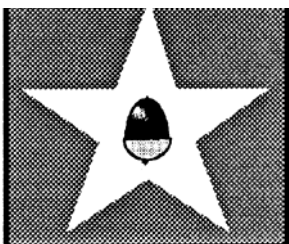


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**Russia-Baltic Relations,
1991-1999:
Characteristics & Evolution**

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Introduction

Throughout the 1990s analysts have identified the key issues that have dominated Russia's relations with the three Baltic States, but few have attempted to characterise the main dynamics within a Russian 'Baltic policy'.¹ Some scholars have analysed post-Soviet Russo-Baltic relations in two clearly divided categories – from 1991-1997 and from 1997 to the present, the borderline being the publication in 1997 of Russia's Long Term Baltic Policy Guidelines.²

A more nuanced interpretation argues for three periods characterised by the dominance of differing issues and policies. The first period (1991-1994) was primarily concerned with dealing with the legacy of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The second period (1995 – 1997) was primarily dominated by Russia's reaction to the prospect that the Baltic States would integrate rapidly into NATO. From the start of a third period in early 1997, there emerged the rudiments of a new Russian strategy of counter-engagement – the combination of hard and soft security strategies to balance Western initiatives in the region.

However, just as Russia was consolidating a viable strategic framework through which to structure its Baltic relations – identifiable state interest balanced by the necessity of counter-engagement – Russia itself suffered the birth pangs of a renewed systemic shock, felt most sharply by the August 1998 'Meltdown'. This article will examine the possible strategic implications for the continued evolution of a coherent Russian policy towards the region.

Dealing with the Detritus of Empire: Russia's Baltic Policy, 1991–1994

Russo-Baltic relations were complicated both by the need to overcome a Soviet legacy and at the same time negotiate a transition from one-party authoritarian political control to democratic pluralism, and from a centralised economy to some form of free-market economic liberalism. The Soviet Union was a rigid unitary state and the post-Soviet state building project had to create a stable Federal system in which commonly accepted rules of behaviour would govern centre-periphery relations. To compound these challenges, the Russian Federation had to create a new non-Soviet foreign policy whilst at the same time adapt Soviet institutions and decision-making practices to reflect both the systemic transformation from USSR to Russian Federation and the realities of the post Cold War international system. The difficulties faced by the Baltic States were arguably more challenging. Although they were restored republics, they had for fifty years foregone an independent foreign and security policy and lacked the institutions, personnel and expertise to bridge this shortfall easily.

As the Russian Federation became the legal successor state to the USSR, many if not all of the issues which dominated Russian-Baltic relations were integrally linked to the legacy of forced Sovietization fifty years earlier. This was particularly true of

three key points of contention that characterised inter-state relations in this period - the treatment and status of Russia's Baltic *diaspora*, the lack of agreement on border delineation, and the withdrawal of Soviet era military units. However, their resolution was complicated by a deeper set of imperial cultural and psychological assumptions that informed Russian and Baltic attitudes and beliefs. This legacy is ambiguous and harder to define, but nonetheless rendered the formation of a Russian policy towards the region highly sensitive and emotive. In the 18th century the Baltic region began to function as a literal and metaphorical 'window to the west' for a Russian 'westernizing' (*zapadnikiy*) imperial elite dominated by Peter the Great (1672-1725). Whilst this historical resonance had helped to shape the image of a Russian imperial Great Power, the loss of these territories undermined the fragile post-Soviet search for Russian identity. At the same time, the Baltic States were inclined to view post-Soviet Russian intentions through this prism of the past.

Russia's continued desire to control strategic military assets on Baltic territory constituted the key point of tension between Russia and all three Baltic States. Disputes over control of the nuclear submarine training base at Paldiski, Estonia, the Early Warning Radar Station at Skundra in Latvia and demands for unimpeded access to Kaliningrad through Lithuania, are well-cited examples of this trend. Russia was constrained by both the cost of instituting a rapid redeployment from the Baltic region and also of the Western Group of Forces in Germany and the strategic implications inherent in upsetting the agreed post Cold War balance of power embodied by the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.³ The speed and the manner of military withdrawal became linked to the thorny question of civil rights afforded to the amorphous Russian Baltic *diasporas*, including retired Soviet military pensioners. These considerations exacerbated inter-state tensions. However, although the withdrawal of Russian troops involved heavy financial costs for the Russian Federation and was linked to other political and economic issues, it was completed precisely to schedule.

