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Russia and the Baltics in the Age of NATO Enlargement

STEPHEN J. BLANK

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Since the 1997 Paris and Madrid conferences that created a NATO-Russia Joint Council and ratified NATO's enlargement, Russia has twice modified its Baltic policies. Because those policies are rightly seen as a litmus test of Moscow's goals in Europe, these modifications bear close scrutiny.[1] Clearly Russia's changing Baltic policies demonstrate, if anything can, why it was right to enlarge NATO. Although Russian opposition to NATO's enlargement has not declined, Russia first modified its regional policy in late 1997. It offered new terms to the Baltics, which, though still insufficient to stabilize the region, seemed to represent a small but measurable step away from Moscow's previously negative, unhelpful, and bullying tone that characterized much of Russia's Baltic and European policies. However, in April 1998 Russia unilaterally imposed energy sanctions on Latvia because of incidents of police brutality there, and because of its alleged mistreatment of Russians in Latvia, thereby reverting to its earlier threatening tone and posture. Both policy changes directly relate to Russia's failure to arrest NATO enlargement and the need to prevent NATO's further expansion to those states. But while they signify Russian frustration above all, they also suggest how unreliable and unpredictable a partner Russia really is in Europe.

Before the NATO conferences in May-June 1997, Russian policy reflected Moscow's deep-rooted hegemonic aspirations and inability to accept the Baltic states' sovereignty and inclination to the West. Their lasting and successful Western orientation constantly reminds Moscow of its failure to extend Russian influence abroad.[2] Moscow clearly still cannot accept that reality and still tries to bluster and threaten to compel the Baltic states to change their policy line. Nor is it only the lunatic fringe that views the Baltic states solely as criminal enterprises and intelligence "launch pads" aimed at Russia.[3] That view had surprising resonance even at the government's highest levels.

In February 1997, President Boris Yeltsin's government formally announced its Baltic policies. It supposedly aimed to promote mutual friendship and a model of relations based on economic integration and bilateral cooperation (notably not a true regional security cooperation, which Russia opposes), security and indivisibility of states, and respect for human and ethnic minorities' rights.[4] Russia had strange ideas, however, about achieving these goals. Were the Baltic states to join NATO, one Russian source asserted, that would have a lasting and seriously negative effect on relationships with Russia: "Conversely, the preservation of their [the Baltic states] non-bloc status would be able to create a basis for bilateral and unilateral steps, and quite concrete ones, capable of dispelling the apprehension for security which is still lingering in the Baltic states." [5]

Additionally, protecting Russian minorities' rights in the Baltics remained a fundamental long-term policy goal. Russia listed the conditions for citizenship that it insisted Estonia's and Latvia's Russian minorities must receive, seeking thereby to dictate those states' citizenship laws. Progress on treaties to delimit their borders with Russia would stall, those states were told, unless they adopted Russia's recommendations regarding the broader Russo-Baltic relationship. As NATO and the European Union (EU) had told candidates that they must first resolve border issues, Russia here tried to blackmail those states with permanent exclusion from NATO and possibly the EU unless they surrendered vital aspects of their sovereignty over internal legislation and foreign policy.[6] This insistence that Moscow can rightly intervene in the Baltic states' domestic and foreign policies owing to alleged discrimination against Russians remains a critical element of Russian policy and enjoys much support among the nationalist and communist opposition in the Duma.

Moscow also complained that since the Baltic states misuse Russian goods against Russian interests--though Moscow has never specified how this misuse occurs--mutual economic ties remained underdeveloped. Therefore, state and customs controls must be strengthened, according to the Kremlin. Yeltsin also advocated granting favorable transport

conditions to Kaliningrad by means of a corridor through Lithuania. Poland had already rebuffed Moscow's previous demand for a corridor. Now Russia sought to ensure a route to Kaliningrad that would separate Poland as a NATO member from the Baltic states.[7]

Moscow also demanded increased cultural cooperation to overcome Baltic fears of its "cultural imperialism." But this agreement could create a basis for future cultural-political agitation within those states, which could allow Russia to intervene in local politics.[8] Finally, Moscow demanded an end to Baltic-based criminal threats against Russia. Since Russian criminals had confessed to fomenting ethnic enmity in the Baltic states, and Baltic governments believe Moscow directs such operations, the Baltic states rejected this arrogant and hypocritical demand outright.[9] These demands merely culminated an anti-Baltic barrage that had begun long before; they displayed clearly Moscow's bizarre notions about its relations with the Baltic states.

In late 1996 for instance, Valery Loshchinin, Director of the Second European Department of Russia's Foreign Ministry, stated that Russian diplomacy's strategic task in the Baltics was to "overcome the negative heritage of the past and to form medium-term good neighborly interstate relations." In addition to the usual harangues against Latvia and Estonia due to their policies toward resident Russians, he announced Yeltsin's instructions to conduct a policy of economic warfare in trade and bilateral economic relations with the Baltic states to induce them to reverse those policies. The aim was "to eliminate or to reduce to the minimum parasitic mediation of the Baltic states in Russia's foreign trade." [10] This is clearly a strange way to make friends.

