Promoting Security in the Western Balkans through Further NATO Enlargement

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Abstract

The accession of Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, and most recently Montenegro, into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have demonstrated a commitment by NATO to integrate Western Balkan states to promote security and stability in the region. Considering this, two research questions have emerged: has NATO enlargement within the Western Balkans promoted security in the region through the additions of Croatia and Albania as member states? And to what extent could further NATO enlargement promote an increase of security and cooperation in the Western Balkans? To answer this first question, the case studies of Albania and Croatia will be evaluated based on the influence NATO has had in these two countries in the areas of collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. To answer the second research question, this paper specifically seeks to identify the potential pathways for NATO integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia, as they are the two most likely candidates to be considered for future NATO integration. Ultimately, this paper seeks to identify both the potential benefits and challenges of these two countries' accession into NATO based off political factors and current challenges to their defense structures. Two main findings have emerged in this paper— first, that during the NATO accession process, political-social norms are less important than political-military norms, and second, that even if a candidate state meets the basic requirements for membership, NATO's decision to pursue enlargement is ultimately political and based off potential strategic gain.

Introduction

Since the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, the number of NATO member countries has more than doubled—from its original 12 founding members to now having a makeup of 29 members. This significant increase in size of the Alliance is attributed to NATO's "open door" policy, based on Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This article states that any decision taken to invite a country to join the Alliance must be based on consensus among all member states through the North Atlantic Council, and third states do not have a say in these negotiations (NATO 2017). The entry of Slovenia (2004), Croatia (2009), Albania (2009), and most recently Montenegro (2017) into the Alliance have demonstrated a commitment by NATO to integrate Western Balkan states to promote security and stability in the region. Currently, three countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Georgia—have publicly declared their aspirations to join the Alliance.

Considering this, my research questions are as follows: has NATO enlargement within the Western Balkans promoted security through the additions of Croatia and Albania as member states? To what extent could further NATO enlargement promote an increase of security and cooperation in the region? This paper will specifically seek to examine the potential pathways for NATO integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia, as they are the two most likely candidates to be considered for future NATO integration. My goal is to identify both the potential benefits and challenges of these two countries' accession into NATO, based off political factors and current challenges to their defense structures. Since two of the tasks NATO has focused on in the Western Balkans have been defense reform and counter-terrorism, my thesis is that further enlargement would only stand to aid other Western Balkan states in building their own national defenses (in line with NATO norms) and contribute to combatting domestic terrorism threats. Ultimately, this paper is relevant from an EU studies perspective because these two countries are also potential candidates for the European Union. Their inclusion into NATO could facilitate an environment conducive to promoting stability and security in the region, which could in turn, foster economic and social growth, providing a pathway for EU membership in the future.

Literature Review

Kenneth Waltz, a scholar who identifies as a "realist" regarding International Relations theory, makes the assertion that as NATO is first and foremost a treaty made by states, and therefore, only states can hold it together (2000, 20). He views NATO as being "a means of maintaining and lengthening America's grip on the foreign and military policies of European states" (2000, 20). Therefore, he claims that NATO's survival and expansion after the Cold War are more reflective of American power and influence and less reflective of institutions as multilateral entities. Ultimately, he believes that NATO is a prime example of how a "moribund" institution can be maintained only through stronger states, like the United States, to serve their perceived or misperceived interests (Waltz 2000, 20). In regard to NATO enlargement, he argues that enlargement occurs only when it is in the interests of the most powerful states in the Alliance, as they are the driving forces in NATO expansion.

In contrast to the theoretical framework of realism, Keohane and Martin argue that realism cannot fully explain the success of institutions in creating norms and upholding shared values. They argue that "institutions change as a result of human action, and the changes in expectations and processes that result can exert profound effects on state behavior" (Keohane and Martin 1995, 46). Therefore, institutions are created by states *because of* their effects on state behavior (Keohane and Martin 1995, 46). This institutionalist perspective can also be applied to the analysis of security organizations, like that of NATO. They argue that "the stable norms and rules of NATO led to stability in levels of conventional forces within the regime that cannot be explained by structural theories" (Keohane and Martin 1995, 49). According to this logic, then, the continued existence and expansion of NATO is more attributed to member states upholding values and norms rather than simply being a product of more powerful member states exerting their power to either promote or prevent enlargement.