On independence Lithuania had declared that all Soviet citizens living on Lithuanian territory at the time of independence would automatically gain Lithuanian citizenship (the 'zero option'). However, Estonia and Latvia, with much higher proportions of their populations ethnic Russians or Russian speakers (38% and 48% respectively), insisted that residency and language requirements had to be fulfilled before citizenship would be granted.⁴ Technically these states could claim their citizenship policies were not exclusive, being based on the criteria laid out in their restored inter-war constitutions. However, given that the overwhelming majority of Russians had migrated into the region during the Soviet period, these two states in all but name implemented ethno-nationalist post-Soviet state-building projects. This citizenship policy was heavily and continuously attacked by the Russian political elite, and became a driving dynamic in Russia's Baltic policy.⁵

Russia had border disputes with each of the Baltic States. The disputes between Estonia and Latvia were complicated by the linkage of the constitutional status of the two republics to their border delineation.⁶ Border disputes clouded a subtler series of interconnected political issues – recognition that the Baltic States were illegally occupied, a desire by the Baltic States to internationalise inter-state disputes as a means of enhancing western strategic reorientation, and a refusal by Russia to address the Baltic States as equal partners. For Russia, disputes with Lithuania were the most sensitive as they directly impinged on access to the strategically important Kaliningrad.

Although the border issues continued unresolved, progress was reached during 1994 in other aspects of inter-state relations. Former Soviet troops had been largely withdrawn from all three Baltic republics by September 1994. Moreover, although the treatment of minorities remained a point of tension at the state level, at societal level inter-ethnic relations in the Baltic states were perhaps the most peaceable amongst the former non-Slavic republics. The 'minority issue' was internationalised with the introduction of OSCE missions to Latvia and Estonia to monitor their condition, and by 'third party' mediation of bilateral border commissions (for example, Finland's role in Russo-Estonian border negotiations). Thus by 1994 mechanisms and frameworks had been set in place which aimed to ensure peaceful and negotiated resolutions to the legacy of empire.

Troop withdrawal apart, these issues had not been solved, but they were now being managed and contained. However, just as geo-economic interests were resurfacing as the historical role of the Baltic States as the gateway to European markets was reaffirmed, Russia's desire to oppose the Baltic strategic military reorientation towards NATO became the dominant and overriding impulse that drove Russian interest in the region.

Russia and NATO Enlargement in the Baltic Region

With the collapse of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and the end of the Cold War, Russia questioned the continued role and function of Cold War security architecture, particularly NATO. In an effort to both carve out a post Cold War rationale and role for itself and assuage Russian concerns, NATO launched the Partnership for Peace Programme in January 1994. By mid-1994 a number of Central and East European countries, including the Baltic states and the Russian Federation had signed partnership agreements, ensuring greater co-operation with NATO and raising the possibility of possible future membership.⁷ In December 1994 NATO foreign ministers decided to create a 'NATO enlargement study' and PfP began to be perceived as a stepping-stone towards NATO integration rather than its substitute, particularly by the Baltic elites.

Russian opposition to NATO 'enlargement' was initially characterised by a twin-track approach. At first Russia adopted a policy of 'conditional enlargement'; former Warsaw Pact states could be integrated without strenuous Russian opposition providing key conditions were met. Above all, neither the Baltic States nor any of the other former Soviet republics were to be integrated under any circumstances. The negative consequences of unconditional NATO enlargement were graphically posed at all diplomatic meetings and speeches - strident militarism within the 'Near Abroad', political instability within the Federation, a hard-line nationalist president at the 2000 elections, and closer Sino-Russian relations were, it was claimed, just some of the likely negative consequences.⁸

At the same time, Russia proposed alternative 'non-NATO' mechanisms to oversee European security. In the spirit of post Cold War East-West co-operation, Russia argued that new and more appropriate international organisations, such as the EU, OSCE or UN, should provide the context within which European security was guaranteed. In a sense, Russia's position was locked into a self-defeating and self-sustaining dynamic: the louder it protested Baltic inclusion, the greater the Baltic states strove to attain NATO 'security guarantees', the more Russia increased traditional diplomatic and other economic pressure to halt integration. Russia's opposition received little international support and by the end of 1996 it was clear

that NATO was preparing to announce in mid-1997 the states which would be incorporated into NATO by 1999.⁹ Moreover, the startling speed of Baltic strategic reorientation had outstripped Russia's policy responses and it was clear that Russia's twin-track opposition to first-echelon NATO enlargement had failed.

