

U.S. Congressional Engagement with Central and Eastern Europe since 1991: the Balkan Wars and NATO Enlargement

by Michael Haltzel

The role of Congress, especially of the U.S. Senate, in foreign policy has been under-appreciated and often misunderstood. Winston Churchill famously said “You can always count on Americans to do the right thing - after they've tried everything else.” The Congress doesn't try *everything*, and it certainly doesn't always get it right, but there were two issues that occupied the lion's share of my professional attention for more than a decade – and which Congress *did* get right: NATO enlargement and the wars in the Balkans. My analysis will be combined with personal reminiscences of my time on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as senior advisor to Vice President, then-Senator, Biden.

It is easy to forget that 1991 was not a year of unmitigated positive developments. In fact, liberation was not without opposition, and there was considerable uncertainty throughout the process. Of course, the biggest news was the relatively peaceful collapse of Soviet Union and its empire, but the defeat of the Soviet coup d'état attempt in August 1991 was by no means assured. Moreover, the year saw the beginning of the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and of the first Gulf War.

Therefore, uncertainty prevailed in Washington, with a fear of uncontrollable destabilization. Secretary of State James Baker in commenting on Yugoslavia epitomized the mood of caution: “We don't have a dog in that fight.” When the United Nations reacted to the bloodletting in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina by setting up a protection force, UNPROFOR, the United States refused to participate. The West Europeans were happy to take the lead. “The hour of Europe has dawned” crowed Foreign Minister Jacques Poos of Luxembourg, at the time in the EU presidency.

I thought, and continue to believe that the George H. W. Bush Administration made the correct decision in opting out of UNPROFOR. The peacekeepers' chain of command went up through the UN civilian authorities, including the UN Secretary General's Personal Representative to the Region, a timorous Japanese diplomat named Yasushi Akashi. Moreover, the peacekeepers were hampered by a restrictive set of rules of engagement. It was a recipe for disaster. Predictably, the Bosnian Serbs set about kidnapping UN blue helmets. Far worse was the completely preventable genocide in Srebrenica. The West Europeans undoubtedly had good intentions in sending their peacekeeping troops to the Balkans (many non-European countries also participated), but their top priority was containing the conflict, not in ending it.

The leaders on the Bosnia issue in the Congress were Senator Biden and Senator Dole, who travelled to the war zone early in the conflict. Senators Lieberman and McCain also played important roles. The Clinton Administration complied with the UN arms embargo on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, a measure which severely disadvantaged the principal aggrieved party, the Bosnian Muslims, while the Bosnian Serbs inherited most of the weaponry of the old Yugoslav National Army (JNA), and the Croatian army could smuggle arms across its border to the Bosnian Croats. Twice Congress passed resolutions to “lift and strike” – that is, lift

the embargo and strike by air against Bosnian Serb forces – but President Clinton, wishing not to antagonize NATO allies, vetoed the legislation. Biden and Dole continued to press for ways to ease the pressure on the poorly armed Bosnian government forces. In October 1994, as part of the 1995 Defense Authorization Act, the Congress limited U.S. participation in Operation "Sharp Guard," a joint NATO-WEU naval force in the Adriatic, charged with preventing arms smuggling. The Clinton Administration had already clandestinely facilitated some arms shipments by air to the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH), including ignoring Iranian arms shipments via Croatia.

In July 1995 came the massacre in Srebrenica of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys, directed by General Ratko Mladić, who after the war went into hiding and was not captured until May 2011. At the end of August 1995, the Bosnian Serbs mortared the Sarajevo Market for the second time, killing more than three dozen civilians. That was the last straw for the Clinton Administration. Led by the United States, NATO launched an air campaign, which helped the ABiH to recapture large sections of the country. By November, both sides had had enough and agreed to peace negotiations. The result was the Dayton Accords, an imperfect solution, which although better than the earlier carnage, created dysfunctional institutions that continue to hamper the democratic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina to this day.

Shortly after Dayton, Congress authorized funding for the Implementation Force (IFOR). The Republicans would only agree to a one-year authorization, but one year later, after no casualties to U.S. peacekeepers had occurred, Congress agreed to fund the new, UN-sanctioned Stabilization Force (SFOR).

