



NATO EXPANSION FLASHPOINT NO. 2

The Border between Hungary and Serbia

by Ted Galen Carpenter and Pavel Kislitsyn

Executive Summary

The decision to invite Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to join NATO creates the prospect of U.S. involvement in an assortment of nasty ethnic disputes throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Although some advocates of NATO expansion are motivated by a desire to discourage future Russian imperial ambitions, article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty obligates signatories to assist a fellow member that falls victim to aggression from any source. That obligation should trouble all Americans. One of the proposed new members, Hungary, has long-standing problems with three of its neighbors because of discrimination against ethnic Hungarians living in those countries. Tensions are especially acute between Hungary and Serbia over Belgrade's continuing mistreatment of Hungarian citizens in Serbia's province of Vojvodina.

If those tensions escalate, NATO could find itself entangled in an armed conflict between Hungary and Serbia. Such a struggle would have no relevance to important American interests, but the United States would be under intense pressure to assist its new ally lest the credibility of the security commitments being extended to the incoming NATO members be fatally undermined. The prospect of U.S. forces' slipping into a Bosnia-style morass on the Hungarian-Serbian border is one reason among many that the U.S. Senate should refuse to ratify the proposal to expand NATO.

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Introduction

On July 8, 1997, NATO leaders at the Madrid summit formally extended membership invitations to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. NATO expansion is intended, in President Clinton's words, to "prevent local rivalries, strengthen democracy against future threats, and create the conditions for prosperity to flourish."¹ Although those may be noble goals, enlarging NATO carries with it the strategic ramifications of providing military guarantees to the proposed new members. President Clinton has acknowledged that "enlargement requires that we extend to new members our Alliance's most solemn security pledge."² Indeed, article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty proclaims that an attack on any member of the alliance is to be considered an attack on all.

In the decades since NATO was created, the article 5 commitment has come to mean solidarity and mutual assistance whenever the security of a fellow signatory is threatened. Although some proponents of NATO expansion may still interpret article 5 as an obligation to deal with the threat of an attack by an anti-Western great power (which was the alliance's focus during the Cold War), that is emphatically not the Clinton administration's objective. According to the president, "NATO, initially conceived to face a clear-cut and massive threat, is now a lighter, more flexible organization adapted to its new crisis management and peace-keeping missions."³ In other words, supporters of NATO expansion who believe that the United States will be called on to help defend the new NATO members only if Russia turns aggressive are deluding themselves.

Numerous potential conflicts could entangle NATO. Hungarian foreign minister Laszlo Kovacs was one of the first East European politicians to emphasize that "the security risk we now face stems from the instability of the region rather than a traditional military threat."⁴ Thus, furnishing security guarantees to the new members could embroil the United States in low-level conflicts that have little importance to American interests or even to the premise of transatlantic security. Considering the fact that only three applicant countries were invited to join at the Madrid summit, the new dividing line across Europe promises to breed instability and paranoia. Several trouble spots in Central Europe have the potential to produce a morass similar to that caused by the Bosnian civil war.

Vojvodina's Hungarian Minority

An especially worrisome trouble spot is Vojvodina, a region of Serbia directly adjacent to Hungary. Serbs and Hungarians were the original settlers of the region, which stretches along the Danube River and was part of Hungary during the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Upon the empire's dissolution after World War I, Vojvodina was included in the newly established Yugoslavian state. Figures from the 1991 census indicated that 18.9 percent of Vojvodina's population were Hungarian and another 5.4 percent were Croatian. (Serbs accounted for 54.4 percent, and the remainder of the population belonged to some 27 ethnic groups.)⁵ The 350,000 Hungarians in Vojvodina constitute the third largest concentration of Hungarians outside Hungary's borders.