From the ashes rose a reconfigured dual strategy to oppose second echelon NATO enlargement. In February 1997 Yeltsin's Presidential Office published a document which elaborated Russia's long-term policy guidelines towards the Baltic States. The policy document outlined six interlinked issues that were central to Russo-Baltic relations. It began by reiterating Russian opposition to Baltic inclusion into NATO and stressed that until the protection of 'compatriot rights' was guaranteed, border ratification would be delayed. The document emphasised the necessity of Russia maintaining profitable economic ties to the Kaliningrad *oblast'* (region), whilst calling for Russo-Baltic co-operation to combat the threats posed by organised crime. Lastly, increased bilateral cultural co-operation between Russia and the Baltic States was encouraged.¹⁰

The insistence that Baltic-NATO integration could not proceed without Russian agreement, coupled to the explicit linkage of the border question to the condition of the Russian *diaspora* were the hallmarks of this policy document. It pointed towards a policy of 'opposition by proxy'; that is, Russia sought to halt the process by illustrating that the aspirant Baltic States had not met the conditions for enlargement.¹¹ Although NATO had adopted a policy of restricted enlargement, in some Russian quarters it was perceived as 'soft' integration through the back door, since NATO's emphasis on aspirant members participating in enhanced Partnership for Peace (PfP-II) activities was seen as a way to secure *de facto* forward positioning of NATO forces on the territories of aspiring members.¹² Hence the prospect that NATO could eventually surround the highly militarised Kaliningrad oblast, Russia's only non-contiguous territory.¹³ Throughout 1997 and 1998 NATO undertook a series of PfP exercises (BALTBAT peacekeeping operation scenarios and naval search-and-rescue exercises) on Baltic territory, so underscoring its willingness and ability to defend PfP territory.¹⁴ Although Russia was invited to join PfP exercises, it restricted joint manoeuvring to limited naval engagements.

By 1997 Russia had received NATO assurances through the US Charter, Russia-NATO Joint Partnership Council and NATO's Madrid summit promise of integration based on reinforcement rather than forward positioning, to allow for the demilitarisation of the Baltic-Nordic region. As a consequence, Russia's Baltic policy was transformed into a 'constructive engagement' - a much more purposeful and coordinated Russian elaboration of hard and soft security initiatives in the region. Its first manifestation was the 'Baltic Initiative' - a series of unilateral or multilateral security guarantees - raised by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in Vilnius at a regional security conference in September 1997. This proposal was followed in October by the notion of a 'regional zone of security and stability.' Baltic reactions were no more favourable - Russia was accused of attempting to regionalise security and reimpose what the Baltic Assembly referred to as 'Russian patronage' and some politicians called a 'protectorate arrangement' within the region.

In December 1997 the nature of the 'hard' security guarantees became apparent when Yeltsin proposed Russia's 'Northern Bridge' initiative in Stockholm during a state visit. These new proposals were based upon regional co-operative models that directly complemented Finnish and Swedish 'sovereignty support' initiatives towards the Baltic States, and explicitly supported the preferred Russian policy of non-alignment within the north Baltic region (ie non-NATO Baltic integration). The

creation of a confidence building regime, massive force cuts in northwestern Russia of 40% and transparency beyond Vienna CFE Treaty stipulations were mooted. Moreover, Russia proposed joint control of Baltic airspace and joint military exercises, as well as a hot line between Kaliningrad and the Baltic region.¹⁵

The ultimate objective of this strategy was, as ever to retain the Baltic States within Russia's sphere of economic and social influence, and restrain western military presence within the region. In the lead-up to the April 1999 NATO Washington Summit, Russia again promoted demilitarization. In February 1999, the commander of the Russian Baltic Fleet, Admiral Vladimir Yegorov, stated that first echelon NATO enlargement 'has to be reckoned with as a reality and we should do everything possible to maintain stability in the area where the fleet is stationed'. This included resolving problems concerning transit of cargo for the fleet through Lithuanian territory in a positive way (and placing greater emphasis on sea routes from Leningrad Region) and enhancing Baltic Fleet co-operation with other countries, including NATO countries.¹⁶ By March 1999 these cuts were complete - the 6th Army in Leningrad Military District and the army corps in Vyborg had been disbanded, leaving a motor-rifle brigade near St. Petersburg and a semi-brigade in Pechenya.¹⁷ However, since early 1998 the issue of military security has had a much lower profile in the regional security agenda than it once had.

From Hard to Soft Security Initiatives

As the importance of the issue of NATO enlargement was downgraded, Russian political priorities shifted from 'hard' to 'soft' security initiatives during 1998: 'from geo-politics to geo-economics, focussed on domestic structures and economic interests rather than military threats and territorial control.'¹⁸ This shift in strategic focus can be partly explained the rising role of Financial Industrial Groups (FIGs) in shaping Russia's foreign economic policy following the 1996 second stage privatisation programme of strategic economic assets.¹⁹ It was also facilitated by the Baltic States' re-emphasis on EU membership as their prime foreign policy objective.