Attention in the former Yugoslavia shifted to Kosovo, a Serbian province whose autonomy had been revoked by Slobodan Milošević in 1989 and whose ethnic Albanians, comprising more than 90% of the population, were living under apartheid-like conditions. Unfortunately, Kosovo was left off of the Dayton agenda. Led by the French-educated intellectual Ibrahim Rugova, the Kosovar Albanians maintained a disciplined, passive resistance for nearly a decade. By 1998, however, more radical elements began attacking the Serb military, prompting ruthless reprisals that included the killing of women and children.

In March 1998, after one such reprisal, Senator Biden sent me on a fact-finding trip to Serbia, including Kosovo, plus Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro. I came back convinced that unless Belgrade reinstated the Kosovar Albanians' rights, all-out war was inevitable. The Senate unanimously passed a Resolution condemning Serbian repression in Kosovo, but the violence escalated, with the new Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) launching guerilla attacks in many areas of the province. In October, Richard Holbrooke negotiated a ceasefire agreement with Milošević, but it soon collapsed. An especially gruesome massacre of Kosovar Albanian farmers near the village of Račak in January 1999 pushed the situation to the point of no-return.

In March, after further international diplomatic efforts had failed, Senator Biden introduced a Resolution authorizing President Clinton to conduct military air operations and missile strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The Senate passed the Resolution by a vote of 58-41, with 15 Republicans joining 43 of the 45 Democrats. Regrettably, Congressional action was mixed up with anti-Clinton sentiment at the beginning of the Lewinsky affair. In fact, the House of Representatives failed four times to pass the authorization, even after the air campaign had begun.

The NATO bombing got off to a shaky start but gradually took a toll on the Serbian forces, especially in late spring when coordination with KLA ground units improved. Behind the scenes Senator Biden was urging President Clinton to deploy, or at least make a credible threat to deploy, U.S. ground forces in the war. Clinton's speech at the Air Force Academy at the beginning of June 1999 did call for additional aircraft and several thousand troops as peacekeepers after hostilities ended, which -- I think, not coincidentally -- occurred only a week later. In military terms it was an "ugly" victory, but a victory nonetheless. In mid-June, I accompanied Senator Biden on a tense flight into Kosovo aboard a U.S. military Chinook helicopter from Skopje, Macedonia. Because a Russian SFOR contingent from Bosnia had occupied the Prishtina airport, we landed in a field on the outskirts of the city. The newly established Kosovo Force (KFOR) quickly established a modicum of stability, and the more than one million Kosovar Albanians who had fled abroad began to return.

As with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the settlement ending the war in Kosovo was far from ideal. The security situation was worse than in Bosnia and remained poor for several years. In March 2004 province-wide attacks on Kosovo Serbs occurred, resulting in the emigration of thousands. I have written elsewhere¹ about how Senator Biden's private intervention with former guerilla leader and later Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj saved the ancient Serbian Orthodox Monastery Veliki Dečani from destruction during those riots.

After years of fruitless internationally-brokered negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina, Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008. At the time of this writing, Kosovo had been recognized by 79 countries. Its government still faces enormous challenges, with Serbia maintaining effective control of the northern part of the country and economic conditions still precarious. Comparing the situation in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, however, with 1991 -- not to mention with our later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan -- one must rate our Balkan policy a success.

The second major U.S. policy dealing with Central and Eastern Europe during the last twenty years, NATO enlargement, was, I believe, an even more striking success. The initial impetus for enlargement came from Lech Wałęsa in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia. In the U.S. the first substantial support for enlargement was contained in Newt Gingrich's *Contract with America* in 1994. President Clinton quickly followed suit, but there was widespread skepticism about, and opposition to the idea.

Nonetheless, Congress believed that the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe should be given the chance to show that they were serious about joining the alliance. In the NATO Participation Act of 1994² Congress declared that "full and active participants in the Partnership for Peace in a position to further the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area should be invited to become full NATO members in accordance with Article 10 of such Treaty at an early date . . ." The "Višegrad Four" -- Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia -- were designated for assistance.

¹ "Rescue Mission in Kosovo," Akron Beacon Journal, October 17, 2008, Editorial, Commentary page: <http://www.ohio.com/editorial/commentary/31152464.html>.