In a piece entitled "Puzzles of EU and NATO Accession of Post-Communist Countries", Katchanovski analyzes the "puzzles" behind which countries are offered accession or the prospect of membership into these two inter-governmental organizations. Using statistical analyses of European post-communist states, he examines which factors determine whether or not a state is eligible to become a member state of either the European Union or NATO. Ultimately, he looks at three criteria which are arguably the most influential factors: the level of democracy in candidate countries; the cultural affinity of these post-communist countries with Western countries; and either the level of prejudice towards NATO due to a former influence of

the Soviet Union or the prevalence of close ties to Russia today (Katchanovski 2011, 305-306). While he argues that there are overlaps between both the European Union and NATO's accession requirements—specifically those concerning political stability and democratization— they diverge in that the European Union is more focused on social and economic stability, while NATO is more focused on military capabilities and potential contributions that a candidate country could make to increase the Alliance's security (Katchanovski 2011, 316).

In a Congressional Research Service report entitled "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Future Possible Candidates", the authors use the case studies of Albania and Croatia to determine how NATO enlargement in the Western Balkans has promoted security and stability in the region since their accession into the Alliance. They evaluate the two countries based off the following criteria: domestic reforms; public support for NATO membership; defense reforms and an ability to contribute to allied missions; and regional issues (Morelli et al 2009, 6). Additionally, they examine other factors, like enlargement costs and U.S. policies, that have heavily influenced the prospects of future NATO enlargement. Because all NATO member states must approve new members, NATO must collectively agree that new additions are of strategic importance to the Alliance. This means that they do not want to support the incorporation of new members if they do not believe the new additions will be politically and militarily advantageous in promoting security, due to the high costs of enlargement (Morelli et al 2009, 13). Furthermore, U.S. support for NATO enlargement is highly dependent upon the current presidential administration and its policies. Because the United States plays such a fundamental role in influencing NATO's political objectives, due to its status as a founding member and the largest contributor to the Alliance, the official U.S. stance on future enlargement is be a key determining factor in whether or not accession of Western Balkans states will occur (Morelli et al 2009, 13).

Gülnur Abyet's piece entitled "NATO Conditionality in Bosnia and Herzegovina" focuses specifically on the progress Bosnia and Herzegovina has made towards defense reform over the years with the goal of becoming a NATO member state, but also addresses the challenges that the country continues to face which impact their potential candidacy. He points out that previously, NATO and the European Union required state transformation rather than state-building from candidate countries; however, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, both state transformation and state-building must occur simultaneously (Abyet 2010, 21). He

highlights the significance of the Dayton Accords as laying the framework for peace in Bosnia, as this peace agreement serves as the state's constitution and framework for government (Abyet 2010, 22). Due to the nature of the Accords, Bosnia is fragmented into three ethnic groups, which interferes with the progression of state-building at the domestic level (Abyet 2010, 22). Therefore, when international organizations like NATO seek to engage with the Bosnian government in order to incentivize them to adhere to specific norms, they must actually work with ethnic-based groups rather than solely state-level groups (Abyet 2010, 25). While this has been problematic from an EU-accession perspective, Bosnia has still been able to oversee defense reform in line with NATO standards (Abyet 2010, 25). Ultimately, Abyet argues that while a "socialization" process (in line with EU accession standards) has not yet been successful overall, a "technocratic rationalization"—referring to Bosnia's national defense reform—has been successful (in line with NATO accession standards).

In a piece entitled "The Study of Things Military in the Republic of Macedonia (1991-2015): Flying in Place", Vankovska and Taneseka focus on the military development of the Republic of Macedonia over the past two decades. Specifically, they focus on the "triad" of security, democracy, and the military, and seek to explain how these three areas have developed simultaneously in Macedonia. As Macedonia was de-militarized in 1992 after it gained independence from Yugoslavia, the country had to completely rebuild its military—no easy feat for such a small country with little infrastructure (Vankovska and Taneseka 2017, 383). Vankovska and Taneseka argue that since Macedonia has made it very clear that they seek accession to both NATO and the European Union in the future, Macedonia's strategy should be to focus on meeting all the requirements for NATO membership, as the peace and well-being of the country will be guaranteed by default as a NATO member (392). This increase in stability will, in turn, allow Macedonia to focus on meeting the EU accession requirements, and therefore give them increased prospects of joining the European Union.