Russian economic interest in the Baltic States is centred upon the transport and transit of Russian goods and energy through this region to European markets.²⁰ Latvia, for example, is a major strategic transit, transportation and communications gateway between East and West, with some of the largest container ports and most modern transit facilities in the Baltic region.²¹ Within the 1997 Russian Baltic policy guidelines document lay the implicit threat that Russia could redirect its trade destined for the European market away from the costly high transit Baltic ports, towards those of Finland.²² However, as one analyst succinctly noted, at best constructing the new Russian port facilities in the Leningrad region 'would take 15 years and amount to the price of transit fees for 25-30 years.'²³

The energy interdependence within the region has become more apparent as the price of oil, gas and metals has sunk and Russian energy FIGs have begun to compete for ownership of transport networks, storage and refining facilities within the region. For example, in February 1999 Vagit Alekperov, the president of LUKoil, examined the possibility of expanding the Latvian pipeline network to link with the Western Pipeline Network, allowing for Russia to build the pipelines and ship oil through Baltic Sea and Polish ports.²⁴ LUKoil is also examining the possibility of acquiring a 33% stake in Mazeiku Nafta (Mazeikiai Oil refinery) and so becoming one of its strategic operators. The dependence of this refinery upon

regular Russian crude deliveries from Polotsk (Belarus) to remain profitable was underlined by the heavy financial losses suffered when the refinery was idle between 30 January and 8 February 1999.²⁵ It is clear that although the timetables and directions of Russian oil exports must be approved by the Russian Fuel and Energy Ministry and implemented by Transneft, energy FIGs can exert a considerable degree of private influence over these structures. Indeed, the Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Bulgak subsequently insisted that the Fuel and Energy Minister (Sergy Generalov) must impose order on his Ministry. He rather pointedly remarked: 'The Ministry of Fuel and Energy is not a branch of Menatep [bank], LUKoil, Gazprom [Gas monopoly] or United Energy Systems of Russia [national grid]. It is an impersonal state body, and this should be taken into account in recruiting personnel.'²⁶

By January 1998, at both Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) meeting and the 5th Barents-Euro-Arctic Council meeting, Russia introduced a set of soft security initiatives, which were generally well received by the Baltic States. These last initiatives centred upon the integration of transport infrastructures, and a common market in communications, services and business information. Especially topical was the commercially sensitive creation of a unified energy grid - 'the Baltic power circle' - which Russia wanted to complement the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline, with other regional partners determined to avoid a Gazprom gas monopoly in the region. The creation of Baltsea, with ecological monitoring and search and rescue functions was also proposed and welcomed.²⁷

These initiatives were discussed at the Russia-EU Moscow Summit held in February 1999.²⁸ This summit illustrated the growing role of the EU as an interface between the Russian Federation and the aspirant EU Baltic States, particularly in non-traditional security sectors. Whilst Russia emphasised the importance of non-discriminatory economic co-operation, and a balanced improvement of regulation for trade and services, the EU expressed concern over the significant reduction in EU exports to Russia following the August 1998 collapse, and stressed resolving the issue of access to Russian markets. The importance of regional co-operation between the regions of the Russian Federation and the EU was recognised, as was 'the intensification of contacts in the fight against international crime.'²⁹

Russia signed the Partnership Co-operation Agreement (PCA) with the EU and the Russian Federation on 1 December 1997. Following agreement on the Amsterdam Treaty (16 July 1997) the European Commission recommended negotiations should begin with five states, including Estonia and Poland.³⁰ In effect, the EU had adopted a policy of 'differentiated engagement' towards the Baltic States, and it is notable that the Baltic EU integration strategies, with priority placed on 'single state capability' had fragmented trilateral pan-Baltic sub-regional institutional cohesion.

Finland and Sweden, as non-aligned states which formally acceded to the EU in January 1995, were instrumental in developing EU policy within the region and were particularly keen to facilitate the shift towards the 'soft security' agenda. In September 1997 Finland introduced the Northern Dimension (ND) concept in Rovaniemi, Lapland. This Finnish initiative aims to coordinate economic, environmental, societal and political co-operation in the North of Europe. It is an EU project, coordinated by the European Commission, but its implementation is largely dependent on Finland promoting the idea. The December 1999 Vienna European Council Meeting clearly placed the ND on the European agenda. The ND, which includes the five Nordic, three Baltic States, Poland, Germany and the

Russian Federation has already had an important impact in shaping Russia's role and policies within the region.