After the Helsinki Summit with President Clinton in March 1997, Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov mentioned a new approach to the Baltics which purportedly included "guarantees" to regional states. But Primakov's later statements to the EU's commissioners and the ongoing demand for guarantees concerning minorities as a precondition to border treaties signaled Russia's continuing policy to exclude the Baltic states from any European security organization and force them to seek Russian security guarantees.[11] Thus Moscow repeatedly threatened economic sanctions against Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia throughout 1997 and into 1998.[12] Threatened new sanctions represent not a new policy but earlier threats that Moscow sought to impose at the first opportunity.

Although other European states support Russian protests against police brutality and discrimination against Russians, and announced their opposition to Latvian membership in NATO or the EU, Russia's actions represented a significant and ominous departure from the accepted European way of resolving such problems. Here, as in so many other areas, Russia preferred to score short-term points rather than to formulate constructive long-term solutions.[13] In fact, Primakov recently restated Moscow's right to intervene in a heavy-handed, unilateral fashion on behalf of Russians there, depriving international organizations of a chance to rectify the situation and showing again that Moscow cannot accept Baltic sovereignty and independence.[14] After all, one incident of police brutality and some bombings by terrorists pale as a human rights issue demanding foreign intervention and sanctions in comparison to Russia's basically unchallenged brutality in Chechnya. Nevertheless, this incident shows the explosive charge attached to the issue of the status of Russians in the Baltics.

Russian leaders still regularly charge the Baltics as well as the nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with mistreating local Russians and demand that they all revise their domestic legislation, surrender territory to Russia, or grant Russians dual citizenship rights and preferences. This arrogance resembles nothing so much as the principle of extra-territoriality, the 19th century's most visible sign of colonialism.[15] Moscow threatens to use economic and maybe even military measures against any state that refuses such intrusion in its internal affairs. The chairman of the Duma's Foreign Policy Committee, Vladimir Lukin, reissued this threat in a New Year statement for 1998 that Moscow's embassy in Washington openly distributed, signifying its official character.[16] But while Baltic citizenship policies may be strategically unwise or objectionable for a host of reasons, they compare quite favorably with Western laws, as resident Turks in Germany can tell us.[17] Russia's continuing threats only display Russia's inability to face European and Baltic realities.

In April 1997 Yeltsin wrote to Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis that measures taken to improve the status of Russians in Latvia "remain and will remain the decisive factor" in bilateral relations.[18] Primakov has repeatedly stated that the entire system of East-West relations depends on whether or not the Baltic states enter into NATO, a transparent effort at blackmail and at forcing NATO to take Russian interests into account before consulting its own interests and

objectives.[19]

Russia blatantly tried to coerce the smaller Baltic states and make a deal over their heads with the larger states. This conformed to the general pattern of Russian policy in central Europe. From Estonia to Bulgaria, Russia has consistently rejected serious dialogue with local governments about their security interests, insisting instead that it is entitled to an unequal and uncontested role in European security. Russia's Minister Plenipotentiary in Bulgaria, Andrei Shvedov, said recently,

Our position is that NATO's expansion should not be effected to the detriment of any country. No state should be deprived of the right to express its opinion on this matter. Still, the issue remains of whether the entry of a certain state into NATO represents a threat to the security of another country.[20]

Moscow, it seems, should have a veto over the security policies of small European states. Similarly it claims the right to deal solely with the great powers from a position of equality, shunning responsibility for Europe but demanding that the West take its legitimate interests into account.[21] Since Russia cannot accept the legitimacy of other central European states' interests in formulating its own policies, it cannot play a large role in Europe, a consideration that eludes but does not trouble Russian policymakers. Moscow craves status, not responsibility, in Europe.[22]

Accordingly, central and eastern European nations view Russia as a revisionist, unpredictable state with a hegemonic, unrealistic agenda, and a grating, bullying tone that evokes past threats. Russia appears unable or unwilling to accept the need to conduct a policy based on European realities. As Monika Wohlfeld of the Western European Union's Institute for Security Studies writes,

So far, Russia has not been able to make a clear impact on the evolving European security structure. . . . Deprived of the bipolar relationship with the United States, Moscow appears unable--if not downright unwilling--to participate on an equal footing with other Europeans in the establishment of a new network of security institutions, and Russia's participation in the Contact Group and then IFOR is considered by Moscow to be a meager substitute for a more effective instrument with which to wield its influence over European events.[23]

Russia's refusal to accept the canons of European international relations reinforces dangerous and unfounded regional prejudices that Russia is not a true European power.[24]

Moscow's revisionism in the Baltics and within the Commonwealth of Independent States contributes to that perception. Primakov told the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in September 1996 that,

