

OPEN LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE

Honorable Senators:

You will soon be deciding on an issue of the utmost importance not only for this country, but to many others. Namely, you will ratify, or not, last December's protocol on the accession to NATO by the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Before you decide, please pause and reflect on the issue.

More than most Americans, I wish my native Poland and all other Central and Eastern European countries all the best. Yet I also know how potentially dangerous that area of the world is; after all, in this century alone, it sparked two world wars.

Therefore, before you undertake the commitment to guarantee the security of these states, please listen to the views of someone who has first hand experience with the issues soon to be under your consideration.

Let us recall that before NATO chose to move eastward, it was the USSR and its satellites that began moving westward. Gyula Horn, then Hungary's foreign minister, declared during his February 22, 1990, visit to Bonn, that it was likely that the Warsaw Pact countries might join NATO in the near future. On May 17, 1990, Secretary James Baker, when meeting with Gorbachev in the Kremlin, learned that he was to propose to President Bush the USSR's membership in NATO.

On October 5-6, 1991, during the Cracow summit of the Visegrad Group, then composed of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, a statement was issued that the Group would be willing to join NATO. On December 16, 1991, when the USSR was about to disappear, Secretary Baker heard from Boris Yeltsin in Moscow that the emerging CIS "military organization" would simply merge with NATO.

Finally, sometime in January 1992 - the precise date being publicly unknown - the "new Russia" sent to Brussels an application on accession to NATO. Before anyone could reflect on the issue it was promptly withdrawn.

At any rate, it was not NATO which first began the eastward move, but the Soviet bloc countries, later the "post-Soviet" ones, that started the westward drive.

Before NATO reacted to these openings, those countries, primarily the three in question, started to knock feverishly at its door. This was the more strange because none of them would say who their potential enemy was. Not to say that some, like the Czech Republic, do not even share a border with any CIS member, much less with Russia, while Hungary has only a small one with Ukraine. Only Poland has a 1,100-mile long border with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Even though, for some reason Moscow chose officially to do away with its grip over Central and Eastern Europe, or even over the non-Russian republics, it nevertheless has preserved its control over them.

domination over the said area has come to an end. Should this continue, then Moscow, practically already in NATO following the May 27, 1997, "Paris charter," may use the former satellites to sow havoc in the Alliance's ranks. In the end, the mentioned three countries might be no more than Trojan horses that will make NATO's life miserable. Especially if one considers that, to some extent, NATO has already expanded from 16 to 42 nations if one includes the members of the newly created EACP, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Incidentally, Poland's president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, stated on February 7, 1998, that Russia should become a NATO member! Interesting indeed that even before his country is a NATO member he is already telling NATO what it should do. What will he say tomorrow?

It should also be clear that, once the United States agrees to extend NATO it is undertaking a very serious commitment. Secretary Albright said on February 9, 1998, that NATO's eastward expansion is in the national interest of the U.S., and that this country, if necessary, will fight to defend "new allies," although she was quick to add that it would do so after being "called upon."

Historically speaking, no one in this country has ever made a similar commitment to that area which was always considered as not vital to U.S. national interests. Leaving aside the issue whether a Secretary of State may make such a commitment, its very essence must be commented upon.

Without debating whether anyone in Poland would ask the United States to fight aggressors descending upon it, one must nevertheless seriously address other related issues. In the past the United States, at least in words, disbelieved by the French, declared its readiness to defend Western Europe against a Soviet-led aggression. How this would have been done in practice is anyone's guess, as it was quite probable that before attacking Western Europe, the Soviets would strike the United States first.

This time the situation might be similar. Once NATO moves to Russia's borders, Moscow, before striking Poland, may choose to nuke the United States first. No one, I presume, doubts the Russian capability to do this. The fact that Russia would in turn be incinerated by the United States is no consolation.

Moreover, if it is really to be a credible NATO member, Poland should have at least a minimum defense capability. Increasing it requires at least some extra \$3 to \$5 billion annually spent over the next 15 years, something beyond Poland's means. And there is no outside help in sight.

Finally, there may be another likely scenario. Poland has always had unreliable allies, and this time things may be no different, especially

withdrawal.