Before the intensification of Serb nationalism in the late 1980s, the ethnic groups populating Vojvodina coexisted reasonably well--although the Hungarians and Croats were sometimes discriminated against by the Serb majority. But Belgrade formally rescinded the autonomous status of Vojvodina in 1990. That action mirrored a similar move in Serbia's predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo and signaled a surge in virulent Serb nationalism, symbolized by the rise of Slobodan Milosevic as Serbia's president in 1988, that would contribute to the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. "Until 1988 there were tolerant relations between the nationalities living here; since then, we have seen an imported aggressivity," said Istvan Bosnyak, president of the Hungarian Cultural Association of Yugoslavia.⁶

The dislocation caused by the ethnic strife in Bosnia and Croatia further unsettled the precarious social balance, shattering the peace and calm in Vojvodina. The troubles in Vojvodina intensified when the Serbian government encouraged approximately 200,000 Serb refugees from Bosnia to settle in the region, with little regard for the sensitivities of members of other nationalities who had lived there for years. Even worse, established ethnic minorities saw their rights and liberties curbed by the nationalistic Serbian government of Milosevic. The influx of refugees reached its peak in 1994 when thousands of Serbs from Croatia's Krajina region were displaced by advancing Croatian forces. As a result, the ethnic balance in Vojvodina was dramatically altered.

Mounting Tensions and Hungary's Reaction

The new ethnic tensions have caused manifold problems. The same Serbian nationalistic sentiment that brought Milosevic to power has precipitated various encroachments on the rights that the citizens of Vojvodina enjoyed for a half century. The suspension of Vojvodina's regional autonomy was an ominous development. The centralization of authority reflected the growing Serbian ethnic intolerance, which has caused understandable concern among all ethnic minorities throughout the country. More than 35,000 ethnic Hungarians reportedly left Vojvodina as early as 1993 because of the "twin forces of harassment and newfound economic hardships."⁷ The situation appears to have gotten worse rather than better since then. A May 1997 conference of Hungarian intellectuals in Serbia issued a statement advocating an action program "to preserve the ever-smaller and increasingly impoverished Hungarian community."⁸

One especially sensitive matter has been the concerted campaign by the authorities in Belgrade to discourage Hungarian-language schools in Vojvodina. That effort has provoked the wrath of politicians in Budapest. Szilard Sasvari, a member of the Federation of Young Democrats and a member of parliament, blasted Serb actions, charging that "higher education in Hungarian has become, in effect, completely impossible in Vojvodina."⁹

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki has reported numerous violations of human rights in Vojvodina, including the forced evictions of non-Serbs from their homes; those people were then replaced by Serb refugees from Bosnia and Croatia. Although Croat inhabitants appeared to be the principal targets of such ethnic cleansing, Hungarians also fell victim. According to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, "Most of the human rights abuses in Vojvodina have been committed by Serbian paramilitary organizations and armed civilians with the acquiescence of local authorities." The paramilitary organizations "with the active assistance of the [Milosevic] regime . . . terrorized non-Serbs and children of mixed marriages in a systematic campaign to drive them from their homes."¹⁰

There was also evidence of fraud by Serbian authorities aimed against the Vojvodina Hungarian parties during the recent Yugoslav parliamentary elections. Confirmed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), such improprieties gave additional credence to fears that the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina and elsewhere

in Serbia are not adequately protected.

Military conscription in the context of the fighting that afflicted much of the former Yugoslavia exacerbated the already strained relations between Belgrade and Budapest. Many ethnic Hungarian draftees fled to Hungary to avoid military service, since they obviously had no interest in fighting someone else's civil war. Hungarian prime minister Gyula Horn chastised Belgrade for resisting calls to grant a blanket amnesty to such draft evaders. "No one should be punished for refusing to perform military service during the war," he insisted.¹¹

Serbian authorities also assumed control over all media that had previously been accountable to the regional and provincial parliaments. That action effectively removed the voice of regional ethnic Hungarian representatives from decisionmaking about the amount and quality of minority-oriented programming.¹² There are also indications that a more flagrant nationalistic bias has characterized media operations as a result of that takeover.

Those encroachments on the status and civil rights of Hungarians in Serbia have produced multiple diplomatic protests by the government of Hungary since the late 1980s.