The ND has a multiple purpose. It is designed to maintain equilibrium within the EU and can be seen as a counter to the Mediterranean Programme. It coordinates internal EU policy within the region and helps to integrate aspirant states into the EU through the creation of a network of multilateral co-operation projects across Baltic-Nordic space. It is likely that the ND will repair damage to sub-regional cohesion, as the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council of Ministers will be utilised to implement ND policy decisions. Moreover, it is also set to become the key instrument to coordinate EU-Russia policy. Russia's Baltic policy will become inextricably linked to its EU policy within the region and will be shaped and influenced by the ND. Russia is keen to emphasise the economic benefits that will flow from EU enlargement in the region, particularly for investment opportunities, enhanced access to the EU market, the creation of Euro-Russian elite, and closer ties between northwestern Russia the EU.³¹ The EU is also in the process of developing a 'Common Strategy for Russia' (CSR). This legally binding instrument, discussed at Amsterdam and ratified in May 1999 in Cologne, is a key item on the Finnish EU Presidency agenda. The CSR aims to coordinate an overall EU Russia policy and provide a logic and direction to this evolving 'strategic partnership'.³²

At present it is the Finnish border that represents the EU member-states' external border with the Russian Federation. In the future this function will be extended to the Baltic States and Poland. These borders must function as 'security filters', that is, to exclude or filter out security threats. Western European police forces, border-control institutions and customs agencies have to combat security threats, particularly organised crime networks (sustaining illegal migration and prostitution), drug trafficking and arms proliferation. These types of security threats are increasing and are resulting in closer local and regional co-operation to combat their threat.³³

EU external borders are destined to be hard, non-permeable barriers, allowing for soft internal borders that facilitate the free flow of labour, goods, capital and services. It is paradoxical that the existing EU Finnish-Russian border is currently more open than the aspirant first echelon EU Polish-Lithuanian border.³⁴ The North West Directorate of the Russian Federal Border Guard Service and the Finnish Border Guard report that there has been a 20% increase in people crossing the Finnish-Russian border in 1998 from 1997, and a 12% increase in transport over the same period. However, there was a 152% increase in illegal migrants (1997 - 112, 1998 - 282), particularly in the Vyborg region. Illegal fishing in the Gulf of Finland and increases in smuggling, particularly using maritime routes, was also noted.³⁵

By 1998, Russia had constructed a viable state policy towards the Baltic States. 1997 had served as a pivotal year as before then the crucial issue of NATO integration and the importance of hard security initiatives had been prioritised. With the shift the consequent downgrading of NATO integration as the key foreign policy objective of the Baltic States and a re-emphasis upon EU integration, the soft security agenda was placed firmly upon the inter-state agenda. De-militarization of the Baltic region had not resulted in a de-securitization of pre-existing disputes. Indeed, the region has the ability to generate new and sustain ongoing inter-state, societal and regional tensions. But transport and energy interdependence facilitated the harmonisation of financial and economic networks and provided a

new template of common interest; this process was set to characterise a new phase of Russo-Baltic relations.

Systemic Shock: Implications in the Baltic Region

In August 1998 Russia suffered what appeared to be a major financial and economic 'Meltdown' or dislocation. This collapse has had a wider and more profound significance that should be recognised – it is systemic in nature. Its impact upon governance within the Russian Federation, particularly Federal economic coherence and political stability, has been profound. The August events of 1998 have seriously impaired the sustainability of federal power structures, shedding light on many of the inherent structural, institutional and behavioural weaknesses of Russia's post-Soviet state-building project. These internal dimensions to the economic dislocation have been matched by external trade implications. Russian international trade has also been seriously weakened. In 1998 Russian exports shrank by 16.4% and imports were down 19.1%; Russian trade, including unofficial trade shrank 17.6% in 1998.³⁶ This downturn in trade has had a noticeable impact on the economies of adjacent trading partners, including the Baltic states, particularly Latvia. Systemic shock has also had a spillover effect on the coherence and management of Russia's Baltic policy and its implications for that policy are only now becoming apparent.

a. Regional Stability:

August 1998 served as catalyst for further regionalisation. It emphasised the loss of political authority and respect that the regions had for Moscow-based Federal institutions. The collapse of 'budgetary federalism' and the autonomous regional banking system exacerbated this process.³⁷ At the same time that this drift to decentralisation has occurred, Moscow has attempted to respond by encouraging the growing role of sub-Federal economic structures such as Inter Regional Economic Associations (IREA) and regional political elites in the foreign policy-making process. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) acknowledges this reality and has established a special unit on inter-regional affairs and promoted its institutional presence within regions that are most actively engaged in foreign trade. As a result there are over 40 regional MFA offices and the ministry has also invited leaders from northwestern Russia to participate in federal trade delegations to the EU; it has also supported the creation of a representative office for Russian regions in Brussels.³⁸ Thus the manner in which Federal policies are formulated, coordinated, and implemented has been affected; the systemic shock has transformed the content of Russia's Baltic policy and further stretched the soft regional security agenda to cover new issues. It has also placed a far greater importance on inter-state interaction at the regional level through the use of sub-federal institutions.