Methods and Hypotheses

To determine how NATO has been influential in promoting security in the Western Balkans, I will first look at two case studies of Albania and Croatia, as they are the two NATO members in the Western Balkans that have been part of the Alliance since 2009. While Montenegro is also a NATO member, it only joined the Alliance this past year (in 2017), so it would be difficult to look at the progression of Montenegro's contributions or evolving

participation in NATO operations. Through these two case studies, I will be looking to evaluate the role that NATO has had in promoting collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management in the Western Balkans region through the member states of Albania and Croatia.

Additionally, I will be looking at two case studies of the two countries that are considered most likely to become the newest additions to NATO—Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia. While NATO has an overall framework for conditions applicant states must meet to become a member, much like the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, there are other, more technical and political requirements that applicant countries must meet as well. Considering this, it is difficult to measure these countries' applications for NATO accession empirically because the same requirements do not apply to all applicants, but are instead specific to each country. Therefore, these two case studies will be primarily focused on identifying the current challenges these two countries face as obstacles to NATO accession.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of future challenges to NATO enlargement in the Western Balkans, it is also necessary to examine the role that Russia plays in the Western Balkans. As Russia seeks to actively counter the increase of NATO's power or territorial control in Europe, they have been instrumental in undermining NATO's enlargement efforts in the region. Specifically, I will identify Russia's links to undermine NATO's role in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro to illustrate the threat that Russia poses to further NATO expansion in the Western Balkans.

Ultimately, I have two hypotheses that this paper will seek to either prove or disprove. The first hypothesis is that during the NATO accession process, political-social norms are less important than political-military norms, marking the key difference between accession into the European Union in contrast to accession into NATO. By this, I contend that NATO is less concerned with accession requirements related to social issues than the EU and is instead more concerned about the potential strategic benefits that the Alliance gains through extending membership to a candidate country, as evidenced by the case of Turkish membership. My second hypothesis is that even if a candidate state meets the basic requirements for membership, NATO's decision to pursue enlargement is ultimately political and based off potential strategic gain. While this decision is typically shaped by more powerful NATO member states who stand to have more influence, the structural nature of NATO allows for all Allies to exercise influence out of their own national interests because NATO decisions are always reached by consensus.

Background

NATO operations in the Western Balkans

In response to the violent conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO launched its first major crisis response operation using air strikes in 1995. NATO intervention in the conflict drove the warring parties to negotiate a peace agreement struck through American and European mediators in the United States, which was called the Dayton Accords (NATO 2017a). In the aftermath of the crisis, the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilisation Force (SFOR) were deployed in Bosnia to enforce the cease-fire and agreements of the Dayton Accords, lasting from 1995-2004 (NATO 2017a). Currently, NATO maintains a military headquarters in Sarajevo that works in tandem with the European Union in the areas of defense reform and counter-terrorism (NATO 2017a).

In 1999, during the war in Kosovo, NATO once again led an air-strike campaign, lasting for 78 days, before establishing the peace operation called the Kosovo Force (KFOR) (NATO 2017b). The original objectives of KFOR included: the deterring of renewed conflict; establishing a secure environment; ensuring public safety and order; demilitarizing the Kosovo Liberation Army; supporting the international humanitarian efforts; and coordinating with the international civil presence (NATO 2017b). Today, the primary goals of this operation are focused on maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kosovo to promote stability in the region. Ultimately, since 1995, NATO has been instrumental in the Western Balkans through these operations—even before the accession of Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro—and the Alliance has a vested interest in maintaining security and stability in the region.

Partnership for Peace

One of the most valuable tools NATO uses to promote stability across non-NATO member states is through its Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Established in 1994, the PfP program is based on bilateral cooperation between NATO and a partner country and seeks to build strengthened security relationships between NATO and non-member countries within the Euro-Atlantic area (NATO 2017c). While there are a number of countries that take part in the PfP program who do not intend to become NATO member countries, this program is still used by some to be the first step towards NATO membership, as seen in the cases of Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro. Joining the PfP allows for a country to cooperate in a number of areas along-side NATO, while learning how to strengthen their own defense structures and meet the required

standards for NATO membership. Areas for bilateral cooperation include defense-related work, defense reform, defense policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues (NATO 2017c).