In fact, the treatment of Vojvodina's Hungarian population is seen as one of the most significant challenges to Budapest's foreign policy. Hungary's former ambassador to Belgium stated in a May 1994 interview that "there are various kinds of security risks" in Central Europe, most notably "a threat to the 400,000 Hungarians in Yugoslav Vojvodina which could very quickly get out of control."¹³

However, the minority issue in Vojvodina is not seen as merely a security issue by the authorities in Budapest. In June 1997 a high-ranking Hungarian Foreign Ministry official explained that the "[Hungarian] constitution states that the Hungarian Government . . . [must] take responsibility for the Hungarians living beyond the border." Kovacs has also spoken of the "political and moral duty" to protect the rights and liberties of the Hungarian minorities abroad.¹⁴ Some portions of Hungary's political elite are even more militant. The Independent Smallholders' Party, for example, has openly advocated "border modifications" (naturally to Hungary's benefit) in the context of an overall settlement of the turmoil in Yugoslavia.¹⁵ Such statements indicate Hungary's continuing intense interest in the treatment of Hungarian populations in neighboring countries.

The Growing Drive to Restore Vojvodina's Autonomy

Such determination is especially significant considering the recent pressure by the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina to compel the Belgrade regime to reinstate the region's political and cultural autonomy.¹⁶ Two of the various Hungarian political organizations in Vojvodina--the Democratic Community of Vojvodinan Hungarians (VMDK) and the Hungarian Association of Vojvodina (VMSZ)--have extensive influence.¹⁷ The VMDK, established in 1990, is the older of the two bodies and has enjoyed a modest degree of success. It has been able to elect nine representatives to the Serbian parliament and led the mass protests in the early 1990s against Belgrade's military conscription of Hungarian youths. Personality conflicts and financial scandals led to a split in the VMDK in 1994, with most of the leaders leaving to form the VMSZ. Relations between the two groups have been frosty since then, and their leaders have resisted Budapest's prodding to mend the schism. There was, however, some movement toward reconciliation in the summer of 1997.¹⁸

If a rapprochement actually takes place, the campaign for Vojvodinan autonomy likely will gain strength.

Although the factionalism has had more to do with personalities than with ideological disputes, there are some differences in strategy. The VMDK seems the more militant of the two groups and makes attempts to bring outside pressure (from both Hungary and the international community) to bear on the Serbian government. The VMSZ shows a greater willingness to bargain with Belgrade in an attempt to attain short-term substantive gains. Despite their differences, both organizations are dedicated to securing significant political and cultural autonomy for the Hungarian community in Vojvodina.

The VMDK presented its first plan for autonomy in 1992. That plan envisioned the creation of a Hungarian autonomous region with its own parliament and a separate executive, the regional council, headed by a president. Belgrade's adamant refusal to even discuss the proposal, combined with the defection of the plan's principal author to the VMSZ in 1995, led the VMDK to present a new, slightly less ambitious plan later that year. The revised plan proposed that Vojvodina voters who registered as Hungarian elect an assembly of Vojvodinan Hungarians. That body would elect a personal autonomy council, which, in turn, would elect a political council. The political council was to be "the partner of communication" with the Serbian government in matters concerning the Hungarian population. For ethnic Hungarians

living in dispersed groups, there was to be local or municipal autonomy, but it would be limited to cultural and educational matters. Those areas with large concentrations of Hungarians, however, would have far more extensive autonomy.

Such populations were to enjoy complete political and administrative as well as cultural autonomy and could establish a Hungarian autonomous region, if they chose. In marked contrast to the 1992 plan, however, the new plan left the political powers of the autonomous region vague. How that region would be governed was to be decided by negotiations with the Serbian government.¹⁹

The VMSZ published a competing plan in January 1996. That plan did not provide for a separate roster of Hungarian voters and dispensed with a personal autonomy council. Instead, a political council would be established by Hungarian representatives elected in parliamentary elections for the rump Yugoslavian federation and the Vojvodinan provincial parliament. (The creation of autonomous political bodies through direct elections was mentioned only as a long-term goal.) The VMSZ also envisioned the establishment of a so-called regional autonomous government to have a voice on cultural and educational issues. That government might also play a role in political and administrative matters--but only if the Serbian parliament agreed.²⁰ All in all, the VMSZ proposal was less radical and less confrontational than its VMDK counterpart.

