

Enemies No More
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On July 8 and 9, leaders of the 16 NATO nations will meet in Madrid to select new candidates for membership. The countries most likely to be named for inclusion into NATO are Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, although Romania and Slovenia are also possibilities.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established in 1949. Its goal was to form a defensive alliance based on political and military cooperation to safeguard the freedom, security and democratic institutions of the member countries. Since the end of the Cold War, the mission of the organization has expanded to promote the stability and security of Europe as a whole.

This evolution led in 1994 to the creation of the Partnership for Peace program, which includes countries — particularly in Eastern Europe — which are not yet official members of NATO. Members of the new partnership work together to diminish threats to peace and strengthen good relations.

A practical illustration of this new collaboration could be witnessed last week at the opening ceremony of Cooperative Nugget 97, a joint training exercise held at Fort Polk, La. Twenty-two countries, from Albania to Uzbekistan, are there until July 4 to practice tactics and techniques associated with peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This was the third time since 1994 that Partnership for Peace exercises have been held in the United States.

Commenting on the significance of these exercises, Gen. John Sheehan, the commander in chief of the Atlantic Command, said that since there is no longer a single enemy threatening NATO countries, security will need to be addressed in new ways in the next century. With that in mind, he hopes these types of joint peacekeeping exercises will allow countries to come together to be a force for preventing war.

Gen. Sheehan said that for the past 50 years many of the countries participating in Cooperative Nugget have thought of each other as the enemy. But, he elaborated, when they have a chance to get to know one another during these joint exercises they realize that former adversaries are not the bad guys, that we all bleed, that we all get hungry, that we are all human. When asked if he thought programs like this would help prevent future wars, he responded: “People who talk to each other don’t fight, because if they are busy talking, they have a tendency not to fight. It’s when they stop talking that I get worried.”

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