The result has been to create further ambiguity and lessen effective coordination of such policy. The ability of northwestern Russian governors (St. Petersburg, Republic of Karelia and Leningrad, Pskov, Novgorod and Kaliningrad *oblasts*) to coordinate a regional identity and cohesiveness is open to question. They have argued that decentralisation of federal responsibilities must be matched by the devolution of the means to fulfil the tasks assigned by the centre. As Mikhail Prusak, Governor of Novgorod, reported to Primakov, the crisis of budgetary federalism has created a 'vacuum of power' within the regions in general and northwest Russia in particular.³⁹ Many of the trans-border regions, such as Pskov, have to bear the brunt of expenditure on Federal border infrastructures that are being upgraded in

the face of a restructuring of Baltic states' eastern borders. This expenditure places additional strain on regional budgets.⁴⁰

b. Kaliningrad and the danger of 'collapsed' Baltic regions?

Decentralisation of power to the regions through a process of drift and default has raised the spectre of separatism, particularly in the strategically important Kaliningrad *oblast*. The governor has been accused of separatism, a charge he denies - 'In fact, separatism begins in the offices of public officials in the capital city. They have long been far removed from the country and are living in isolation.'⁴¹ The ongoing debate as to the nature of alleged 'separatist' tendencies in Kaliningrad cannot mask a host of internal structural weaknesses within this *oblast* that render such 'separatist' status unrealistic and unworkable.

Kaliningrad is perceived to represent an unstable and poorly administered centre for criminal activity, with an AIDS epidemic competing against the role of organised crime gangs in sustaining prostitution, drugs and illegal migrant networks for the media's attention.⁴² Indeed, the ND (paragraph 40-41) makes particular reference to Kaliningrad as a region in need of 'programmes of technical assistance' to 'fight organized crime.'⁴³ Such a perception, coupled to Lithuania's accession talks with the EU, has resulted in a Lithuanian refusal to replace the temporary visa free travel regime by a five year visa free travel agreement with the Russian Federation.⁴⁴ As a consequence, Valeriy Ustyugov (speaker of the Kaliningrad *duma*) has warned of the further economic isolation of Kaliningrad from participating in European-Baltic energy and transport projects, such as the Trans-European Networks (TENs) and the Pan-European Transport Corridors (PECs).⁴⁵ Involvement in these programmes is both questionable - given the existence of alternative transport routes - and, at the same time, central to both Kaliningrad's internal sustainability and its future ability to function as an instrument of Russian influence in the region. As a mark of the seriousness with which stability in Kaliningrad is viewed, Lithuania, as chairman of the Council of Baltic Sea States for the first six months of 1999, focused its undivided attention on involving Kaliningrad in the works of the Council.⁴⁶

Kaliningrad finds itself in double jeopardy. Its geo-politico-economic location as a Russian exclave within an expanding EU places particular stresses on its ability to enhance cross-border trade. These challenges are compounded by the lack of a consistently held Federal policy towards the region. The status of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is particularly indicative of Moscow's uncoordinated and constantly fluctuating 'policy' towards Kaliningrad. In July 1999 a cash-strapped IMF-dependant Federal Ministry of Finance was desperate to increase revenues and viewed the SEZ as contributing to high crime and direct losses to the federal budget. It therefore indicated it would revoke the privileges associated with a special customs regime and decided to re-impose customs duties, excise and VAT on imports.⁴⁷ Such threats have been a constant feature of the economic environment (for example, in March 1995) and in itself destabilises confidence and so partly explains the lack of inward investment to the region.

Indeed, it is difficult to foresee a smooth transition for Kaliningrad from its present socio-economic and political predicaments into a thriving stable trading zone. It has a huge competitive advantage to bridge in terms of its outdated transit infrastructure, services and regulatory environment, when compared to other Baltic ports. Other productive sectors, such as agriculture, are characterised by a massive structural collapse. Traditional industries, such as fishing, paper and pulp, are largely obsolete whilst raw materials, such as amber, are consigned to the

grey and black economies. These factors militate against the re-establishment of Kaliningrad as a transport conduit and international trading hub, gaining comparative regional advantage by becoming a market place for Russian links into the global market.