Nevertheless, the determination to regain Vojvodina's autonomy is intense throughout the Hungarian community. In May 1997, 9 political parties and some 13 other groups signed a document, "Proposal for Changing the Constitutional Status of Vojvodina," and established both a coordinating committee and an executive council to press the campaign.²¹

One Serbian commentator warned, "A centralized Serbia in which all power and all money converge in Belgrade clearly cannot survive any longer either politically or economically."²²

Prospects for a Conflict over Vojvodina

The renewed demands for autonomy by Hungarians in Vojvodina appear especially destabilizing, considering the impact that a similar drive had on domestic politics in Hungary. During the 1993-94 election cycle in Hungary, the issue of Hungarian minorities abroad became the focus of ideological wrangling among several competing parties. Kovacs, then foreign policy adviser to one of the presiden-

tial candidates, admitted that the government's foreign policy had been "dictated by obsession with the fate of the Hungarian minorities."²³ Such politicization of foreign policy priorities could jeopardize the status of the Vojvodinan minority even further, since the Serbian government may retaliate with additional restrictions if it feels pressured by its northern neighbor.

That was precisely the case during the confrontation in 1993-94. At the time a New York Times article noted that "while the plan (for autonomy) is supported by the Hungarian Government, many in Yugoslavia say it is ill-timed and certain only to provoke attacks from Serbian nationalists."²⁴ Acknowledging that danger, Nenad Canak, president of the Social-Democratic League of Vojvodina, pointed out that "the Hungarian role is very important and very dangerous because they can destroy our efforts to achieve autonomy."²⁵

Belgrade remains adamantly opposed to any changes in the region's status. Pavel Domonji, Vojvodina secretary for rights of national minorities, emphasized that "the struggle for personal and especially territorial autonomy of ethnic Hungarians jeopardizes the stability of political relations [between the two countries]."²⁶ In the wake of the Yugoslavian civil war and the shattering of the old federation, Belgrade's drive to centralize authority so as to minimize the chances of further disintegration comes into direct conflict with Hungarian demands for Vojvodina's autonomy. As recently as February 1997, radical-nationalist Serb politicians denounced "foreign influence" (presumably originating in Hungary) exerted to achieve the dissolution of what remains of Yugoslavia.²⁷ Steps taken by Budapest, and the various comments of political figures there, have the effect of exacerbating the nationalist paranoia among the Serbian majority in Vojvodina. A similar hard-line attitude seems to exist throughout the rest of Serbia. A public opinion survey published in October 1996 by the Institute of Social Sciences found that 61 percent of respondents in Serbia favored maintaining the existing political and cultural status of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina.²⁸ That is not exactly a mandate for concessions.

The result has been continuing incidents of ethnic strife in an atmosphere of distrust and tension between Serbia and Hungary. Attempts by the Hungarian government to establish a dialogue to solve the problems plaguing the minority in Vojvodina have so far been futile. Earlier this year, a Hungarian foreign policy expert lamented that "the

highest-ranking Belgrade politicians refused even to discuss the minority problems."²⁹

The suspicions of Serb authorities are not entirely unwarranted. Some advocates of Vojvodinan autonomy do appear to be using the issue as a smoke screen for a Hungarian separatist agenda. For example, Karoly Dudas, chairman of the Vojvodina Hungarian Cultural Association and a member of the board of the World Federation of Hungarians, pointedly declines to use the term "Vojvodina" to identify the region. Instead, he refers to the inhabitants as "Hungarians of the Southern Region"--a term used for the area in the years before 1920, when it was part of Hungary.³⁰ Dudas also asserted that Belgrade's program to resettle Serb refugees from Bosnia and Croatia is merely the latest installment in a "fiendish plan" begun in the 1920s to erase the region's Hungarian identity.³¹

Thus far, the campaign to restore Vojvodina's autonomy has remained peaceful, but given the growing tensions and the increasing militancy of the Hungarian community, it is uncertain how long that situation will persist. The effort of the Albanian population of Kosovo to regain the autonomy of their province also began peacefully in the early 1990s.

In the past two years, however, there has been a crescendo of violence directed against both Serb police forces and Serb civilians. A shadowy organization calling itself the Kosovo Liberation Army has emerged to take credit for the shootings and bombings and appears to be gradually displacing more moderate political elements.³² A similar evolution could occur in Vojvodina, especially if Belgrade remains intransigent.

