NATO Expansion Is European Welfare

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All the arguments that the Republican Congress used in order to pass welfare reform, after President Clinton vetoed it twice, apply just as importantly to the upcoming vote on the NATO Expansion Treaty. This Treaty would continue old-style welfare to foreigners that costs U.S. taxpayers dearly and perpetuates the dependency of the recipients.

Welfare handouts also create a stream of taxpayers' money that enables many others along the way to have their hand in the till. Behind the orchestrated propaganda for NATO Expansion is the $51 million that U.S. weapons contractors have spent on lobbying in the last two years.

U.S. weapons manufacturers, which expect to make billions of dollars selling arms and military equipment to the new NATO nations, have funneled an additional $32.3 million to Congressional candidates. This political money (which dwarfs the donations made by the tobacco industry) went equally to Republicans and Democrats, which explains why support for NATO Expansion is "bipartisan."

The establishment elite, the sort of men who always lobby for extravagant foreign handouts and who serve on the boards of directors of the corporations that make money out this flow of taxpayers' money, has run a full-page newspaper ad advocating NATO Expansion. This ad states: "The upcoming Senate debate on expanding NATO to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic is all about securing the victory of democracy and free markets."

Let's have a reality check. NATO Expansion has absolutely nothing to do with securing free markets to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; instead, NATO Expansion's immediate effect will be to deny free markets to those countries.

What the former Warsaw Pact nations really want and need is membership in the European Union (EU), which they see as the key to their economic security and future prosperity. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright ought to be pressing our European allies to admit Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to

the EU.

But West Europeans don't want to admit Eastern Europe into their exclusive EU free-market club. Western Europeans are no longer afraid of Warsaw Pact troops marching westward, but they are in deadly fear of an invasion of cheap goods and cheap labor from Eastern Europe.

So, Western Europeans are pursuing a protectionist policy in order to protect their farmers and manufacturers from price and wage competition. Running along the same line as the former Iron Curtain, we now have a Competition Curtain separating Western capitalist countries from the former Warsaw Pact countries.

It's easy to see why Western Europeans think NATO Expansion is a splendid idea. Admitting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO gives Western Europe cover for not letting them into the EU.

Nobody can assure us of any ceiling on NATO Expansion's cost to the United States, but it is certain that NATO Expansion will cause a steady outflow of U.S. dollars. Madeleine Albright and Clinton's chief foreign policy adviser Strobe Talbott are already on record as endorsing "Marshall Plan"-style handouts for Eastern Europe. "Collective security" means the U.S. pays and Europe collects.

The Clinton Administration claims that much of the cost of NATO Expansion will be paid by the new and current NATO members. But Western European countries, which have gotten by ever since World War II with letting Uncle Sap pay for most of their military defenses, see no reason to end their dependency now.

The Pentagon says that the NATO Treaty obligates Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to spend $10 to $13 billion to upgrade their military forces and make them "compatible" with sophisticated Western equipment. But they don't see any reason to modernize their military. Who's the enemy? Isn't it better to modernize their economies?

The U.S. weapons industry has already protected itself against the inability or unwillingness of the new NATO countries to fulfill their commitments. In 1996, the U.S. arms industry lobbied a bill through Congress to force American taxpayers to guarantee loans for weapons exports.

The NATO Expansion Treaty will put NATO-U.S. troops right along the border of Russia, and Russia sees

that as, at best, a diplomatic slap in the face, and, at worst, a military threat. So the Clinton Administration is buying Russia's acquiescence with more handouts, which adds up to an additional financial cost of the NATO Treaty.

The Clinton Administration has repeatedly stated that the first round "will not be the last." The Senate vote is not just about Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, but is just as much about Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and all the countries that are queuing up to cash in on America's financial generosity and military commitments.

There are no viable criteria for admitting some ex-Communist countries and omitting others. What about Ukraine? Bosnia? Even Kosovo? Refusing to admit eager applicants to the NATO club next year, and the year after, is sure to give us expensive grief.

Western Europe, which has grown wealthy on U.S. handouts over the past 50 years, is today's "welfare queen." The Senate should reject the NATO Expansion Treaty and terminate welfare for foreigners now.