² title II of Public Law 103-447; 22 U.S.C. 1928 note

In the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996³ Congress called for the prompt admission of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia to NATO. Slovakia, because the semi-authoritarian government of Vladimir Mečiar was not meeting the democratic criteria outlined in the 1994 legislation, was dropped from the “short-list.” The law further declared that “in order to promote economic stability and security in Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, and Ukraine . . . the process of enlarging NATO to include emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe should not be limited to consideration of admitting Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia as full members of the NATO Alliance.”

Senator Biden was the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and generally recognized as the Democrats’ leader on foreign policy. Despite having voted for the two aforementioned bills, Biden was skeptical about the wisdom of enlarging NATO. A lawyer to the core, he insisted upon a first-hand examination of the evidence, weighing all arguments pro and con, before making up his mind. Early in 1997, he decided to take a fact-finding trip to the four leading candidate countries – Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia. We would begin the trip, however, in Russia.

Russia had made clear its strong opposition to NATO’s admitting former members of the Warsaw Pact. Moscow obviously could not exercise a veto over NATO membership, but its opposition and possible reaction to enlargement was – and should have been – a factor in U.S. Senators’ decision on the issue. We arrived in Moscow in March 1997, just a few days after the conclusion of a now nearly forgotten U.S.-Russia summit meeting in Helsinki and were told that President Yeltsin was “indisposed” in his suburban dacha. We were able to meet, however, with most of the other leading Russian political figures, including nationalist party leader General Lebed’, communist party leader Zyuganov, and liberal party leader Yavlinsky. Especially important was a lengthy evening meeting in the Kremlin with Yeltsin’s national security team.

As Biden subsequently wrote in a report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee⁴, “... no Russian politician with whom I met believed that NATO enlargement posed a security threat to Russia. Rather, their opposition to enlargement reflected a deeper psychological problem of coming to grips with the loss of empire and a fear of Moscow’s being marginalized in the changed world of the 21st century.” None of the Russian leaders was happy about the prospect of enlargement, but no one exhibited the kind of paranoia on the subject that has characterized the Putin era. I recall that in the evening meeting in the Kremlin we even discussed the possibility of eventual Russian membership in NATO.

This mature, unthreatened attitude did not suddenly materialize out of the blue, for, in fact, Washington had taken important measures to help Russia over the previous several years. For example, as the late Yegor Gaidar, former Acting Prime Minister, acknowledged, without hundreds of millions of dollars of emergency American agricultural assistance, Russia might not have been able to avert famine in the winter of 1991-92.

Moreover, at the time of our Moscow visit, our interlocutors knew that the U.S. Senate was nearing final consideration of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Flank Document, which would allow Russia to augment its forces on its northwestern border and in the Caucasus.

³ title VI of section 101(c) of title I of division A of Public Law 104-208; 22 U.S.C. 1928 note

⁴ “Meeting the Challenges of a Post-Cold War World: NATO Enlargement and U.S.-Russia Relations,” in *The Debate on NATO Enlargement*, S. Hrg. 105-285 (Washington, D.C., 1998), pp. 338-369.

I was the Democratic staff member tasked with securing ratification. Seven weeks after our Moscow visit, the U.S. Senate ratified the Flank Document by a 100-0 vote. It is worth noting that the Senate's ratification was *after* the first Chechen War and must be seen as a conciliatory gesture toward Yeltsin's fragile democratic government.

All this gives the lie to Putin's version of history, introduced in a speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, of unremitting U.S. hostility toward post-communist Russia. Similarly, Putin's claim that in 1991 the U.S. promised not to enlarge NATO has been disputed by former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, and recently has been definitively disproved in a meticulously researched article by Mark Kramer of Harvard.⁵

But back to Biden's March 1997 fact-finding trip. After Moscow we flew to Warsaw, where only three weeks earlier the government had instituted civilian control of the military. We were met at the Warsaw airport by the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, the late Nicholas Rey, a talented diplomat who had fled Poland with his family as a child after the German invasion in September 1939. On the drive into town we noticed anti-Semitic graffiti on a wall. Ambassador Rey translated the graffiti for Biden and added that there had been a few recent anti-Semitic incidents. That afternoon in a public speech at Warsaw University, Biden declared that there were two things that would impel him to oppose NATO membership for Poland: a reversal of civilian control of the military or continued manifestations of anti-Semitism. Later in the day Biden met with a group of parliamentarians. Although he got on poorly with one or two of them -- in particular, the ex-communist opportunist Longin Pastusiak -- he was very favorably impressed with the nearly unanimous sentiment for NATO membership.