Implications for NATO Expansion

The status of Vojvodina's Hungarian minority is not a trivial issue, since it involves questions of self-determination and human rights as well as the relationship between Hungary and Serbia. Nevertheless, there is no intrinsic reason why the dispute would have any relevance to the United States. The invitation to Hungary to join NATO, however, makes the fate of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina a problem for U.S. foreign policy--and exposes the United States to serious risks.

The Hungarian government has already begun to connect its impending membership in NATO to its policy on minority issues. As early as August 1995 a Hungarian defense minis-

try official emphasized that "NATO membership does not mean giving up our national interests. On the contrary, it means an opportunity to assert national interests," purportedly the same way that Greece has used NATO to promote its interests in Macedonia.³³ Deputy State Secretary Istvan Gyarmati of the Ministry of Defense elaborated on that point in November 1996, noting that "opportunities to enforce our interest will increase."³⁴ He added ominously that an "international response must be sought if Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries are threatened."³⁵ On the basis of the comments appearing in the Hungarian press, as well as the close ties between Hungary and its ethnic brethren in Vojvodina, one can reasonably expect that security guarantees provided by NATO membership will encourage Hungarian policymakers to press Serbia for concessions.

The political leverage Hungary gains from its admission to the alliance may serve to undermine, rather than strengthen, the precarious balance of ethnic tensions in Vojvodina. Enflamed by such dire predictions as those contained in the December 1995 Helsinki Committee on Human Rights report, which stated that the entire 340,000-strong Hungarian community in Vojvodina might eventually disappear, Hungary's leadership may be tempted to take steps it knows will further disrupt the already strained relations with Belgrade.³⁶ An assertive foreign policy, backed by the country's NATO membership, will provide a tempting option for Budapest decisionmakers.

Because an active Hungarian foreign policy toward Vojvodina can be considered likely, especially with the addition of the perceived political leverage of NATO membership, Americans need to consider the various risk factors before Hungary is admitted. Given the ethnic tensions in Vojvodina, there is a distinct possibility that Bosnia-style violence could erupt. If it does, Hungary's involvement to protect its ethnic brethren in Vojvodina appears probable. It would take only a spark to ignite fighting between Hungarian and Serbian forces, and Budapest would then almost certainly invoke article 5 to secure the cooperation and assistance of its allies.

Even though a Hungarian-Serbian skirmish might not constitute "aggression" as conceived by NATO's founders, that is largely beside the point. Not only might it be difficult in the fog of war to sort out which party had initiated the hostilities, but the NATO countries would feel compelled to intervene on behalf of a new member regardless of the nature of the conflict, lest the credibility of

article 5 be fatally undermined. Such a development would put pressure on the United States and its European allies to support Hungary, whatever misgivings they might have privately, and commit to a military operation with no clear objective. Moreover, it should be recalled that the conflict in Bosnia did not even arguably involve an attack on an alliance member, but NATO nevertheless intervened militarily. People who believe that a strict interpretation of article 5 will keep the United States out of murky conflicts in Central or Eastern Europe are engaging in dangerous self-deception.

Likely Ambivalence of the American Public

There is little evidence that public opinion in the United States would support American involvement in such a venture--even if U.S. leaders cited an alleged article 5 obligation. An explosion in Vojvodina would test NATO in a way that might well expose the hollow nature of the guarantees extended to Central European countries slated for alliance membership in 1999. Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.) voiced concern about that point when he commented that the American people are "going to wake up one morning and discover that we have provided a guarantee to defend Central Europe . . . they didn't know about . . . and I doubt that they're going to be very thrilled about it."³⁷

In light of the hesitant U.S. response to the Bosnian civil war, concerns about American ambivalence are amply warranted. "If Congress is having this much trouble sending troops to Bosnia--in a role that involves a minimum amount of risk--how serious is its willingness to back up the commitment to defend the territorial boundaries of the countries earmarked for NATO membership?" asked Charles Kupchan, senior fellow for Europe at the Council on Foreign Relations.³⁸