Today, the balance of forces resulting from the confrontation of the two blocs no longer exists, but the Helsinki agreements are not being fully applied. After the end of the Cold War certain countries in Europe--the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia--have disintegrated. A number of new states were formed in this space, but their borders are neither fixed nor guaranteed by the Helsinki agreements. Under the circumstances, there is a need for the establishment of a new system of security.[25]

Russia also demanded guarantees of its integrity against secessionist threats even as the Ministry of Defense insisted on retaining the old Soviet borders; Primakov confirmed what Russian observers called the duplicity of Russian border policy.[26]

Obviously, this suicidal course of action did not prevent NATO from enlarging or Russia from continuing to risk exclusion from Europe's security agenda. Since then, however, Moscow has made concessions that had previously seemed most unlikely. It signed a treaty recognizing Ukraine's borders and outlined other unilateral military and political concessions vis-à-vis the Baltic states. Although Russia still sharply attacks enlargement, calling it a mistake and threatening to withdraw from partnership with the West if a new round of enlargement occurs relative to the Baltics, Russia began to talk of a vague system of regional guarantees with NATO.[27] Russia also talked of settling outstanding border issues with all three Baltic states, and the need for economic partnership. Perhaps the European Union's 1997 invitation to Estonia showed Russia that it will be left behind, given the EU's barriers to Russian trade, if it does not improve economic ties to the Baltic states before they join the EU.[28] And Russian criticism of Baltic

nationality policies was noticeably milder after the 1997 Paris and Madrid conferences. Nonetheless, Russia still seems determined to gain leverage over Baltic domestic legislation and security policy and to prevent NATO from moving farther to the east. The new sanctions showed that Moscow would sooner pander to domestic chauvinists than consider its greater interests in Europe.

Indeed, both the concessions of 1997 and then the 1998 sanctions demonstrated the rightness of NATO's enlargement. The first steps produced a reaction from Russia with two outcomes: it rebutted the prediction of opponents of enlargement and confirmed the arguments of enlargement's supporters.[29] NATO enlargement obliged Russia to find a modus vivendi with the Baltic states and to develop a more restrained policy in the West even if these are only tactical steps to prevent subsequent enlargement of the Alliance. But because the 1997 concessions were merely tactical, Russia, by its bullying tactics in the region, confirmed the need for NATO enlargement to restrain its atavistic imperial drives. As long as Russian policy remains unstable, that hedge is absolutely essential.[30] If one of the principal purposes of NATO is to protect the security of small states, then Russia has again gone a long way to justify enlargement.[31] The 1997 initiative may prove to be tactical; it would also herald a general turn in Russia's hitherto abortive and unappealing European policy. In either case NATO must restrain tendencies toward instability in Europe and Russia must show that it is a responsible power.

Explaining Russia's New Approach

Russia's threats have produced precisely the opposite of their intended aim. Estonia headed a 1996 survey of Russia's main enemies, striking testimony to the absurdity of Moscow's policies.[32] Moscow squandered mutual progress to more normal relationships and to economic-political opportunities in the Baltics and more generally in Europe. The new sanctions repeat this pattern. Moscow's hectoring and overbearing tone reminded everyone why they feared Russia and why NATO should expand. But as Russia could obviously not carry out its threats, the threats only stiffened Baltic contempt for Russia and the belief that dealing with the issue of local Russians was not a Baltic responsibility but a Western problem, as is the provision of security.[33] Indeed, it soon became clear that Russia could not implement its threats, some of which actually went against the private interests of powerful sectors within its government. Nobody gained from the tension, and Russia remains the Wizard of Oz.

These threats occurred even while economic and trade relationships were developing, demonstrating in material terms how much everyone could gain from normal relations. But there were other security costs to Russia.[34] Its obsession with NATO led Russia to overlook the European Union. Most analysts agree with the assertion that "Moscow's foreign-policy experts do not have Brussels on their map," and that Russia has consistently underestimated the EU's value for European and Russian security.[35] So, while Russia welcomes the EU's extension to Finland, Sweden, and the Baltics, it overlooked this enlargement's revolutionary implications. As Sherman Garnett has written,

Russia's obsession with NATO obscures the implications of Baltic membership in the European Union, which will have profound consequences for Russia, accelerating the reorientation of trade away from Russia and erecting new economic barriers between the Baltics and Russia. EU rules and policies cannot help but affect Russia's access to Baltic markets and ports. There are also security implications from such membership, both within the terms of EU itself and via the direct links between the core members of the EU and NATO. This security linkage is precisely why leading exponents of NATO enlargement see European Union membership for the Baltics as an important part of a western post-enlargement strategy for the region. EU membership will mean that the Baltic states are "lost" to Russia as well. Many in the Russian foreign policy community do not understand that the EU's coming to the Russian border would also be a revolutionary event and a direct challenge to the current foreign policy consensus on Russia's status vis-à-vis the states of the former USSR.[36]

