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## Hungary and NATO

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### THE EXPANSION OF NATO

Simon, Jeffrey. *Hungary and NATO: Problems in Civil-Military Relations*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. 131pp. \$26.95

Simon, Jeffrey. *Poland and NATO: A Study in Civil-Military Relations*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. 195pp. \$28.95

Simon, Jeffrey. *NATO and the Czech and Slovak Republics: A Comparative Study in Civil-Military Relations*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. 307pp. \$34.95

The enlargement of the European Union and the consummation of the second wave of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion in the spring of 2004 would tempt one to believe that the postcommunist transition is coming to a close as a kind of normalcy settles over the region. Jeffrey Simon's careful and informative series of books concerning civil-military relations in four Central and Eastern European countries reminds us that in important respects, transition is still under way. Or rather, given the state of civil-military relations across the region, we should hope that it is, for the difficulties that postcommunist states face in democratizing, rationalizing, and strengthening their military-security apparatuses are still manifold. Placing Simon's insights against the backdrop of NATO's own strategic transition—the outcome of which is very unclear—one has continuing reason to worry about the stability of postcommunism. By extension, European security is at stake insofar as

stability and security stem from constructive military-societal relations, sophisticated defense expertise, and well institutionalized democratic accountability.

In each of the three volumes, which cover Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia (now the Czech and Slovak republics) respectively, Simon provides a detailed chronology of defense reforms since communism's collapse. In all cases, Simon's narrative is set against four consistent criteria to which he continually refers as he assesses the merits and shortcomings of reform. The four criteria revolve around: the division of civilian authority in democratic societies; parliamentary oversight, especially in matters of budgeting; subordination of general staffs to civilian institutions; and military prestige, trustworthiness, and accountability. According to Simon's analysis, Poland has clearly been the best at transforming its military-security apparatus, despite some fairly serious

setbacks in the early 1990s. Measured in terms of the four criteria, the Czech Republic has fared somewhat better than its Slovak counterpart, which, after the “velvet divorce” of 1993, found itself building a range of military and security institutions from scratch. The biggest surprise in the series for students of the postcommunist transition will be how poorly Hungarian civil-military relations have developed—especially given Hungarian politicians’ strenuous efforts to enter the alliance.

These books are essential reading for anyone writing on NATO, because, concerning as they do half of NATO’s newest members, the problems within these states will no doubt have some bearing not only on the functioning of the alliance but also on its political orientation. Certainly, there are few people better placed to report on events and persons crucial to the military-security reform process than Jeffrey Simon, given his long-standing role as a leading American adviser to postcommunist governments on how to advance institutional change in this area. More generally, those interested in the postcommunist transition and cross-national variation would do well to spend time trying to understand this somewhat arcane sector’s evolution, not least because military-society relations carry with them implications for democratic consolidation. Admittedly, Simon does not make this an easy or inviting task. He has evidently been so close to the intricacies of reform that one unfamiliar with the issues or the personnel could conceivably drown in the detail.

Despite the particular challenges that Simon’s intimate portrayal poses, I would nevertheless suggest that his findings provide some puzzling questions

for the literature on postcommunist transition. For example, Poland and Hungary are very often grouped together as states whose strong opposition to state socialism made them especially susceptible to Westernizing reform. The more repressive nature of the Czechoslovak regime contributed to relatively less political competition after the transition, allowing policy errors to endure. Although Poland’s ability to exploit NATO’s criteria for membership in order to achieve reform confirms the democratic opposition hypothesis, Hungary’s relatively poor performance in restructuring the military and accompanying political oversight raises new questions about what provides the impetus for reform. The military could require explanations distinct from those that cause variation in other kinds of political and economic reform. On the other hand, the logic underpinning the democratic opposition hypothesis is sufficiently broad that national defense establishments should be susceptible to Westernizing influences.

With specific respect to military-security reforms, Simon points repeatedly in all three volumes to problems that can plague civil-military relations generally, as well as to those issues that may be peculiar to the region. The lack of civilian expertise in former Warsaw Pact countries figures prominently in the initial failure to formulate effective restructuring such that new lines of authority allow ministries of defense to take on the bulk of planning and management. From lack of civilian expertise flow other problems, including the failure to provide transparency, discipline military malfeasance, or dedicate adequate funding to militaries in decline. Other perennial issues have included

the lack of acceptance of civilian control as NATO defines it—among both military personnel and civilians, tension between general staffs and ministries of defense, and a behavioral gap between formal institutions and lived experience.