Indeed, the absence of clearly defined U.S. strategic and economic interests in Central Europe presents the United States with policy decisions to be made on the basis of oblique moral choices and issues of credibility, rather than geostrategic considerations. Even U.S. engagement in the Bosnian conflict was to a considerable extent motivated by the desire to preserve NATO morale and solidarity. Hungary's admission to NATO would create similar ambiguous situations and introduce an additional destabilizing factor by heightening already serious tensions.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Hungary's own military capability remains limited by an annual defense budget of about \$600 million.³⁹ Such weakness would almost necessitate NATO intervention if even a low-level conflict erupted on Hungary's border with Vojvodina. If Hungary is admitted to NATO in 1999, it will become the first member totally surrounded by nonmember states, making a NATO airlift the only possible means of relief in a crisis, unless transit rights can be obtained from Austria or (less likely) Slovakia. All those factors contribute to the liability that Hungary's NATO membership would entail.

NATO's Stability Fallacy

Advocates of NATO expansion claim that the additional incentives to settle border disputes, explicitly provided for by the various membership guidelines by which the prospective members must abide, are a sufficient guarantee that regional stability will be enhanced by expanding the alliance. Such optimism is misplaced. It is true that the desire for NATO membership has promoted productive diplomatic dialogues on at least some of the disputes in Central and Eastern Europe, notably between Hungary and Romania, Poland and Lithuania, and Hungary and Slovakia. Paper agreements, however, do not ensure cooperation and tolerance in border regions with a diverse ethnic composition.

That point became all too apparent in September 1997. Despite the earlier accord between Hungary and Slovakia, Hungarian prime minister Horn charged that "Slovakia's ethnic minority over the past few years has found it increasingly difficult to enforce its rights." He added, "There are plenty of sources of tension between the two countries."⁴⁰ That appears to have been something of an understatement. At a rally in Bratislava in early September 1997, Slovakian prime minister Vladimir Meciar revealed that, at a summit meeting with Horn the previous month, he had proposed the exchange of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and ethnic Slovaks in Hungary.⁴¹ Officially sanctioned mass population transfers (Meciar's proposal would have involved tens of thousands of people on each side), even if ostensibly "voluntary," have never been the hallmark of ethnic tolerance or of cordial relations between neighboring states.

Moreover, there is not even a paper accord between Budapest and Belgrade. The absence of meaningful agreement

between Hungary and Serbia on the legal status of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina should alert NATO leaders to the potential repercussions of extending full membership guarantees to a country adjacent to the perennially unstable Balkans. The complacent attitude that ethnic disputes will be solved with ease after NATO expands to the east appears not only shortsighted but dangerous. The alliance's current political priorities seem to be completely eclipsing a realistic evaluation of security risks in the area. Indeed, the proposed admission of the new members increases the prospect of creating perilous new dividing lines between them and nonmember neighboring countries. Serbia and other neighbors are not likely to be convinced that Hungary's NATO membership will make that country less rather than more assertive in pressing its grievances.

An Enlarged NATO as a Transmission Belt for War

Another concern should be noted in conjunction with the situation of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. The possibility of a collision between Hungary and Serbia over Vojvodina must be viewed in the context of historical connections with powerful patrons. Specifically, the long-standing connection through pan-Slavism between Serbia and Russia must be considered as a relevant facet of the Vojvodina problem. Hungarian membership in NATO could create a situation in which Vojvodina could be a catalyst for a wider conflict not unlike Serbia was at the outbreak of World War I.

If Hungary decides to protect its ethnic compatriots in Vojvodina by using military force, its direct opponents will be the Serbs living in the same area. Ethnic clashes in Vojvodina, which probably would involve NATO through Hungary's connection to the minority there, could find NATO and Russia on opposing sides of a messy conflict. Any confrontation between NATO and Serbia would precipitate an extremely adverse reaction by the Russians, who have expressed a continuing concern for the fate of the Serbian nation.

