one element of NATO's purpose. The other is blunting internal rivalries, and in this regard a seat for Russia at the NATO table might not prove quite as advantageous. Some newer NATO members, particularly former Soviet satellites in Eastern and Central Europe, feel that letting Russia join the club is a bit like letting the fox into the henhouse. "Admittedly," Kupchan writes, inviting Russia into NATO "strikes a dissonant chord due to the alliance's Cold War mission, Russia's backsliding on democratic reform, and its heavy-handed approach to its 'near abroad.' " In the past, the alliance has stipulated that new entrants be democratic, have market economies, treat minorities fairly, and be committed to peaceful conflict resolution—none of which exactly describes Russia. But, as Kupchan points out, NATO has made exceptions in the past (Portugal, for example, was an original signatory in 1949 but did not become a democracy until 1974), and strategic concerns certainly warrant making one for Russia now.

In February, Russia identified the expansion of NATO as a primary external threat. The alliance is contemplating extending membership to Georgia and Ukraine, a move that could provoke a crisis with Moscow. One way to avoid such a situation: Admit Russia first.

It's not as though NATO's overtures to Russia would be irreversible. If Russia tried to splinter the alliance or block decision making, the outreach could quickly come to an end. Of course, even if NATO does invite Russia to join, Moscow may reject its offer due to the constraints entailed by membership. But let any absence be on Russia's head, Kupchan argues, and not the result of the Atlantic democracies' failure "to demonstrate the vision or the will to embrace Russia in a pan-European order."

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Measuring Military Might

THE SOURCE: "Economic Development and Military Effectiveness" by Michael Beckley, in ***The Journal of Strategic Studies***, Feb. 2010.

It's the million-dollar question of international relations scholarship: Why are some states stronger than others? The prevailing theory says that military power is the direct result of material resources—size of the defense budget, number of soldiers, or stockpiles of materiel. But in empirical studies, material resources are no better than a coin toss at predicting victory in battle. Other theories have sprung up to compensate: Perhaps "nonmaterial" factors such as democratic institutions, Western culture, or good civil-military relations are the keys to military power. Try again, says Columbia University political scientist Michael Beckley: In 381 battles fought since 1900, the single best measure for predicting which side emerged victorious was a country's income per capita.

Could it really be so simple? Beckley says that the problem with the material resources theory is that it doesn't account for economic development and its bedfellows—technology, infrastructure, and human capital. An undeveloped nation can pour all the money it wants into its military, but without the right tools and educated leaders, it's no match for a rich country's force. (America's loss in Vietnam is the most obvious counterexample; Beckley suggests it is the exception that proves the rule.)

Democracy, Western culture, and other intangibles serve as good proxies for economic development, but Beckley finds that when he holds gross domestic product per capita constant, those other measures fail to explain variations in military power. Democracy actually seems to substantially weaken nations on the whole. It just so happens that democracy has gone hand in hand with economic development, which has masked the negative effects of democracy on military power. That relationship may not last forever, and in the next century, economic (and therefore military) powerhouses may rise that are anything but democratic.

Beckley says that having a tool for accurately predicting a victor could help forestall "foolish" incursions. "Wars," he writes, "are fought over a variety of issues, but most share a fundamental cause: false optimism." When both states think they can win, they'll take up arms. Perhaps if they have a hard measure of their chances of success, weaker countries won't be so quick to sound the trumpets.