Russia's bluster was economically and politically counterproductive. The end of Soviet rule spawned many opportunities for creating a durable basis for the Baltic littoral's regional integration in a network of relationships that facilitate Europe's broader integration. The Baltic ports of St. Petersburg, Vyborg, Kronstadt, Riga, Tallinn, Kaliningrad, and Szczecin could cooperate to build a web of economic relationships that they hope could make them each or collectively "Baltic Hong Kongs." Another applicable model is the Maquiladora zone on the US-Mexican border, where US investment has created 500,000 jobs.[37]

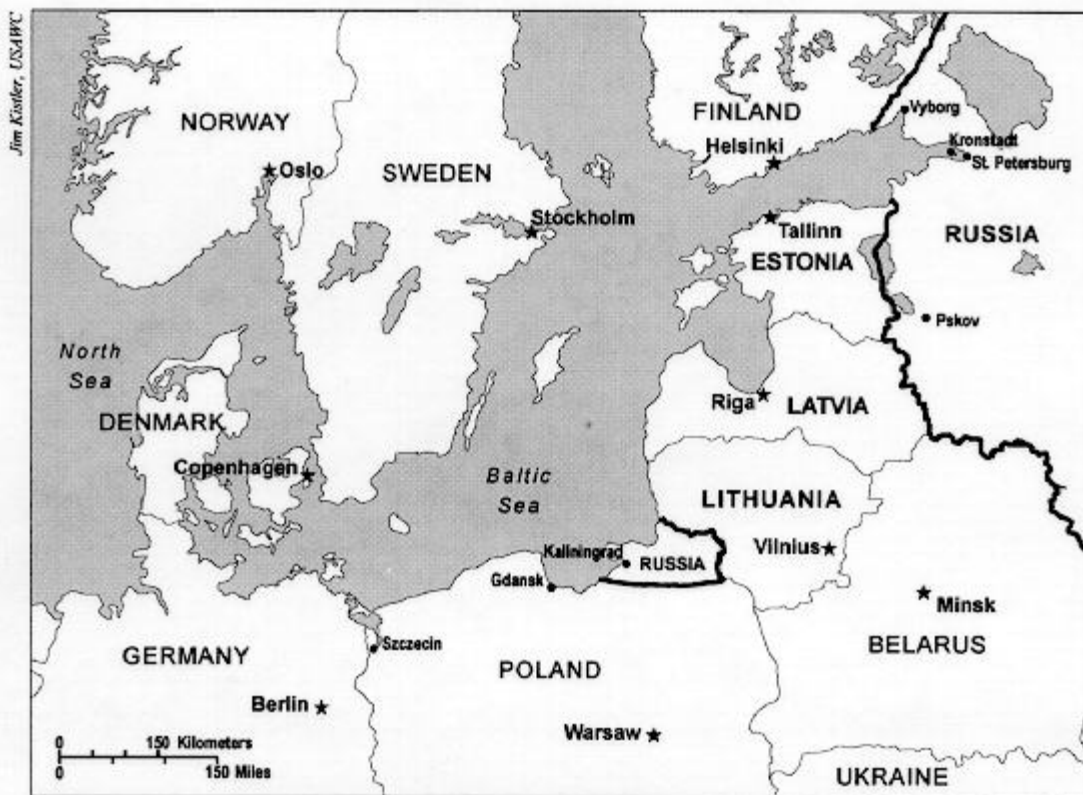


Figure 1. The Baltic Region.

Some of the most promising projects are large-scale transport programs to connect hitherto separated cities and regions. The key project is the "Via Baltica" from Tallinn to the Polish-Lithuanian border, where it feeds into roads to Warsaw and the planned Trans-European highway from Gdansk to Istanbul. Northern connections to Finland would go via ferry in the Baltic Sea. Separate plans to build highways from St. Petersburg to Tallinn and Helsinki would tie St. Petersburg and its hinterland to Europe and to German projects to build up the Baltic coast in eastern Germany. Russia is also developing major port and energy facility projects in the Baltic. The projects reflect the perception of local elites that such major infrastructure projects are vital preconditions of future growth.[38]

Heightened tension between Russia and its neighbors to the west inhibits plans for economic growth and exacerbates political antagonisms throughout Europe by entangling Baltic security with NATO expansion. Thus one reason why Kaliningrad's economic situation has deteriorated more than Russia's since 1991 is Moscow's inclination to military-type rhetoric and solutions to Russo-Baltic security issues. That trend has stifled European interest in investment and inhibited sensible initiatives such as creating a regional free economic zone. For Kaliningrad and Russia's northwestern provinces to flourish, Moscow, Europe, and the Baltic states must overcome the vicious circle of threats and conciliation.[39] All sides should adopt nonprovocative rhetoric and policies.