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Before NATO reacted to these openings, those countries, primarily the three in question, started to knock feverishly at its door. This was the more strange because none of them would say who their potential enemy was. Not to say that some, like the Czech Republic, do not even share a border with any CIS member, much less with Russia, while Hungary has only a small one with Ukraine. Only Poland has a 1,100-mile long border with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Even though, for some reason Moscow chose officially to do away with its grip over Central and Eastern Europe, or even over the non-Russian republics, it nevertheless has preserved its control over them. This control has a code name - the "near abroad" in reference to the former non-Russian Soviet republics, and the "zone of historical interest" in reference to Central and Eastern Europe. In the latter case, the following example supports this. Namely, the Russian Security Council, the present day Politburo, during its session of April 23, 1993, which was chaired by Yeltsin, left no doubt that such a "zone" is firmly in place and that the West must be prevented from doing away with it.

What is more, when commenting on the new Russian military doctrine of November 3, 1993, which he helped author, Gen. Valery Manilov, deputy secretary of the Security Council, stated that its "nuclear nature" was to keep away from NATO and the European Union the former Soviet republics and former Warsaw Pact (that doctrine was further "nuclearized" on May 7, 1997).

Gen. Victor Samsonov, then chief of the General Staff, stated in turn in November, 1996, that Moscow's "defense perimeter" went well beyond Russia's borders.

Last but not least, Marshal Evgeni Shaposhnikov, the last Soviet defense minister and former commander-in-chief of the CIS Joint Armed Forces, and now a special military advisor to Yeltsin, said on May 16, 1997, that Russia, whenever necessary, will reach out for the "nuclear club" to defend its interests.

This, together with countless Russian warnings that NATO's extension eastward is intolerable and the "greatest mistake" in the postwar world, calls for reflection.

True, the United States, as Secretary Madeleine K. Albright keeps repeating, may ignore such Russian warnings and move NATO eastward "no matter what." But, knowing the Russians well, I would be more prudent.

Also, and without reference to my personal experience, I think that it is still too early to admit the said countries to NATO. Those who for decades spat on it, are now strangely its most vehement supporters! Yes, the countries in question are making efforts to become democracies and market economies but it is not yet certain that they will succeed in this endeavor. They need at least a generation to solidly enhance the necessary self-motion mechanisms.

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Finally, there may be another likely scenario. Poland has always had unreliable allies, and this time things may be no different, especially because the country itself does not want to see NATO troops and nuclear weapons on its soil. In other words, Poland is an easy prey to Russia and other CIS countries, be it open aggression or other measures destabilizing the country. In such circumstances, NATO, by standing by idly, as no one in Poland would call upon it to help, would lose face.

NATO, to the Poles, is the United States, since nobody there believes that France, England or Germany would actually rescue them. This is especially so because, behind Poland's and NATO's back, a Russian-German-French triangle has been emerging.

In conclusion, I am far from exhausting all the points, I appeal to you Senators of the United States not to rush the ratification of the protocol. There is no urgency in doing so. On the contrary, rushing may do more harm than good.

Let it be recalled in this connection that when Poland felt threatened by Germany in 1939 and began defense preparations, Prime Minister Chamberlain, addressing the House of Commons on March 31, 1939, hinted at some security guarantees to Warsaw. Poland's Foreign Minister Jozef Beck then boarded a train and, via Berlin, hastened to London to seek clarification of the British offer. He stopped over in Berlin but did not seek to contact Hitler, which outraged him and, as a result, Hitler issued the directive "Fall Weiss" which on September 1, 1939 resulted in the onslaught on Poland.

Of course, history may not repeated itself, but it is timely to say that it does when its lessons are ignored.

Poland has lived without NATO for decades. That life was not comfortable but there is no certainty that becoming a member of NATO will increase the level of comfort. Hence there will be no tragedy if Poland remains in NATO's corridors for as long as it takes for these issues to become clarified.

Respectfully,
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Dr. Zdzislaw M. Rurarz is Poland's former Ambassador to Japan who, in December 1981, in protest to Gen. Jaruzelski's martial law, requested and was granted political asylum in the United States



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