Membership for Action Plan

Going beyond the Partnership for Peace program, NATO also utilizes a Membership Action Plan (MAP), which is specifically intended to provide advice, assistance and support to countries who have a clear goal of joining the Alliance in the future. NATO focuses on providing feedback to MAP countries in the areas of political, economic, defense, resource, security, and legal issues (NATO 2017d). Originally created in 1999 to prepare former Soviet countries for their accession into NATO, the MAP was also used to prepare Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro for their membership (NATO 2017d). Today, both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia have joined the MAP and are working in cooperation with NATO to ensure that they are meeting the necessary requirements for membership (NATO 2017d).

Case Studies

Case Study #1: Albania

Albania joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, and officially became a NATO member in 2009, along with Croatia. While Albania is currently falling behind every other Alliance member in terms of GDP, it still manages to outspend nearly half of all members in terms of military spending as a percentage of GDP (Burden 2016, 44). Since becoming a Partnership for Peace member, Albania has been instrumental in promoting NATOs key goals of collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. After Article 5 regarding collective defense was invoked after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, Albania contributed over 3,000 troops to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (Burden 2016, 51). Additionally, Albanian Special Forces have contributed to NATO operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, and Iraq (Burden 2016, 51).

Concerning cooperative security, Albania has been a valuable member of the Alliance, due to a history of instability and conflict in the Western Balkans. With the increase in terrorist activity in Albania in recent years—linked to the recruitment of foreign fighters for radical Islamist terrorist organizations, arms supplying, financial support for terrorist operations, and the movement of terrorists through the Western Balkans—Albania's membership in NATO has been

essential for providing intelligence and collaborating with the Alliance to mitigate these activities (Burden 2016, 52-53). For example, after the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, it was discovered that most of the firearms used to carry out the attacks were sourced from the Western Balkans, due to the lack of law enforcement and security mechanisms in place (Burden 2016, 53). In response, the Albanian military and law enforcement collaborated with Italian security forces to enforce security in the Western Balkans region. Albania alone deployed over 1,500 security forces within their own borders to crack down on the illegal movement of weapons through the country (Burden 2016, 54).

Finally, Albania has proved to be a strong asset to NATO through crisis management. During the war in Kosovo in 1999, about 375,000 displaced Kosovars traveled to Albania for help, and Albania worked to set up many refugee shelters throughout the crisis. While this action taken on the part of Albania was in part driven by Albanians' shared ethnic ties to Kosovars, it was also taken because of Albania's partnership with NATO. Since Albania was a Partnership for Peace member, and not yet a full NATO member at the time, the country sought to prove its potential as a valuable member to the Alliance through helping promote stability in the Western Balkans (Burden 2016, 55).

Case Study #2: Croatia

Croatia joined the Partnership for Peace in 2000 and officially became a NATO member in 2009. As of 2017, Croatia, too, was contributing more to the Alliance than half of all member states (NATO 2017e). In line with collective defense, Croatia became an active supporter of ISAF operations in Afghanistan in 2003, providing a platoon of military police forces to a NATO base in Kabul (Polak et al 2009, 512). Additionally, in 2005, the Croatian military took part in the building and training of the Afghan National Police (Polak et al 2009, 512). As part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR)—a NATO-led international peacekeeping force with the goal of stabilizing Kosovo in the aftermath of the war—Croatia has been a key actor in providing support to the operations, due to its proximity to the country. In addition to supplying military personnel, helicopters, and equipment, it has also provided other levels of support—to include access to both sea-ports and airports, military facilities, and air space (Polak et al 2009, 513).

Concerning cooperative security, Croatia has created a national security strategy in line with NATO norms to promote counter-terrorism measures and increase their intelligence capabilities (Peresin 2013, 11). Similar to Albania, Croatia has had issues relating to terrorism,

weapons smuggling, and international crime. Through guidance from NATO, Croatia has been effective in creating its own national security policies to increasingly promote stability in within its own borders, further contributing to overall security and stability in the Western Balkans (Peresin 2013, 11). In turn, Croatia's heightened security measures have allowed them to contribute valuable intelligence to NATO to promote cooperative security for the Alliance overall, especially given its geo-political importance as a state in the Western Balkans.