Unhappily it seems unlikely that this will happen any time soon, despite Moscow's recent tactical gambits. Nationalist emotion and fear outweigh the lure of economic integration. Lithuania's stated policy on Kaliningrad--"to encourage Kaliningrad to become more open and more ready to cooperate with neighboring states, progressively turning the enclave, economically and politically, into an integral part of the Baltic region,"[40]--can only excite Russia's deepest fears about its intentions there. And Estonia officially rejects Russian government investment in its territory. Russian foreign policy elites believe Russia's integrity is threatened on all sides; consequently attacks against this highly neuralgic point in Russian foreign policy arouse great anger.[41]

But Russia's economic policy does not benefit its national or local interests either. It places high tariffs on Estonian goods coming into Pskov Gubernia, penalizing Pskov's efforts to become a gateway to northern Europe.[42] Russia seeks to double its port capabilities in the Baltic to compete with the Baltic states even as they compete with Russia and among themselves for access to Russian regions and trade.[43] Thus geopolitical rivalry inhibits opportunities for economic growth for everyone and reduces mutual benefits to all states, Russia included, in the region.[44] Moreover,

Moscow evidently does not grasp that the Baltic states' membership in the EU would remove the economic warfare card from its arsenal and greatly strengthen their economies vis-à-vis Russia. It is inconceivable that Russian gains from economic warfare against an EU member would outweigh its losses.[45]

Accordingly, Russia's Baltic policies have hardened the Baltic states' desire to look West and the West's inclination to include them under its umbrella, and have reduced the economic gains available to northwestern Russia through unfettered economic relations. Russia also eroded its position in Kaliningrad, where Lithuania could and did apply pressure over transit rights. Finally, Russia's foolish and futile threats awakened fears of its policies across Europe, leading Denmark, Poland, Sweden, and other states to champion the Baltic states' interests and spreading an image of Moscow as an incorrigible imperialist. Russia's futile threats arguably made a second round of NATO enlargement more likely or at least more easily justifiable.[46]

This truculent policy makes it difficult to find a settlement for regional issues that safeguards Moscow's truly vital security interests. NATO enlargement to the Baltics presents Moscow with serious strategic problems; Moscow's attitude makes it increasingly more difficult to correct them. If one regards NATO as exclusively a military alliance, the correlation of forces Moscow then faces is highly negative.[47] Second, were NATO forces to be placed in the Baltics, they would be only 75 miles from St. Petersburg, able to launch tactical aircraft carrying precision-guided or nuclear weapons that would be less than an hour's flight from St. Petersburg and Moscow.[48] Third, NATO could launch either conventional or nuclear sea-based missiles from the Baltic coast, greatly enhancing the potential for a surprise attack and gaining further control of the flight pattern for such missile launches against Russia. Fourth, NATO could blockade the Baltic Sea against Russia; and fifth, it could surround and cut off Kaliningrad from Russia.[49] Such contingencies would have disastrous effects on Russia. Blockades in the Baltic have effectively crippled its maritime commerce in previous wars, with severe military-economic consequences for Russia. These threats remain very real to Russian elites. Admiral Feliks Gromov, commander in chief of the Russian navy, wrote that increased defense cooperation among Baltic, NATO, and Nordic states and associated pressures to demilitarize the Kaliningrad Military District would leave that district defenseless, threaten Russia's maritime interests in the Baltic Sea, and render Russia vulnerable to blockade. NATO's proposed next round of enlargement therefore could threaten Kaliningrad province, which is cut off from Russia proper, as well as vital Russian maritime interests and European stability.[50] Gromov wrote:

It is naive to say that the approach of the [NATO] bloc's armed forces toward the Russian border will increase anybody's security. Quite the contrary, such an action will undermine any attempts to strengthen stability on the European continent. The ultimate aim of such consolidation of the above mentioned countries is clearly the limitation of Russia's influence in the region, the securing of unilateral political, economic, and military advantages and, as a result, crowding Russia out from the community of Baltic states, limiting to the maximum its access to the Baltic Sea, and possibly also revising the Helsinki accords on the inviolability of the European borders.[51]

These dangers, in a Europe at peace where Russia faces no threats, should lead Moscow to try to adopt a conciliatory tone toward its Baltic and other neighbors to allay their fears and obviate the need for NATO enlargement to the Baltics. Instead, Moscow's heavy-handedness has increased the European fears which Russia claims constitute a threat against its own vital interests and security.

Russia's protests won a NATO-Russia Council for it at Paris and Madrid. But they failed to prevent NATO from moving to the borders of Kaliningrad and the former Soviet borders which Russia believes still are its own borders--or should be. While no rational analyst truly believes that there is a military threat from this phase of enlargement, Moscow remains dissatisfied. In its view, only if NATO's new members, especially Poland, are demilitarized, and the NATO-Russia Council becomes an established force in European politics, will Russia have achieved its minimum aims. But rather than try to bring about such an outcome by conciliation and steadfast support for the new status quo, Moscow has waged a fierce diplomatic rearguard action against enlargement per se. This meant shunning opportunities for meaningful dialogue with central or eastern European states before the 1997 conferences in Paris and Madrid.

