Chairman, the seven nations that received invitations at the Prague Summit understand that the threats we face today are fundamentally different from those of the last century -- that the threats of today come not from strong states within Europe, but from unstable failed states and terrorist organizations far from Europe's borders.

As NATO Secretary General George Robertson has said in his inimitable fashion, "geography will no longer act as our shield," because the current and future security

environment "does not afford us the luxury of fighting theoretical battles about what is 'in' and what is 'out of area.'" In other words, as you famously said, Mr. Chairman, NATO is either "out of area or out of business."

This was the lesson the United States derived from the tragic events of September 11 -- that the gravest threats to our security can come from anywhere on the globe. NATO's future is thus the defense of peace not just in Europe but wherever threats arise to all of us in the Euro-Atlantic community. In fact, NATO is already operating well beyond the borders of our member states, and that is where NATO belongs. The old "out-of-area" debate is indeed dead.

Today in Afghanistan, troops from fourteen NATO, and fourteen NATO Partner, countries make up the vast majority of the 4,500 strong International Stabilization and Assistance Force (ISAF). In addition, NATO itself has assisted current ISAF lead nations Germany and the Netherlands with force generation, planning, intelligence, coordination and information sharing, and communications.

If NATO's past was centered in countering the Soviet threat to Western Europe, its future must be devoted to meeting the greatest security challenge this generation faces -- the toxic mix of terrorism, states that sponsor terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction far from Europe's shores. NATO needs to pivot from its inward focus on Europe -- which was necessary and appropriate during the Cold War -- to an outward focus on the arc of

countries where most of the threats are today -- in Central and South Asia, and in the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman, our transformation agenda for NATO is an ambitious one, and there are many challenges to overcome. But at the Prague Summit last November, President Bush and his fellow Heads of State and Government took historic decisions to set this process in motion.

The Prague vision was both simple and far-reaching -- to launch a wholesale transformation of the Alliance for the 21st century. The old NATO served us well, but because the threats to our common security had changed, Allies agreed that NATO had to change with them.

At the Summit, Allies agreed to a three-part reform effort -- to build new military capabilities to fight terrorism and the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction and to keep the peace; to take in new members to broaden NATO's reach; and to nurture new relationship with Russia, Ukraine, our Mediterranean Dialogue Partners, and our partners in the Partnership for Peace, particularly with the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus to extend security across Eurasia.

NATO's goal of new military capabilities was expressed in the Prague Capabilities Commitment, through which our European Allies committed to fill NATO shortfalls in areas such as heavy air and sealift, air-to-air refueling, precision guided munitions, and

advanced communications. In recent months, Allies have begun implementing the Prague decisions, pooling their resources by establishing a number of multinational consortiums aimed at acquiring these capabilities.

Our challenge between now and the next NATO Summit in mid-2004 is to ensure that our Allies follow through on these commitments in a tight budget climate. At NATO, we are keeping the heat on -- both through bilateral pressure and peer group pressure within the North Atlantic Council. Our most effective lobbying tactic is through leadership and example. As demonstrated so vividly again in Iraq, Congress has funded the strongest military in the world. Allies know what they have to do to catch up.

In Prague, our Allies also agreed to a U.S. proposal to establish a NATO Response Force to allow us to move more quickly and flexibly wherever needed. This will be a rotational force that is technologically advanced, lethal, and has trained and exercised together as a combined and joint force. The NATO Response Force was Prague's capability headline; it will also be the most visible determinant of our success on this front.

This cutting-edge NATO force needs to be matched by similar streamlining in the NATO command structure, with new technologies and military doctrines designed to address 21st century threats. We are making good progress in transforming NATO's structure and should be able to agree on the key elements by the June Defense Ministerial.

DEFENSE OF TURKEY IMPASSE

Mr. Chairman, earlier in my remarks I mentioned the very difficult debate that we had in Brussels several weeks ago regarding the defense of Turkey. I know that this is an issue of concern to this committee so I think it is important that I address it.

This was not the first time that NATO members have disagreed vocally, and publicly, on a difficult issue. The Suez Crisis and Vietnam were bitter, as was President DeGaulle's decision in 1966 to withdraw from NATO's integrated military structure. NATO debate leading up to the 1979 Two-Track Pershing Missile decision that eventually led to the elimination of an entire class of nuclear weapons in Europe was coupled with public demonstrations that rivaled those we have seen during the last month.

My point, Mr. Chairman, in providing this historical perspective, is that NATO has survived crises in the past, and NATO will survive this latest episode.

Mr. Chairman, we should also remember that in this latest disagreement, only three of our Allies opposed the wish of the majority to respond immediately and positively to Turkey's request for contingency measures to assist in its defense. Sixteen Allies supported the proposal, and the divisions were as deep within Europe as they were across the Atlantic.

For the 15 Allies who stood with Turkey, it was a fundamental obligation of the Alliance -- a matter of principle -- to come to Turkey's aid. The actions of France, Germany and Belgium led to a crisis of credibility in the Alliance because their narrow efforts violated the core fabric of NATO -- that we come to each other's assistance in times of need.

In the end, Germany and Belgium did the right thing, and NATO met its commitment under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty by deploying AWAC surveillance aircraft, Patriot missile systems, and biological and chemical response units to Turkey in order to deter and defend against Iraqi aggression. Our final success in breaking the impasse was only made possible by the decision to meet in NATO's Defense Policy Committee and decide to help Turkey "at 18" -- that is, without France, which withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966.

One of the bright spots in that otherwise frustrating week was when the Ambassadors of the seven invited nations visited me in my office to tell me they were with us and would have supported aid to Turkey if they had been part of the deliberations. I would have liked to have had them at the table with us that week, and I look forward to the day when they will be. The seven invited nations are expecting to join NATO as equal members on an equal footing, and to have their voices heard and respected when we differ.

