

The Baltic Republics and Kaliningrad Oblast

The Baltic republics have been of particular concern. Their governments did not join the CFE, because in the early 1990s they were primarily concerned with getting Soviet troops to leave their soil, and the treaty was regarded as a vehicle by which the very presence could be legitimated. As Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were constituent republics of the Soviet Union rather than members of the Warsaw Pact, their comparatively early assertion of secessionism during the period of the Gorbachev reforms signaled that Moscow has lost control of the pace of domestic change. Moscow responded to Baltic secessionism with a non-violent display of military force in March 1990.

Prior to 1997 Russian policy toward the "near abroad" — initially the "diaspora linkage" aspect of the withdrawal of Russian troops²⁰ — testified to a Russian inability to accept either Baltic independence or the Western aspirations of the Baltic peoples. Even after the 1997 Helsinki Summit with President Clinton, at which President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov announced a new approach to the region, Moscow asserted more than once its right to intervention based on the continuing presence of ethnic Russians. Moscow's unwillingness to provide the reassurance the Baltic republics needed from their former master produced the result Moscow wished above all to avoid. It foreclosed Baltic neutrality by heightening the concern of Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, and the United States for the security of the republics and thereby made their admission to NATO more, rather than less, likely.²¹

The Russian *oblast* of Kaliningrad on the Baltic coast nestled between Lithuania and Poland adds a further geopolitical wrinkle. The *oblast* has a population of about 900,000. It is home to the Russian Baltic Sea Fleet and the Yantar shipyard. It offers the only ice-free port on the Baltic, without which the Russian navy would be unable to operate effectively in the area. It also has the Baltic's largest fishing fleet and possesses undeveloped oil reserves, a reputation as a haven for organized crime, decaying industry, and worst pollution problem in northeastern Europe.²² Although the Putin government obviously feels the need to maintain a military presence in the enclave in order to deter potential secessionism, it appears to have decided against a "fortress Kaliningrad" policy and is scaling back its commitment. The contrast between Moscow's often petulant reaction to the first round of NATO enlargement and its relaxed reception of the much more ambitious second round agreed upon by Alliance members at the Prague Summit is remarkable, especially as the Prague meeting included a NATO offer of accession talks to the Baltic republics.²³

During the 1990s Western governments intermittently suggested that the signature of the Baltic republics on the CFE Treaty could be considered an astute gesture toward Moscow and a ticket of entry for eventual NATO membership; for its part, Moscow repeatedly urged that the republics join the treaty and suggested the issue could be critical to Moscow's relations with NATO. When the Alliance proceeded with its membership offer in the absence of a Baltic signature, its action testified both to a confidence that Moscow is helpless to thwart or complicate broad NATO expansion and an acknowledgment that NATO, not the CFE, constituted the primary security-shaping vehicle of Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴ A creative approach to assuaging mutual Russian/Baltic suspicions could involve developing stronger military-to-military links through the Partnership-for-Peace (PfP) and/or through the integration of Russian military units in the joint Danish-German-Polish Corps. Denmark, Finland and Sweden too have developed a number of joint military initiatives with the Baltic states.²⁵

²⁰ Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Compatriot Games: Explaining the 'Diaspora Linkage' in Russia's Military Withdrawal from the Baltic States," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.53, No.5, 2001, pp.771-791.

²¹ Stephen Blank, "Russia, NATO Enlargement, and the Baltic States," *World Affairs*, Vol.160, No.3, 1998, pp.115-125.

²² Garthoff, pp.394-399, 419-420; Stephen J. Blank, "Russia and the Baltics in the Age of NATO Enlargement," *Parameters*, Vol.28, no.3, 1998, pp.50-68; John Burbank, "What to do about Kaliningrad?" *Europe*, Issue 421, November, 2002.

²³ Dmitri Trenin, "Silence of the Bear," *NATO Review*, Spring, 2002. <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2002/issue1/art3.html> In all, seven states were invited to accession talks: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

²⁴ The governments of the Baltic republics, on the other hand, feared that their signature on the CFE Treaty could be used as an alibi for refusing them NATO membership. Hans-Joachim Schmidt, "Auf dem Weg zum NATO-Beitritt: Die konventionellen Rüstungskontrolle als Stabilitätselement für den baltischen Raum," HSEK-Report 1/2001, Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, Frankfurt, pp.25-44.

²⁵ Clive Archer, "Nordic Involvement in the Baltic States: Needs, Response, Success," *European Security*, Vol.7, No.3, 1998, pp.43-62.