Russia's aggressive behavior toward the Baltic states and what subsequently appeared to be concessions to Ukraine and

the Baltic states may not have been accidental. As the well-informed and insightful Dmitry Trenin of the Carnegie Endowment in Moscow writes,

It is worth noting that the more sophisticated antagonists of NATO enlargement on the Russian side decided to oppose this enlargement on the banks of the Vistula and the Vltava and risk a political skirmish with the West, only in order to avoid a real political battle on the Niemen and the Narova. Thus, while the Baltic States are still perceived in Russia to be of little importance per se, their symbolic importance is rivaled by few other issues which concern Russia. Alongside the problem of the Caspian Sea oil, the future security alignment of the Baltic States has become one of the principal factors impacting on Russian-Western relations as a whole. In the worst-case scenario, if mishandled, the Baltic issue might well serve as a banana skin for this relationship.[52]

Many European analysts agree with Trenin that this region could become a bellwether of European security. Failure to reconcile Baltic, Western, and Russian interests could stimulate renewed East-West tension.[53] The 1991 Soviet coups in the Baltics and in Moscow ultimately stimulated demands in central and east Europe for NATO membership and the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in NATO. Renewed regional pressure could have similar or more severe consequences for Russia, the Baltic region, and Europe.[54] Therefore much European diplomacy now revolves around the issues of NATO's enlargement and Baltic exclusion from it.

Assessing Russia's New Baltic Policy

By mid-1997 Russian diplomacy in the Baltics had reached an impasse and was incurring sizable costs throughout the West. A new approach was needed. At a series of conferences and in diplomatic notes, ending in Yeltsin's state visit to Sweden where he formally outlined Russia's new stance, Moscow offered the Baltic states, Finland, Sweden, and implicitly NATO a regional security package. Russia proposed what its spokesmen called a three-tiered policy intended to create "a regional model of interaction" that fit Europe's security architecture and regional specifics.[55] In this proposal the Baltic states would have had two options: bilateral Russian security guarantees to each of them, or agreements based on a three-plus-one formula that did not rule out cross-guarantees by the United States, other NATO members, or all of NATO. Yeltsin said that Russia offered unilateral guarantees of the security of the Baltic states based on international law and solemnized through bilateral or multilateral treaties, the latter to include all the Baltic states. Yeltsin also announced a 40-percent cut in infantry and naval forces in northwestern Russia, including Kaliningrad; called for a hotline between the military command in Kaliningrad and those of the Baltic states, procedures for visiting military sites, joint control of the Baltic airspace, and joint exercises of military transport; and suggested cooperation on issues to overcome natural and man-made disasters.[56] Russia also advanced proposals for a northern European regional security system that could include several types of confidence-building measures: economic, environmental, and humanitarian. The environmental issues are urgent and include cleaning up toxic and nuclear waste and decommissioning Soviet and Russian nuclear-powered submarines; humanitarian matters were related to the conditions of Russian populations remaining in the Baltic states.[57]

The Baltic states, Finland, and Sweden immediately rejected these calls for a regional security system. They opposed the idea of northern Europe having regional security guarantees apart from the rest of Europe, calling the proposal an anachronism because it would flout the principle of the indivisibility of European security.[58] They also justifiably suspected Russian aims, since Russian analysts and diplomats broadcast that one reason for these proposals was to remove the Baltic argument that they live in a "gray zone," face-to-face with an ontological threat. Now they would have no grounds or need to enter NATO.[59] Indeed, much of the regional suspicion was justified because the reduction in armed forces, though welcomed, clearly owed little or nothing to Baltic security issues or threats and much to the bankruptcy of Russia's bloated military machine, which has finally begun to undergo reform and systematic downsizing.

Another reason for rejecting Moscow's offers is that the Baltic states were about to sign a Baltic Security Pact with the United States; the pact was signed in January 1998. Although the Baltic states know well that they will not enter NATO soon because Washington has told them to forget about the second round, they still believe that an active sign of US interest in their security will keep NATO's door open for the future.[60] They insist that they see no alternative to them other than NATO and the European Union.[61] The Baltic states view membership in these organizations as

the final goal of a policy to counter the main threat they face--which is not military attack, but economic-political pressure combined with the threat of military force to bring them back into Russia's sphere of influence. While they reject the widespread Western claim that they cannot defend themselves or that the West could not help them, they state that if they are outside of Europe's security organizations they will be vulnerable to Russian pressure for creation of a sphere of influence.[62]

Russian security guarantees, multilateral or unilateral, for the Baltics or for all of northern Europe, point to a division of Europe into rival spheres of influence.[63] Fear of Russia still drives much of the region's foreign policy; Russia exerts a constant gravitational pull that only integration with the West can counter. Otherwise that gravitational force, which the Baltic states generally see as an anti-European force at its root and as a threat to their national survival, will presumably triumph.[64]