Privately, a few of these Ambassadors told me that their publics back home were wondering whether NATO's collective defense commitment was still reliable. I assured

them that the U.S. would always insist that NATO live up to its core responsibility and meet its commitment to its members -- as we will for them once they become members.

An Alliance that keeps its word is the kind of Alliance that the seven invited nations want to join. It is the kind of Alliance that they are dedicated to preserving. These are countries that understand the value of freedom and see NATO as the way to maintain that freedom.

Some commentators have suggested that enlarging the Alliance by seven will make decision-making more cumbersome and difficult. I agree that this will be a challenge but one that we can manage well. Gaining consensus did not become more difficult with the accession of the trans-Atlantic minded Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary in 1999. On the contrary, NATO's newest members have shown themselves to be the least likely to block consensus and among the most likely to seek it. The issue is not the number of nations at the table, but rather the will to act collectively and decisively in our common interest.

SIX CHALLENGES

In summing up, Mr. Chairman, as we look toward the next NATO Summit in mid-2004, we hope the Senate and NATO's other eighteen National Parliaments will ratify the Accession Protocols so that we can strengthen NATO with seven new members. We

need these nations with us as we pursue a NATO agenda that is both clear and complex.

Here are the six main challenges for NATO as I see them:

Our first order of business should be to strengthen NATO's role in meeting threats outside of Europe. In Afghanistan, NATO is already providing support to German and other Allies participating in the International Stabilization and Assistance Force. We are prepared to favorably consider having NATO provide additional support should participating Allies request this. Lord Robertson and some of our Allies would like to see NATO take a larger role in ISAF. This makes sense to me.

We believe that NATO should also consider a role in rebuilding Iraq, including WMD destruction, civil-military reconstruction and contributions to peacekeeping. Rebuilding Iraq will require a broad coalition and NATO should play its part – ideally as a collective contributor, but at least as a facilitator of individual Allied contributions.

NATO's second challenge is to complete the military and defense transformation of the Alliance that we started at Prague, including implementing the Prague Capabilities Commitment, establishing a NATO Response Force, and streamlining our command structure, to create a more nimble, expeditionary Alliance capable of addressing the new threats we face today.

Our third challenge is to integrate the seven new members into the Alliance, provided the Senate and NATO's other parliaments give their advice and consent to the Accession

Protocols. We intend to work closely with our new members to ensure that they strengthen Alliance defense capabilities and are on the cutting edge of NATO's transformation. At the same time, we will continue to emphasize that NATO's door remains open, including for Albania, Macedonia, Croatia and others who may apply for membership in the future, as we pursue our strategic aim of building a unified and peaceful Europe.

Our fourth challenge is to lift the quality of NATO's relations with Partner nations, to realize the full potential of the NATO-Russia Council and to further support reform in Ukraine. We also want to make a major push this year to jumpstart NATO's interaction with Partners in Central Asia and the Caucasus on the front lines of the war against terrorism. In addition, we should do more with Middle Eastern countries through NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue.

Our fifth challenge is to work more effectively with the European Union. The recent NATO-EU breakthrough on Berlin-plus arrangements sets the stage for greatly enhanced strategic security cooperation. We now have the opportunity for a cooperative -- not competitive -- relationship. Just yesterday, Mr. Chairman, NATO handed over its peacekeeping operation in Macedonia to the EU, on the basis of these arrangements. We should seize this opportunity while recognizing that NATO will remain Europe's preeminent security organization. We must preserve and protect NATO's interests as we move ahead with the EU.

Sixth, we should be true to NATO's commitments in Bosnia and Kosovo. The recent tragic assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic reminds us of the risks that reformers take each day to secure a better future for their nations. We must continue to support their efforts. At the same time, we should look for additional opportunities to integrate the nations of this troubled region into the Euro-Atlantic community. This should eventually include the transformation of the Alliance's role in Bosnia and Kosovo to civilian authorities.

PRESERVING THE TRANS-ATLANTIC LINK

Mr. Chairman, let me close with just a few words about why I believe the United States should stay engaged with our Allies through NATO.

While it may sometimes be necessary to go it alone in the world, it is always preferable to act with our Allies and friends. As Churchill said, "the only thing worse than fighting with Allies is fighting without them."

For more than a half-century, NATO has been our most important Alliance and the strongest bridge across the Atlantic, linking North America and Europe in a community of shared democratic traditions and values. We should continue to ask NATO to play this role, and to adapt to help us meet the new threats of the 21st century.

Mr. Chairman, we will continue to rely on our Allies to share the risks with us in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, and to work with them in the war against terrorism. Their contributions make us a stronger nation, and will give us a more secure and peaceful world.

I do not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead, but I am confident that we are on the right path and that the seven invited countries will strengthen the Alliance, refresh its spirit and infuse it with a stronger political will.

Amid all that has happened since September 11, 2001, many have asked if NATO still has a future and is still relevant to the U.S. and its allies. Mr. Chairman, I am firmly of the view that NATO will remain central to American national interests and to those of our European Allies for as far into the future that we can see. NATO is vital because it is America's only permanent bridge to Europe; it is the expression of our commitment to each other's defense; it is the vehicle through which we continue to maintain the peace in Europe and by which we must now address threats outside of Europe. As we reaffirm and rebuild our sometimes troubled Trans-Atlantic ties from the debates of the past few months over Iraq, NATO is one of our key instruments. We should continue to depend on NATO and to believe in it as a guidepost for our future in Europe and beyond.

Mr. Chairman distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you very much for inviting me here. I will be happy to respond to any questions or comments that you have.