Several events in recent years confirm that apprehension about Moscow's reaction is not misplaced. Emphatic protests by Russian leaders about NATO air strikes conducted against Bosnian Serbs to break the blockade of Sarajevo during the latter stages of the Bosnian civil war were one example of Moscow's extreme sensitivity. More recently, the fatal shooting of an accused Bosnian Serb war criminal by NATO forces elicited stern criticism and accusations from

the Kremlin. The tendency of Russia to take the Serbian side in controversial events involving NATO and the United States indicates a continuing Russian commitment to Serbia and is cause for concern in case of a confrontation over Vojvodina. A local conflict could escalate into an international dispute with the United States and the Russian Federation having commitments to the opposing sides.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's comments in her April 23, 1997, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee are cause for further apprehension. Although "NATO will continue to maintain itself in a way that it can deal with an outside threat," Albright stated, "what we are talking about now are primarily those internal threats that are due to instability and problems created by ethnic tension within those areas [of Central Europe]."⁴²

One ought to wonder whether NATO's original defensive purpose--preventing military aggression against the territory of member states--can or should be transformed into a new mission of preventing Bosnia-style internal strife in volatile Central and Eastern Europe. That point has been raised explicitly by an array of prominent critics of NATO expansion. A recent public letter to President Clinton urging him to reconsider his campaign for NATO enlargement (signed by some 50 foreign policy luminaries--including former secretary of defense Robert McNamara and former senators Sam Nunn, Gordon Humphrey, Bennett Johnston, and Gary Hart) noted that "NATO expansion . . . will involve U.S. security guarantees to countries with serious border and national minority problems, and unevenly developed systems of democratic government."⁴³

The willingness of the American people to incur the costs and risks of defending any of the prospective NATO members from external (or even internal) strife is problematic at best. As Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) stated at the same committee hearing, "Some of the earliest confrontations, as occasioned by this expansion, could well be NATO having to come in to settle the instability between those selected and those not selected" for membership.⁴⁴ The ongoing controversy involving the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina might easily put NATO's casually extended security commitments to the test. The prospect of American troops being put at risk in such a murky, parochial quarrel is just one reason among many that NATO expansion should be rejected.

Notes

1. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President to the People of Detroit," October 2, 1996, pp. 6-7.
2. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement, West Point, New York," May 31, 1997, p. 50.
3. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Clinton, French President Chirac, Russia President Yeltsin, and NATO Secretary General Solana at NATO/Russia Founding Act Signing Ceremony, Elysée Palace, Paris, France," May 27, 1997, pp. 1-2. Emphasis added.
4. Quoted in Celia Woodard, "Hungary Wins As West Defers Its NATO Membership," Christian Science Monitor, October 29, 1993, p. 3.
5. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, "Human Rights Abuses of Non-Serbs in Kosovo, Sandzak, and Vojvodina," May 1994, pp. 1, 5.
6. Quoted in Judith Ingram, "Fear and Privation Stalk Yugoslavia's Breadbasket," New York Times, August 18, 1993, p. A8.
7. Carol J. Williams, "As Violence Spreads, Hungarians in Serbian Province Fear They're Next," Los Angeles Times, October 12, 1993, p. A14.
8. Quoted in untitled dispatch, Budapest Kossuth Radio Network, May 18, 1997, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report--Eastern Europe, May 18, 1997, electronic version.
9. Szilard Sasvari, "We Demand Minority Cultural Autonomy! Hungarian Education Is in Grave Danger in Vojvodina," Magyar Nemzet (Budapest), October 1, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, October 1, 1996, electronic version.
10. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, p. 5.
11. "Interview with Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn," Die Presse (Vienna), August 3, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, August 3, 1996, electronic version.

12. Williams.

13. "Interview with Gyorgy Granasztói, Former Hungarian Ambassador in Brussels," Brussels Le Soir, August 16, 1994, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, August 16, 1994, electronic version.

14. "Interview with Laszlo Kovacs, Hungarian Foreign Minister," Republic of Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at <http://www.meh.hu/kum/egyeb/reportkl.htm>, June 26, 1997. For a discussion of that pervasive attitude in Hungary, see Jonathan G. Clarke, "Beckoning Quagmires: NATO in Eastern Europe," Journal of Strategic Studies 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 52-53; and Norman Stone, "The Hungarians: History Makes a Comeback," National Interest 36 (Summer 1994): 58-64.