Furthermore, the Baltic states, Sweden, and Finland all see that the essential condition for accepting Russia's initiatives is that they remain outside of NATO and limit their sovereign freedom in security policy, an absolutely impossible demand for them.[65] Such guarantees would confirm in law a subordinate place for the Baltic states as part of Russia's sphere.[66] While admittedly membership in the EU and NATO entails a loss of members' freedom to conduct unilateral policies, for the Baltic states all the other alternatives are unthinkable and are therefore excluded.[67] Security means NATO and the EU even if the Baltic states are finding it hard to work together to join the EU.[68]

Still, it would probably be wise for them and the Nordic states to pursue Russia's proposals for confidence-building measures and for cooperation on economic and environmental issues, especially around Kaliningrad, to reduce tensions there and to allow for economic, not military, solutions to the exclave's problems.[69] These proposed confidence-building measures offer a chance for continuing dialogue at lower levels of all governments and their armed forces, greater transparency, and, of course, the building of mutual confidence. As for the guarantees and conditions that Russia attached to its proposals, while the United States and other governments welcomed the spirit of the Russian package, none of them will accept it. Its insincerity and the aspect of "too little, too late" is transparent to observers.[70] In view of how little Russia has actually done, and how little it can truly afford to do for Russians abroad, the entire panoply of threats to do something now in the economic sphere strikes Russian and outside observers as empty gestures.[71] Therefore confidence-building measures that cost nothing, provide mutual gains and confidence, and advance the dialogue, however difficult they may be, are worthwhile on their own and may help extricate Russia from its conceptual and political impasses.

Moscow's 1997 initiative undoubtedly represented narrow self-interest, yet it reflected a turn away from pressure caused by NATO's enlargement, just as NATO's enlargement also obliged Moscow to come to terms with Ukraine over the Black Sea Fleet, Sevastopol, and their mutual borders.[72] But we cannot assume that Russia's acceptance of reality is now complete. Russia has so far failed to meet the commitments coming out of the treaty with Ukraine on delineating the Russo-Ukrainian state border, and Russian officials have shown a "very superficial and irresponsible" attitude toward doing so.[73] The attempted sanctions represent the triumph of a policy of regression, but have influential champions in Moscow, both in the Duma and in the Yeltsin government. Primakov, Lukin, et al. continue to threaten the Baltic states on the empty grounds of concern for Russians abroad and attach conditionality to the new regional security package.[74] Evidently Russia believes that patience and perseverance will lead to acceptance of the 1997 package, while Primakov has publicly stated that he believes the Baltic states will get nowhere with the United States, asserting that the US will tell them to make a rapprochement with Russia, supposedly on Russian terms.[75] Yet he also stated that even as he threatens Estonia, relations are improving, despite Estonia's public denials of improvements.[76] The decision to impose unilateral sanctions shows that Moscow cannot resist the temptation to snatch cheap victories and play to domestic galleries rather than help to pacify the region or Europe as a whole. Where good faith is hard to come by and easily squandered, Moscow opted for the latter the first chance it got. It will be some time before Russian protestations of good faith find sympathetic listeners in the West.

Sadly, Russia still believes that it can neutralize the consequences of the eastward spread of European integration even as it remains blind to the implications of the European Union's enlargement, the effects of Russian policies, and Russia's own economic weakness. Russia's domestic situation precludes acting on the regular threats of economic warfare that it makes against the Baltic states. In fact, Russia's weakness precludes anything other than a loud and self-

defeating policy of bluff. Journalist Stanislav Kondrashov observes,

In its present condition Russia has neither the economic strength to influence neighbors in the requisite direction, nor the political strategy and will emanating from the head of state to compensate for that lack of strength. By abandoning Russians in Chechnya to the mercy of fate Moscow has shown its other, much larger diasporas in the former Union republics that it is futile to pin hopes on it. However, given an intelligent policy, the diasporas would be an extremely powerful lever of influence.[77]

Similarly, the weight of private interests in the Duma and the administration and the latter's chronic bureaucratic muddle have already undermined efforts to intimidate neighboring states. Twenty-eight different state ministries and departments are dealing with the problems of the Baltic Russians even as regional governments, like Pskov's, conduct their own foreign policy and make deals with the Baltic states despite Moscow's tough line. And they do so for sound economic reasons, because Moscow cannot or will not conduct rational economic policy or show any concern for the fate of its internal political structures.[78] State officials, even as they loudly insist on the economic levers they possess, are reduced to complaining about "pro-Western lobbies who hinder major transportation projects that do not benefit them" or major economic projects.[79] The Duma's avoidance of ratifying the border treaty with Lithuania is a case in point.

