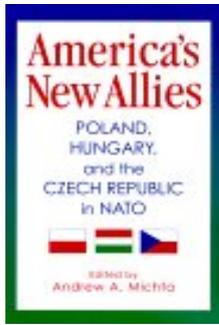


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**America's New Allies: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in NATO**, edited by Andrew A. Michta (1999), 214 pages.



This book is a composite work of several scholars, edited by Dr. Michta who teaches in Memphis, Tennessee. The essence of these competent essays is well stated in the Introduction that explains what the new entrants get from NATO and what they bring to NATO. The essays then explain what would help to integrate these three countries more promptly, while warning about aspects which could easily cause difficulties. The authors are experts on the countries analyzed here, as attested not only by their lucid reasoning but also by their thorough research, requiring proficiency in many languages. Quite logically, they begin with East Germany's army, the *National Volksarmee* (NVA), which in the late 1980s numbered 400,000 soldiers, highly trained, well equipped, and poised as an enemy of the West, along with the elaborate Soviet military system. Suddenly, in 1990 this mighty force was quickly dissolved: 300,000 tons of munitions, 100,000 vehicles, 2,500 cannons, 2,000 tanks, 400 planes and 60 ships were no longer needed. The same applied to some 20 million jackets and pants, stored for army reserves. In short order West Germany's *Bundeswehr* took over and soon thereafter the Soviets returned home. These dramatic changes had been inconceivable a few years earlier.

The Polish chapter informs that almost immediately the country became a linchpin of regional security in this part of Europe. Of course, even casual students of modern history know that earlier diplomatic efforts were made in the 20th century to establish some kind of permanent peace: a *cordon sanitaire* envisioned by the French, Marshall Pilsudski's non-aggression pacts with both powerful neighbors as he thought that Poland was sitting on two shaky stools. Constantly, some kind of a protective shield was needed, and here comes the latest one: become a proud member of NATO, come closer to Western Europe. However, this carries a substantial financial burden explained in great detail. Wisely, a 15-year transition plan for modernization has been prepared, and the list of re-forms is long: the communication systems must be radically changed; many in the "army of colonels" (3,500 of them) need to be retired; Western language skills have to be rapidly improved, computer systems introduced, control of the military shifted to civilian authority. Quite frankly, there is not enough money to modernize the Navy, and the Air Force will probably lease aircraft from the U.S. as it is prohibitively expensive. - - There is no lack of good will, and NATO has acquired an enthusiastic new member, but resources are limited. The world witnesses an amazing spectacle: joined exercises of the Danish, German, and Polish units belonging to the "North East Corps" with headquarters in Szczecin. All this would be impossible without a Polish-German reconciliation.

The essays on Hungary (by Zoltan Barany) and the Czech Republic (by Thomas Szayna) are equally informative. Firstly, the countries are poor. Little Holland, for example, contributes 12 times more in real money for army than these two countries combined. This is not to say, however, that they do not deserve every help that could be rendered; they should also be allowed a considerable leniency. For Poland, the case of Hungary represents a very special case as Hungarians are Poland's best friends. After all, it was the Hungarian princess Jadwiga who brought about the historic 400-year-old union with Lithuania; Stefan Batory was one of the finest Polish kings; the assistance to Polish military refugees in 1939/40 will always be remembered; finally, entire Poland was in mourning when the 1956 Budapest uprising was crushed.

The Czech Republic, created after the breakaway of Slovakia from the former Czechoslovakia, faces many of the same problems as Hungary. The author points out that the Republic actually has no potential enemies. There is no question that this member of NATO is culturally a part of the West.

This book is an outstanding academic work yet easy to read. It should be added that all three countries are extremely eager to join the European Union. But this is a separate subject calling for a new book.

**George Suboczewski**