In relation to crisis management, Croatia proved to be a valuable NATO ally during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to its proximity to the conflict. Between 1992 and 1995, Croatia accepted more than 500,000 refugees from Bosnia, helping secure the necessary preconditions for Bosnia to undergo state-building after the war (Kostovic et al 2000, 133). While Croatia was not a NATO member state at this time, nor was it a part of the Partnership for Peace, it still saw eventual NATO membership as a goal, and part of its motivation to help with crisis management in the region is based off this goal (Kostovis et al 2000, 133). Since becoming a NATO member, Croatia has hosted a series of NATO crisis management exercises, most notably Exercise CMX09 (Republic of Croatia 2017). Due to its geographic location (being in the Western Balkans and having a long expanse of coastline) the exercise's goal was to create a scenario that would combine the humanitarian aspect of providing aid for refugees while also providing a framework for natural disaster relief (Republic of Croatia 2017).

Case Study #3: Bosnia and Herzegovina

With the passing of little over two decades since the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosnian government has made significant progress in the direction of NATO accession. There are still, however, key issues that must be resolved before Bosnia can qualify for full NATO membership. Two of these main issues involve the lack of political support for NATO among Bosnian citizens based on ethnic divisions and the lack of sufficient defense reform. Due to the Dayton Accords dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into two regions—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (comprised mostly of ethnic Bosniaks and Croats) and the Republika Srpska (comprised mostly of ethnic Serbs)—public opinion on political issues has often reflected these divisions. In 2015, public support for Bosnia's accession into NATO was at 65% overall, with 82% within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in support, but only 38% of support within the Republika Srpska (Stiglmayer 2015). Recently, in October of 2017, the Republika Srpska declared itself to be "militarily neutral", in an effort to hinder further progress made

towards NATO membership ("Bosnia's Serb Region Declares Neutrality in Bid to Block NATO Membership" 2017). This lack of support for NATO by ethnic Serbs in Bosnia is a direct result of the NATO air strikes and operations conducted in both Bosnia and Kosovo against Serb-led forces in the 1990s. Instead of wanting closer ties with NATO for protection and stability, Bosnian Serbs have closer ties with Russia and Serbia, often aligning their policy goals with that of Serbia ("Bosnia's Serb Region Declares Neutrality in Bid to Block NATO Membership" 2017).

The second key issue that Bosnia must address before it can become a NATO member is the matter of a continued need for structural defense reform. While there have been significant reforms undertaken by the Bosnian government over the past two decades, NATO stipulates that the Bosnian government register 63 immovable defense properties as official state properties, so they can be used by the country's defense ministry (NATO 2017f). As of 2017, Bosnia had successfully registered only 23 defense properties under state control, largely due to the Republika Srpska claiming the property as its own to further stall the Bosnian NATO accession process (Preljevic 2017). With the recent declaration that the Republika Srpska is "militarily neutral", it is not expected that there will be cooperation between the political-ethnic groups within Bosnia in the near future, and Bosnian accession to NATO is unable to progress further at this point.

Case Study #4: Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia initially joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1995 and has been active in the Membership Action Plan since 1999 (NATO 2016). Not only has Macedonia been engaged in substantial political and military reforms to meet NATO requirements for accession, it has also been a contributor to NATO operations in both Afghanistan and Kosovo, deploying troops and offering logistical support (NATO 2016). Currently, Macedonia cooperates with NATO in the areas of civil emergency planning, security-related scientific cooperation, and public awareness regarding NATO membership (NATO 2016).

The main obstacle to Macedonian accession into NATO is the Greek-Macedonian dispute over the official name for Macedonia, which has been on-going for years. After World War II, Macedonia became part of Yugoslavia, a state with a shared Slavic identity; however, Macedonia is populated by ethnic Greeks, Bulgarians, and Slavs, with rights to its land being

contested by Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia (Mavromatidis 2010, 48). Because Greece, too, has a region of its country with the name Macedonia, that is of significant cultural and historical importance, Greece is unwilling to acknowledge the Republic of Macedonia with its current name (Mavromatidis 2010, 48). This has affected the accession of Macedonia into both the European Union and NATO, as Greece is a member of both organizations and must approve the accession of new members. At the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, Allies agreed that an invitation for Macedonia to join NATO would be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution over the name dispute is agreed upon with Greece, demonstrating the readiness of Macedonia to join NATO having met all other necessary requirements. A potential solution to this issue would involve the Republic of Macedonia (its official name) becoming a NATO member under its provisional name (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), in order for the Greek government to accept their membership (Cooper 2017). While this has yet to be accomplished, due to domestic issues within Macedonia, Macedonia's recently-elected government is pushing for this provisional name change, and it is possible that Macedonia could move forward in the near future with NATO accession (Cooper 2017).