It could well be that Kaliningrad, a test case for EU/NATO-Russian relations, becomes emblematic of a classical security dilemma - the greater the threat of regional instability through separatism or collapse, the greater the bargaining power of local elites within Moscow and Brussels (EU/NATO). In July 1999, for example, the Deputy Speaker of the State Duma, Sergey Baburin, argued that *'the entire border agreement [Kaliningrad-Lithuania] must be linked to the prospects of Lithuanian-Russian relations. Lack of an agreement amounts to a legal obstacle to the [Lithuanian] state's entry to NATO. To remove this obstacle and open a path for Lithuania to this military bloc is something only a madman, an idiot or a traitor would do.'*⁴⁸ This process leads to uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability in relations with Kaliningrad. In effect, what we might conceptualise as a state of 'dynamic disequilibrium' could be institutionalised and consolidated if external policy towards Kaliningrad continues to be uncoordinated and reactive.

c. The Belarus-Russia-Baltic Relations?

August 1998 has also promoted a deepening integration between the Russian Federation and Belarus, following the signing of the Russia-Belarus Union Treaty. At present Belarus' Baltic policy is characterised by a plethora of diverse disputes. These points of contention range from the increase in illegal migration through Belarus to Baltic territory (particularly Lithuania), the threat to redeploy tactical nuclear weapons into Belarus if the Baltic states join NATO, to the broadcast by 'Baltic Waves' Radio Station in Lithuania of material deemed to constitute interference in the internal affairs of Belarus. Lietuvos Energija (Lithuanian Energy Company) has exported 400m litas (\$100m) worth of electricity to Belarus and refuses further exports until outstanding debts are paid.⁴⁹

If Russia and Belarus integrate fully (defence, security and monetary union), then Russia is likely to adopt the role of mediator between the Baltic States and Belarus and assume responsibility for resolving its on-going inter-state disputes. This will be complicated by Lithuania's potential to act as a mediator between President Lukashenko's government and Belarusian opposition forces who are currently in exile in Lithuania.⁵⁰ Syamon Sharetski, the former speaker of the 13th convocation [Parliament disbanded by Lukashenko] stated that he intended to fight against the Belarusian regime from Lithuania.⁵¹

d. Military Security

Whilst the Russia-Belarus union has distinct military advantages for the Russian Federation, August 1998 has placed perhaps the greatest strain upon the Russian armed forces, particularly conventional units. Regions in northwest Russia are also now facing many of the emergent dilemmas of decentralisation, particularly Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Kaliningrad whose large defence base has made them over-reliant upon Federal subsidies. The ability of Federal military structures in this region to maintain their precarious integrity as the financial crisis deepens over the next months can be questioned. The regionalisation of military structures is likely to increase, with regional governors sustaining the cohesion of units based on their territories from regional budgets under their command. The de-militarisation that has already occurred within northwest Russia will place less of a strain upon these regional budgets, than, for example, on Stavropol Territory. This process is occurring at a time when it is noted that 'new threats' are emerging on Russia's

borders, connected with 'the geopolitical aspirations of some of the neighbouring countries, activities of trans-national criminal groups and illegal migration.'⁵²

'Zapad-99' (West-99), the largest strategic command and staff exercises in the post-Soviet era took place 21–26 June 1999. It involved the participation of five military districts (Moscow, Leningrad, North Caucasus, Volga and Urals MDs), three districts of the Internal Troops of the Interior Ministry, with participation of three Fleets (Northern, Baltic and Black Sea) and coordination of the Belarusian armed forces. The war game scenarios tested the ability of Russian armed forces to coordinate the repulsion of aggression from the West and so restore the territorial integrity of the Federation.⁵³ This included repelling an offensive air raid on Belarusian territory and lifting a blockade on Kaliningrad region, as well as simulating the use of limited nuclear strike – a provision of Russian military doctrine employed when all conventional measures are exhausted – on the territory of 'neighbouring countries'.⁵⁴

Paradoxically, this exercise simultaneously underscored Russia's desire to project power and the weakness and inability of its conventional military forces to achieve this limited objective. Whilst the exercise emphasised anti-aircraft defences (a source of Russian concern following the Kosovo campaign), military integration with Belarus and the combat effectiveness of troops, it was clear that by any comparisons with 'Zapad-81' this was a minor and unsustainable operation.⁵⁵ Indeed, funds for further exercises on the same scale are unlikely to be forthcoming. The downgrading of military security within the Baltic region was further emphasised when days after the exercise, Russian security experts working in the influential non-governmental Foreign and Defence Policy Council, reportedly drew up a document entitled 'Russia and the Baltics'. This report implicitly accepts the premise that the Baltic states will be integrated into NATO as it addresses the question of Russian policy post-integration, rather than how to prevent integration.⁵⁶