Our next stop was Prague, where public opinion was running against NATO membership for the Czech Republic. In the office of President Václav Havel in Hradčany Castle, with the modern art adorning the walls providing a vivid contrast to the medieval architecture, the President said that his country's people had been "brainwashed" against NATO during the more than four decades of communist rule. He concluded that he needed to conduct a public education campaign to explain the real nature of the alliance.

The next day we were in Budapest in the office of Prime Minister Gyula Horn. Unlike Havel, a former imprisoned *anti*-communist, Horn was a former *communist*, in fact the last communist Foreign Minister of Hungary. So when Horn opined "we need to do a public education campaign" to convince the people of the benefits of NATO membership, Senator Biden and I could barely contain our laughter.

The final stop on the trip was Ljubljana. Wealthy and successful Slovenia showed even less public support for NATO membership than the Czech Republic or Hungary, largely because of its Yugoslav non-aligned heritage. It would take the assassination in March 2003 of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić to convince the majority of Slovenians that they lived in a rough neighborhood and could benefit from being in a strong alliance.

⁵ Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia," *The Washington Quarterly* (April 2009), pp. 39-61.

A week or two after our return, Biden told me he was convinced that NATO enlargement could work and was in U.S. national interest. He asked me to work with my Republican counterpart Steve Biegun to organize exhaustive hearings on the subject.

Meanwhile, events in the alliance were moving forward. At the Madrid NATO Summit in July 1997, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were invited to enter accession negotiations with the Alliance. Further, the statement of heads of state and government reaffirmed that "NATO remains open to new members under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Alliance will continue to welcome new members in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area." Romania and Slovenia were singled out for special mention.

After the three candidate countries had successfully completed accession negotiations with NATO, each of the current sixteen members would have to ratify the candidates' joining the Alliance. In nearly every member this was a relatively uncontroversial process, with approval swiftly following a brief parliamentary debate. Not so, however, here in the United States. Legislatively, U.S. approval of NATO enlargement (it had been done several times before) is in the form of an amendment to the North Atlantic Treaty of April 4, 1949. Art. II, Sect. 2 of the Constitution gives the Senate the power to ratify treaties by a two-thirds vote of those present.

The Senate took its constitutional responsibilities very seriously. Members and staffers received many classified briefings from U.S. intelligence agencies. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to which the legislation was referred, held about a dozen hearings (several of them occurred before Madrid and before the amendment to the North Atlantic Treaty was introduced), and the Armed Services Committee also held hearings. Most of the Foreign Relations Committee hearings called witnesses from the Clinton Administration and experts from outside of government. The final one, however, in November 1997, was an "open microphone" event in which any citizen could apply to testify. Some people feared that we would be inundated by requests from "crazies" or publicity seekers whom we would have to exclude, but nothing of the kind occurred. In all, fifteen Americans testified at the hearing, most of them representing organizations, with one scholar giving his personal opinion. All of the testimonies were thoughtful. The two that stand out most in my memory were those of the late Jan Novak, one of my personal heroes who was representing the Central and East European Coalition, and David Harris, representing the American Jewish Committee. Both gentlemen argued forcefully for ratification of the amendment to admit Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to NATO. It is interesting that the ratio of "pro" to "con" witnesses -- twelve to three -- exactly foretold the ratio of the vote by the full Senate nearly six months later.

The transcripts of the seven Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings in October and November 1997 can be found in a 552-page book published by the Committee in 1998.⁶

There is a widespread belief, enunciated in a few books written hastily after the event, that the ratification of NATO enlargement was inevitable, largely because of the lobbying of Polish-American and other ethnic groups. This erroneous belief betrays a surprising unfamiliarity with the United States Senate, especially as it was constituted in 1998. Lobbying undoubtedly did play a role in the outcome -- as the opinions of American citizens exercising their First Amendment

⁶ *The Debate on NATO Enlargement, S. Hrg. 105-285* (Washington, D.C., 1998).

right to petition should (and it is worth noting that there was also some lobbying *against* enlargement) -- but despite the healthy 80 to 19 margin in the final passage of ratification, the vote could have gone either way.