Because NATO has made known its intentions to welcome Macedonia into the Alliance as long as all Allies approve its membership, the inability for Macedonia to have already joined the Alliance has been a direct result of NATO's structural makeup. While Greece is not considered to be one of the more powerful NATO Allies, like the United States, France, or the United Kingdom, it still holds veto power like any other Ally. Greece's refusal to allow Macedonia's accession into both the EU and NATO over a name dispute demonstrates just how the issue of enlargement can be a highly political issue. Particularly in the case of NATO, Macedonia has met all the other necessary requirements to become a member, making Greece's use of their veto power the only real cause for preventing their accession. This case confirms Waltz's realist argument about how NATO is driven by the states which make up the Alliance, and that it is naïve to believe that NATO still exists and expands based on merely the upholding of shared values and norms.

Russian Influence in the Western Balkans

An analysis of NATO enlargement in the Western Balkans cannot thoroughly provide an explanation to predict the potential accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia without also considering the influence of Russia in the region, which actively seeks to counter NATO

enlargement. The Russian perception of NATO has always been negative, given the creation of the Alliance as being a means of countering the rising hegemony of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. With the enlargement of NATO to include former Soviet Union states, Russia has become increasingly vocal about how it views NATO's enlargement and troop deployments near the Russian border as a form of aggression. Putin's administration has said that NATO has presented "new threats to national security which have a complex, interrelated character" and has accused NATO of "attempting to maintain their dominance in global affairs" by carrying out "a policy of containment towards Russia" (Farchy 2016). As a result, Russia has maintained a special interest in the Western Balkans for a number of years. Not only does Russia have a common cultural and historical background with Orthodox Slavs in the region, but Russia is also actively pursuing a strategy to dissuade Western Balkans countries from joining NATO to prevent a further expansion of the Alliance into the Russian "sphere of influence". Furthermore, Russia has yet to look past NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999, which was conducted without a mandate from the UN Security Council (Samorukov 2017).

Russia maintains friendly relations with several Western Balkan countries, most notably Serbia. As Serbs also make up minorities in other countries, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russian influence in the Western Balkans is seen as a counterweight to the West and NATO. Russia has made strategic investments in Serbia's economy, including Russia's state-owned *Gazprom Neft* purchasing a €400 million majority stake in Serbia's *Naftna industrija Srbije* in 2008, a Serbian multinational oil and gas company (Bennett 2017). Furthermore, Russia has fostered military cooperation with Serbia, to include the discounted sale of six MiG-29 fighters, 30 T-72 tanks and 30 BRDM amphibious vehicles in 2016 (Bennett 2017). It is important to note, however, that despite Russian involvement in Serbia, Serbia has been a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program since 2006 and agreed in 2015 to deepen cooperation with NATO through an Individual Partnership Action Plan (NATO 2017g). Although Serbia has a policy of military neutrality, its cooperation with both NATO and the Russia can perceived as "cherry-picking" from both sides in order to maintain its neutrality while still being capable of being persuaded to foster cooperation with powerful partners.

Over the past several years leading up to Montenegro's accession to NATO, Russia became increasingly vocal against their membership. Russia has historically viewed both Serbia and Montenegro as allies, and therefore, Montenegro's intentions to join the Alliance have not