e. Environmental Security Concerns

There is a danger that lack of financial payments to energy producing enterprises, nuclear as well as conventional, could result in the increase of environmental risks of spillages and pollution. The Russian Federation in recent months has highlighted the ecological security of the Baltic region as a priority. In February 1999, for example, Primakov discussed the construction of new sewage systems on the St. Petersburg and Krasny Bor grounds, which are overfilled and present a danger to the water system of St. Petersburg and the Baltic Sea. Existing systems, constructed in the 1970s and 1980s to render harmless and bury toxic waste, are only 70% effective, allowing 1 million cubic metres of untreated sewage a day to be dumped in the Neva river and the Gulf of Finland. The cost of new waste processing plants is prohibitive.⁵⁷ The governor of St. Petersburg, Vladimir Yakovlev, met the UN secretary-general in June 1999 to discuss the establishment of 'environmental troops' capable of forming an alternative military service in Russia for recruits unwilling to bear arms. A pilot project created in St. Petersburg could then be instituted throughout northwest Russia, so tackling 'a large number of environmental problems within the Baltic region'.⁵⁸ In July 1999 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development extended a loan of 18m US dollars to the Russian Federation for a period of 15 years to reconstruct the water supply and environmental protection system of the city of Kaliningrad.⁵⁹

However, as international environmental safety is at stake, foreign governments may seek to secure through 'joint-venture finance' the integrity of such plants.

Such a move would effectively represent the 'outsourcing and privatisation' of Federal responsibility and functions to foreign states and further undermine and erode the role of Moscow within the periphery. This process has begun with, for example, UK and Norwegian financial support to improve the management of decommissioned Northern Fleet nuclear waste.⁶⁰

Conclusions

In the early and mid-1990s Russian policy towards the region was reactive, receiving its direction and drive from external influences, particularly the Euro-Atlantic response to the strategic reorientation of the Baltic States themselves. The evolution and then implementation of the EU Northern Dimension concept and the debates surrounding the April 1999 NATO Washington Summit are providing fresh impetus to shape the nature and aims of Russian policy towards this region. The attitudes and interests of the Baltic states themselves, not least their emergent Russia policies have had and continue to have an influential role in moulding Russia's Baltic policy.

Following the August 1998 shock, we are currently witnessing a paradigm shift in Baltic security politics. The traditional post Cold War Russia-Baltic security paradigm based on inter-state relations dominated by a Soviet legacy and Russian attempts to halt the encroachment of trans-Atlantic security structures within the region has been overtaken by two processes. Firstly, the security agenda has been widened, and this was facilitated by a general shift from hard to soft security initiatives in 1997, from geo-politics to geo-economics. Secondly, the process of decentralisation by drift has the potential to radically alter the political and economic structure of the Russian Federation. If constitutional reform occurs this process will be legally sanctioned and approved.

The process of gradual decentralisation has been a feature of Russian Federal politics throughout the 1990s. If the centre maintains its ability to manage the process of decentralisation within an ever weakening Federation, then Russia's third millennium policy towards the Baltic States will continue to evolve at the bilateral, sub-regional, regional and Euro-Atlantic levels, in a more diverse, multi-layered and complex manner.

However, the possibility of a mismanaged transformation remains a realisable reality. As the centre continues to weaken, it is possible that IREA could provide a template for sustainable regional existence and impose from a position of relative strength a settled pattern of centre-periphery interaction. This would create a very weak federal system that nudges on the definition of *de facto* Confederation. In such circumstances monetary union, with centrally coordinated defence and foreign policy formation would be in evidence. In a *de jure* confederation, parts would constitute legally distinct and sovereign confederate entities.

However, repeated replacement of Prime Ministers does little to strengthen the centre in a volatile period in Russian politics. *Duma* electoral campaigns will lead directly onto a hotly contested presidential election. This period of struggle for power will further weaken the centre's ability to coordinate its own policies and control regional foreign policy formation. Such tendencies may allow foreign states to fill the policy vacuum and so become arbiters between centre and periphery. For this reason, further research into the growth and development of northwest Russia, particularly in the field of foreign relations, is important.

Endnotes

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² Medvedev, 'The New Russian Policy', p. 236.

³ Sergounin, 'The Russia Dimension', pp. 38-42.

⁴ Graham Smith, *The Nationalities Question in Post-Soviet States*, 2nd edn (London & New York: Longman, 1996), p. 506.

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¹² The creation of the Danish-German-Polish Corps (Szczecin HQ) has been criticised by the Russian MoD and MFA as an attempt to circumvent the Founding Act – it is perceived to facilitate de facto forward positioning of NATO military infrastructure. Arkady Moshes, *Turn of the Century, Russia Looks at the Baltic Sea Region*, DUPI Working Papers, 12, 1998, pp. 16-17.

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- ²³ Medvedev, 'The New Russian Policy', p. 254.
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