15. See the critical comments of a former Defense Ministry official concerning that proposal. "Interview with Zoltan Pecze, Former Defense Ministry Deputy State Secretary for International Contacts," Magyar Nemzet (Budapest), December 19, 1995, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, December 19, 1995, electronic version.

16. Jan Briza, "Are Autonomists Demanding the Impossible?" Nasa Borba (Belgrade), May 8, 1997, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, May 8, 1997, electronic version.

17. Tamas Gyurica, Janos Irhazi, and Andras Nemeth, "Ethnic Hungarians' Political Organizations Reviewed," Heti Vilag-gazdasag (Budapest), March 2, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, March 2, 1996, electronic version.

18. "Interview with Csaba Tabajdi, Political State Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office," Magyar Hirlap (Budapest), June 17, 1997, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, June 18, 1997, electronic version.

19. Gyurica, Irhazi, and Nemeth.

20. Ibid.

21. Briza.

22. Ibid.

23. Quoted in David B. Ottaway, "Hungary May Seek Détente with Neighbors," Washington Post, May 29, 1994, p. A51.
24. Ingram, p. A8.
25. Quoted in *ibid*.
26. Quoted in "Vojvodina: Hungarian Autonomy Demands Called Unacceptable," Belgrade Tanjug, August 23, 1996 in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, August 23, 1996, electronic version.
27. "Vucinic Accuses Zajedno of Working for Vojvodina Secession," Belgrade Tanjug, February 26, 1997, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, February 26, 1997, electronic version.
28. "Poll Suggests Majority Distrusts Parties, State Media," Beta (Belgrade), October 22, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, October 22, 1996, electronic version.
29. "Interview with Csaba Tabajdi."
30. "Interview with Karoly Dudas, Chairman of the Vojvodina Hungarian Cultural Association and Member of the Board of the World Federation of Hungarians," Magyar Nemzet (Budapest), July 25, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, July 25, 1996, electronic version. Dudas uses similar irredentist terminology to describe the portions of Slovakia and Romania that were taken from Hungary in 1920.
31. *Ibid*.
32. See Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Mediterranean Cauldron," Mediterranean Quarterly 8, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 50-51; Chris Hedges, "Resistance to Serbs Turns Violent in Kosovo," New York Times, February 17, 1997, p. A3; and Chris Hedges, "Notes from the Underground on Another Balkan Rift," New York Times, May 11, 1997, p. A8.
33. Quote from "Interview with Zoltan Pecze."
34. "Interview with Istvan Gyarmati, Defense Ministry Deputy State Secretary in Charge of International Affairs," Magyar Narancs (Budapest), November 7, 1996, in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, November 7, 1996, electronic version.

35. Ibid.

36. "Helsinki Committee Accuses Serbs of Repression," Paris AFP, December 18, 1995 in FBIS Daily Report--Eastern Europe, December 18, 1995, electronic version.

37. Quoted in Mary Cooper, "Expanding NATO," Congressional Quarterly Researcher, May 16, 1997, p. 449.

38. Quoted in George Moffett, "Will U.S. Fight Europe's Wars?" Christian Science Monitor, December 5, 1995, p. 1.

39. Cooper, p. 436.

40. "Hungarian Prime Minister Criticizes Slovakia on Treatment of Hungarian Minority," Central European Online Archive, September 23, 1997, at <http://www.centraleurope.com/ceo/news97092303.html>.

41. Ibid. Journalist Jane Perlez noted that Meciar "has begun to talk at home as if the treaty [recognizing existing borders and pledging ethnic tolerance] with Hungary never existed." Jane Perlez, "Slovak Leader Fans a Region's Old Ethnic Flames," New York Times, October 13, 1997, p. A3.

42. U.S. Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, Hearing on Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in NATO, 105th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 1997. Quoted in Eugene J. Carroll Jr. "NATO Enlargement: To What End?" Paper presented at a Cato Institute conference, "NATO Enlargement: Illusions and Reality," Washington, June 25, 1997, p. 6.

43. "An Open Letter to President Clinton Opposing the Expansion of NATO," Washingtonian, August 1997, p. 14.

44. Quoted in Cooper, p. 441.