Although the opposition challenges its legality and cites the unsettled legal resolution of conditions in the Vilnius and Klapieda districts, evidently the real reason is more complicated:

Lithuanian political observers, noting such drastically dissimilar points of view on the part of the Russian president and the Duma's "left-wing" deputies, point out that the deputies are clearly not keen on seeing the main movement of freight traffic [as regulated by the treaty] go via Kaliningrad once the Russian government removes privileges on freight shipments via Latvian and Estonian ports. Once deprived of the possibility of servicing a part of Russian exports and imports, those countries' [the Baltic states] ports may become unprofitable. It is no secret that the aforementioned ports are controlled by Russian organized crime groups. Therefore, what some Duma deputies are trying to camouflage as "concern for Russian interests" in fact takes the form of lobbying by Mafioso structures which realize that, with the signing of the Russian-Lithuanian border treaty, it is Kaliningrad, not Ventspils or Tallinn, that will become the main transshipment point for Russian freight.[80]

So, if Kaliningrad's freight shipments and rates increase, their profits fall by the same amount. A similar situation prevails regarding the construction of oil terminals and shipments of energy products to and from the Baltic ports. The well-known chaos of Russian energy policy--with private actors usurping national interests--is well-established in the Caspian. Evidently it is equally noticeable in the Baltic region.[81]

Likewise, the 1998 sanctions are as tied to Russian domestic economic issues as they are to relations with other nations. Sanctions on shipping oil through Latvia's port, Ventspils, were needed because the falling price of oil, which has devastated the economy, obliged Russia to ship less oil abroad. Thus the sanctions decision killed several birds with one stone. It played to the domestic nationalist lobby and to those who want to see Russia pound a table and thereby gain satisfaction. The government also gestured to the oil industry by imposing sanctions on the same day that Russia, in response to OPEC's pleas, cut back its oil production. So Moscow reckoned it might as well cut the oil shipments back through Latvia.[82] However, this act only confirms that Russia is an "unpredictable and impulsive neighbor whose actions are too dependent on the current situation in domestic policy." [83]

In Conclusion

As in so much of Russian economic-political life, privatization of the state, seizure of state power for private ends, corruption, and the pursuit of unilateral private policies for short-term gain at the expense of the strategic long term have become the norm.[84] Blame for Russia's failing Baltic policy, its futile threats, its failure to open dialogues with the Baltic states or Europe, and the policy of "too little, too late" ultimately rests with Yeltsin and his government, not in the stars or in Washington. While the West has to be forthcoming and induce further learning, Russia must change for its own good.

Russia must also change faster, because it is already apparent that the security debate in the Baltic littoral is moving against it and toward NATO expansion. Although nobody will now provoke Russia by moving NATO into the Baltics, enlargement of the European Union, NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and the new US-Baltic charter all indicate a gathering tide of integration that is sweeping those states along with it. Perhaps it will include Russia as well when that country is ready to move in that direction. Some Russian observers already believe that one day the Baltic states will be in NATO and Russia can do nothing much about it. In 1992-93 Russia could have had Finlandization in the region, its current goal, but spurned it. It is now both irretrievable and unacceptable.[85]

Finland's political elites are also clearly and gradually becoming aware that if Finland wants to help shape the evolving European security system, it might be left behind if it does not rethink its relationship with NATO.[86] Similar portents have begun appearing in Sweden, whose defense industry now frankly admits that it cannot survive without intimate cooperation with NATO defense industries.[87] Security analysts publicly state that Sweden should start thinking seriously about more intimate cooperation with NATO and even eventual membership. Certainly Sweden's opposition would approve that course, even if the government remains committed to neutrality. In any case, we now know that secret Swedish defense plans during the Cold War envisaged close cooperation with NATO in the event of a war in Europe. Bo Hultdt of the Foreign Policy Institute has remarked on the visible change to a more positive governmental attitude toward NATO and to the idea of adapting NATO materiel for the Swedish armed forces. And others join him in noting that Sweden's government either is adopting or should adopt a more pro-NATO outlook.[88] Finally, Defense Minister Bjorn von Sydow thinks that regional security would increase if the Baltic states joined NATO and that Kaliningrad is not a problem because Russian sovereignty there is uncontested even though it then would be sandwiched between two NATO members, Lithuania and Poland.[89]

Despite its palpable desperation to keep the Baltic and Nordic states out of NATO, Russia still has nothing to offer them other than to denounce such a policy and to demonstrate its capability for making trouble. Obviously this is not an attractive proposition for anyone in Europe. It is now clear that Europe can move forward with Russia and restrain its urge to disrupt European security, even if European initiatives come slowly and hesitantly. Unfortunately Russia has wasted the last eight years in Europe and will probably not catch up anytime soon, for he who stands still today falls further behind. This principle applies to economics as well as to politics, and both processes apply equally to the Baltics.

Russia's abdication of constructive responsibility has forced all of Europe and NATO to fill that vacuum and lead the search for security systems where Russia will have a much more limited part than might otherwise have been the case. It did not have to be so, but as many have observed, nobody can isolate Russia in Europe except for Russia. Sadly, to a very large extent, Moscow has achieved exactly that result.

NOTES

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