been warmly welcomed by Russia. Montenegro was a part of the Federal Republic of Serbia during the NATO bombing campaign in 1999 and was also targeted by NATO in order to force Slobodan Milosevic's troops out of Kosovo. While many Montenegrins supported Montenegro's accession into NATO, the memory of NATO's bombing campaign in Montenegro caused there to be a significant opposition to Montenegro's accession into the Alliance. A poll from 2016 found that 39.5% of the population was in favor of Montenegro's membership, while 39.7% were against (Luhn 2017). In October of 2016, on the day of the parliamentary elections in Montenegro, a group of Russians, Serbians, and Montenegrins were arrested for taking part in an attempted coup d'état against the Montenegrin government and assassinate Prime Minister Milo Dukanovic in order to bring a pro-Russian government to power (Reuters 2017). While the Kremlin has dismissed any accusation regarding their role in the coup d'état, the Montenegrin government claims otherwise because Russia had previously made known their opposition to Montenegro joining NATO. After Montenegro's accession to NATO in 2017, Russia banned Montenegrin wine and Russian tourism to Montenegro dropped by about 12% as a way to demonstrate their opposition. The Russian foreign ministry criticized the Montenegrin government as having "ignored the voice of reason and conscience" and said that Russia "reserves the right to take steps aimed at defending our interests and national security" (BBC 2017).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia has begun to increase their influence among Bosnian Serbs, who have historically been more aligned with Russia than the West or NATO. Because the Dayton Accords of 1995 ended the war in Bosnia by dividing Bosnian territory among ethnic lines, this has led to a decrease in integration and increase in separatist sentiments among those living in Republika Srpska. Russia has increased its backing for the separatist movement through an increase in cooperation with Milorad Dodik, the president of Republika Srpska. Additionally, in 2016, the Russian media outlet Sputnik News has been highlighting Bosnia's ties to Russia as a part of the Russian disinformation campaign. Furthermore, Russia has begun to train and equip Republika Srpska's special police forces, deepening their ties to Bosnian Serbs (Cropsey 2017). The greatest concern is that Russia will continue to further exacerbate the Bosnian government's instability along ethnic lines and therefore, make it impossible for Bosnia and Herzegovina to join NATO in the future.

Analysis and Conclusions

The findings from these four case studies have supported my two main hypotheses overall. My first hypothesis was that political-social norms are less important than political-military norms, when considering requirements for NATO accession. While there is an element within NATO that seeks to enforce democratic principles within member states' governments, NATO is a political-military alliance, and it is more concerned with states' adherence to requirements that strengthen military capabilities and preparedness. Unlike the European Union accession requirements, which have distinct social requirements, NATO is intentionally ambiguous on these matters, and is less concerned with social issues than defense ones. This can be seen in the example of Turkey, which is a NATO member due to its strategic importance, but is not likely to join the European Union anytime soon, due to its back-sliding regarding political and social reforms. Furthermore, while Bosnia and Herzegovina have a number of political issues that are problematic, NATO is more concerned with its need to register immovable defense structures as state property, which is a more technical issue rather than a structural one. The realization of this, however, is certainly political, as evidenced by the Republika Srpska's goal of stalling NATO accession through claiming military neutrality.

My second hypothesis was that even if a candidate state meets the basic requirements for membership, NATO's decision to pursue enlargement is ultimately political and based off potential strategic gain. Albania and Croatia are not large countries with significant military capabilities like other NATO members, but their efforts in NATO operations, as well as their geo-strategic importance have proved them to be valuable assets in promoting stability in the Western Balkans region. It is only logical that NATO would seek to expand its sphere of influence in the Western Balkans region to further promote security and stability, while also overseeing necessary defense reforms. Despite this, the decision to accept new members into NATO is ultimately political, as seen in the case of Greece blocking Macedonian accession due to the name dispute. Therefore, the structural nature of NATO and states' ability to have veto power regarding the accession of potential members plays a significant role in whether or not enlargement in the Western Balkans will continue in the future.

In the context of broader International Relations theory, the case of enlargement in the Western Balkans appears to be more aligned with realism, as Waltz argued. While NATO still upholds shared values and norms, as Institutionalists would argue, the driving force behind enlargement are the member states themselves. The United States and Europe both have a vested

interest in the Western Balkans because instability or security threats in this region could directly impact the security of other European states and therefore affect the Alliance as a whole. U.S. European Commander General Curtis Scaparrotti has been vocal about the U.S. lacking in their efforts in the Balkans, stating that "we are not keeping pace with Russia" and that we have "taken our eye off the area", exposing the region to an increase in support for Russia (Vandiver 2018). Since both the United States and Europe do not want Russia to gain more of a foothold in Europe, enlargement in the Western Balkans is largely driven by the security interests of the member states themselves. While Western Balkan countries have little to contribute to the Alliance in comparison to other NATO members, due to their small size and lack of resources, NATO views enlargement to encompass new member states in the Western Balkans as being a better alternative to there being instability or an anti-western alignment with Russia in the region. Ultimately, my thesis was that that further enlargement would only stand to aid other Western Balkan states in building their own national defenses (in line with NATO norms) and contribute to combatting domestic terrorism threats. While this has proven to be true in the cases of Albania and Croatia in the areas of collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management, the highly political nature of NATO enlargement could prevent success in these areas for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia until their obstacles to accession are overcome.

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