The breadth and depth of responsibilities of U.S. Senators is staggering. Most sit on three or more committees and are called upon to pass judgment on every conceivable question, domestic and foreign. There are simply not enough hours in the week for an individual Member to become expert on every issue. Hence, Senators rely on the opinions of colleagues, usually from their own party, who are the most knowledgeable on the issue at hand and whose judgment they trust.

My impression was that support for ratification among Republicans was fairly solid, although the leading opponent of ratification and floor manager for the opposition was Republican Senator John Warner of Virginia, and Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania, switched to opposition at the last minute. Support on the Democratic side was more tenuous. Several Senators, like Paul Wellstone of Minnesota and Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, feared serious damage to our relations with Russia. Both of them ultimately voted against ratification, and other Senators were wavering. If Senator Biden had opposed ratification, he would have been able to shift the additional fifteen votes necessary to defeat the legislation. Instead, Biden personally moved several Democratic colleagues into the "yes" column, buttonholing one or two of them while working out in the Senate gym.

Early in 1998, the Foreign Relations Committee voted 16 to 2 to send the Resolution of Ratification of NATO enlargement to the Senate floor. The two Members voting against the legislation represented the ideological extreme of each party: Democratic Senator Wellstone and Republican Senator (and future Attorney General) John Ashcroft.

Floor debate occupied seven full days, morning until late into the evening -- three in March 1998, followed by an interruption for other business, and then four more days at the end of April. In a remarkable move, the Republicans asked Senator Biden to be floor manager of the bill. In my eleven years at the Senate it was unprecedented for the Majority party to cede this function for any bill. Moreover, this was not just a normal bill, but a treaty, and not just *any* treaty, but arguably the most important treaty ratification in nearly sixty years. It is true that Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, was not up to the task of being floor manager, but the Republicans could easily have appointed another of their foreign policy stalwarts like John McCain of Arizona or Gordon Smith of Oregon to take over the responsibility. That they, instead, turned to Biden was both a testimony to their respect for his expertise and fairness and a laudable bipartisan gesture that is almost unimaginable in today's political climate.

The floor debate exemplified the best of American democracy. It was wide-ranging, substantive, and, unlike most Congressional floor proceedings, largely spontaneous. The seven long days of debate constituted much more debate than in all the parliaments of the other fifteen NATO members combined. When I was in Brussels a year or two later, more than one parliamentarian from NATO member-states complimented the U.S. Senate on the quality and seriousness of the debate on ratification.

Three key issues were prominent in the floor debate: the effect of enlargement on our relations with Russia; the cost of enlargement to U.S. taxpayers (which proved to be a non-issue); and the

defensibility of the three candidate countries, were they to become allies. One issue not publicly discussed to the best of my recollection was the potential for breaches of security because of current Polish, Czech, or Hungarian intelligence officers with longstanding professional ties to Russia from the communist era. In top-secret briefings on the subject we had been assured that the risk was minimal and manageable, but the issue will remain a concern to me until the last former communist intelligence officer passes from the scene.

Final passage of the NATO enlargement amendment occurred in dramatic fashion on the evening of April 30, 1998. The Senate galleries were packed with members of the diplomatic corps, journalists, and citizens who had waited hours to get in. Emphasizing the historic nature of the occasion, the Chair accepted the proposal of Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) that Members vote from their desks instead of the usual procedure of milling around the well of the Senate and raising their hands in stock-exchange fashion. C-SPAN reported an average of more than twenty million viewers for the final days of debate, which were also televised in Poland via a live feed.