The news from Central Europe is, of course, not all bad. Probably owing to the legacy of some form of political control dating back to the Warsaw Pact, in combination with public enthusiasm for communism's collapse, none of the militaries in question has in any serious way attempted to interfere in the democratic transition. More often than not, politicization of the armed forces has been the will of errant politicians rather than ambitious generals. On the whole, attempts at reform have been consistent with NATO's objectives of improving transparency and accountability. Parliamentary committees have gradually gained competence over a decade and a half and are increasingly comfortable exercising their authority over defense budgets. Nevertheless, in spite of the generally positive trajectory, Central and Eastern European states continue to have real trouble committing the necessary resources to reorient their capabilities toward NATO's evolving strategic challenges, democratic political control has not been fully established in some instances, and, in the Czech Republic and Hungary in particular, backsliding away from initial goals has been evident since their accession in 1999.

The massive variation over time and across the issues under consideration leaves one wishing that Simon had used his vast knowledge to impose some order on the data. This is especially the case with respect to the following two questions: What accounts for such

variation across countries, and what difference has NATO made to the domestic politics and foreign policies of Central and Eastern European countries? Although standard explanations of postcommunist performance by themselves generally do not explain this variation very well, Simon's analysis does provide some starting points. The combination in Poland of having had a strong democratic opposition committed ultimately to Westernization and a relatively high level of public respect for the armed forces as an institution, despite the military's past participation in domestic repression, proved to be a big advantage relative to the Czech Republic or Hungary. In the latter two instances, while the existence of democratic oppositions under communism (albeit in different forms) certainly informed transition in positive ways, the very low standing of the armed forces in these societies inhibited complete reform. Slovakia is the reverse of both variables—it has a relatively high level of respect for the military coupled with a political ambivalence toward Westernization, as opposition movements in the other three countries conceived of it under state socialism.

On the second question, concerning the extent to which NATO enlargement has shaped domestic political reform and, equally important for regional stability, informed foreign policies, Simon has remarkably little to say. This is a shame, because someone of Simon's stature could be a powerful advocate for NATO's engagement in domestic policy reform on the basis that the consolidation of democratic oversight, defense budget transparency, and humane treatment of conscripts improves the quality of governance in postcommunist

states. We might infer from Simon's books that he is skeptical of NATO's transformative capacity and truly does view the evolution of civil-military relations as primarily a domestically generated phenomenon. This would be a difficult conclusion to defend, however, given that Simon himself points out that NATO made the Czech-Slovak relationship much easier to manage after the split than it otherwise would have been. Beyond that single, very important insight, the reader is left wondering whether the logic of NATO's stabilizing capacity could be extended elsewhere.

In all likelihood, NATO's inclusiveness has not only stabilized relations between states in Central Europe and between Russia and former Soviet satellites, but it also improved the quality of a range of domestic institutions throughout the region. Speculating about postcommunist Europe without NATO's engagement, one imagines a historically vulnerable set of states with all the domestic dysfunctions that accompany acute military insecurity. All of the democratic adaptations that NATO requires to improve the interface with its members and consolidate a particular set of values would have been the subject of protracted debate. Moreover, without NATO's support, those values, even in the most Western-oriented societies, might never have prevailed. There is indeed evidence of the contingent nature of democratic civil-military relations in the Polish case, where a series of crises and dissent over the value of democratic control delayed the subordination of the general staff to the Ministry of Defense. Although Hungary, Slovakia, and, to a lesser extent, the Czech Republic continue to have problems in consolidating

democratic civil-military relations, it is worth asking where these countries would be if NATO had never introduced the norm as a desirable and functional feature of democratic governance.

For those concerned with NATO's impact on the region, Simon's series is, of course, an invaluable resource in understanding exactly what happened. Yet one has to look further than Simon to see the subtle, as well as the not-so-subtle, ways in which NATO has transformed the politics of postcommunist Europe. Now would be a particularly apt time for Simon to contribute to the debate about whether NATO has salutary political effects, because as the strategic environment has worsened, the United States in particular is manifesting less interest in the quality of democratic institutions in new member states than in foreign policy support for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although cultivating policy loyalty might be politically expedient, NATO could be missing an opportunity afforded by the transition's political and institutional fluidity to facilitate reforms that would not only improve the quality of domestic governance but also help consolidate a widening democratic community.

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Kaufman, Joyce P. *NATO and the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict and the Atlantic Alliance*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. 231pp. \$74