I can't recall whether Senator Biden had planned to offer only brief, closing remarks, but in any event about fifteen minutes before the final vote he asked me to draft a final statement. Sitting at a desk at the front of the Senate floor with considerable activity going on in the chamber, I pulled out an 8½x14 inch yellow legal pad and began writing in longhand. The next eleven or twelve minutes were a blur, but I do remember feeling like being in a "zone," oblivious to the kaleidoscope around me. I handed the draft to Senator Biden just before the Chair called for final remarks. On the signed copy he later gave me, I saw that he had only changed one word for clarification. After final passage as colleagues crowded around to congratulate Senator Biden, a page came up to say that President Clinton was calling him on the phone from the White House. Senator Biden asked me to come with him into the Democratic cloakroom. After chatting for a few minutes, Biden said some nice words about my role in the ratification and put me on the phone, one-on-one, with the President. It was, to put it mildly, a professionally rewarding evening.

Senate ratification of the next round of NATO enlargement in 2003-2004 was much less dramatic. Unlike 1998, there was no suspense about whether or not ratification would succeed. The real drama was whether it would be a round of five countries or seven. The three Baltic countries -- Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania -- plus Slovakia and Slovenia were certain to be invited by NATO and be ratified by the Senate. Romania and Bulgaria were on the cusp.

In late August 2002, Biden, by then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sent me to Bulgaria and Romania to assess their progress. After discussions in Sofia with Bulgarian government leaders, I travelled to other locations in the country with U.S. Ambassador Jim Pardew, the real hero of the Ohrid Agreement that had ended the incipient civil war in Macedonia the previous year. In Varna we met with the Bulgarian Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had assembled for their Navy Day, and inspected the country's one active submarine. Another of our meetings was with the management of the TEREM armaments firm, which had sold weaponry to at least one "rogue state." The TEREM executives assured us that such dealings had ended and would not be repeated. They were lying to us. Several weeks later their duplicity came to light, and the ensuing scandal came close to torpedoing Bulgaria's candidacy at the last minute.

On balance, even after the TEREM scandal broke, I favored membership for Bulgaria. NATO membership had strong popular support, the country occupied a geographically strategic

location in the post-September 11 fight against terrorism, and there continued to be a need for more stability in southeastern Balkans.

Romania's candidacy seemed to me to be a more clear-cut positive. After meeting with officials in Bucharest, I visited the impressive Alpine troops' training school near Sinaia, the new logistic center in Braşov, and the military academy in Sibiu. As in Poland five years earlier, there was overwhelming popular support in Romania for NATO membership. The Romanian armed forces boasted outstanding specialized units like the mountain troops; the Romanian Red Scorpion Battalion later served with distinction in Afghanistan. Like Bulgaria, Romania offered a strategic platform for operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. The only risk I foresaw was the continued presence of former Ceauşescu *Securitate* people in the intelligence service. In meetings with some of these officials, they pledged loyalty to NATO.

Shortly after my return, Senator Biden published a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed advocating NATO membership for all seven candidate countries.⁷ The Bush White House later told me that Senator Biden's public position had nudged them into accepting Romania and Bulgaria.

In November 2002 at the NATO Summit in Prague, the alliance extended invitations to all seven candidate countries. Debate on ratification in the U.S. Senate was uneventful, with final passage occurring in a 96-0 vote on May 8, 2003.

Since then, Albania and Croatia have joined the alliance. Macedonia was vetoed at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit because of the mindless name-dispute with Greece, a psycho-drama which I hope will soon be settled. Montenegro is progressing well on its Membership Action Plan and could possibly enter the alliance within two or three years. On the other hand Ukraine, under its new President Viktor Yanukovich, appears to be opting out of its candidacy, which had seemed relatively promising a few years ago. Georgia remains very interested in NATO membership and has made significant progress, but as long as President Mikheil Saakashvili is in office, Western European allies like Germany would likely block it. Like Ukraine, Serbia, at least for the time being, is not interested in joining NATO, although its relationship with the alliance has improved substantially in recent years. Before Bosnia and Herzegovina can become a serious candidate, it must solve its bitter internal problems. Two "open and shut" candidates, should they wish to apply for NATO membership, are Finland and Sweden, but they are outside the scope of this article.

To sum up, with the perspective of two decades, I believe that the actions of the U.S. Congress in the two most important issues concerning Central and Eastern Europe -- NATO enlargement and ending the Balkan conflicts -- were correct ones that yielded tangible successes.

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⁷ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Bigger is Better for the Future of NATO. The alliance should accept Bulgaria, Romania and five other nations." *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2002: <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/sep/01/opinion/oe-biden1>