

Boston University

OpenBU

<http://open.bu.edu>

Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology and Policy

Perspective

2002-01

Should NATO Invite the Baltic States?

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3596>

Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository

PERSPECTIVE

Volume 12, No 3 (January-February 2002)

Should NATO Invite the Baltic States?

By STEPHEN BLANK (1)

US Army War College

In November at Prague, NATO will announce the next round of its enlargement. A critical question that arouses much controversy is whether or not to admit one or more Baltic state. First, many allege that the Baltic states are only defensible by nuclear weapons.² They argue that NATO must not reach that stage with Russia. Rather than antagonize Russia by making those states members, it is proposed, NATO should leave them aside and let the European Union accept them instead.

This approach itself raises troubling questions. If Moscow can successfully and unilaterally determine other states' security policies, with NATO acquiescence, then the alliance will have been seriously, perhaps fatally, compromised. Second, if Moscow is so belligerent from a stance of inferiority, then it certainly should be deterred now by superior force and resolution. Third, the notions of empire and spheres of influence are no longer acceptable in Europe. If the West can act legitimately in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which constitutes Europe's "near abroad," why should it abandon the Baltic states?³

Fourth, given Moscow's military inferiority, NATO's military assets, and Chechnya's demonstration of what an aroused citizenry can do, NATO should not fear Russia's current armed forces. If Moscow wants another arms race with Europe and America, it only will dig its grave faster, as its leadership fully understands. Fifth, the alliance must not shrink from stating NATO enlargement's overriding strategic rationale. It transcends merely extending the European security community, although the OSCE now confirms the Baltic states' commitment to democracy and successful resolution of minority

issues.⁴ Rather, the real reason is that NATO and European Union (EU) enlargement increasingly forecloses the Russian elite's option of restoring and extending autocracy and empire, each being the natural accompaniment of the other. The Baltic states' supposed indefensibility (an argument that would have deterred the West from forming NATO and growing thereafter), their supposed problems with minorities that Moscow and its apologists grossly inflate, and the notion that their membership in NATO somehow threatens Russia's security are equally unfounded and illogical.

Behind all these arguments lies the belief that Russia deserves a privileged security status vis-à-vis its neighbors and interlocutors. Unfortunately nothing yet indicates Moscow's readiness to acknowledge its Baltic neighbors' "equal security," which it habitually demands for itself. Recently President Putin actually compared the Baltic states to Macedonia and demanded that Europe supervise their minority policies, an explicit derogation of their sovereignty.⁵ In 2000-2001 Moscow surreptitiously moved tactical nuclear weapons into Kaliningrad oblast and tried to entice Germany into side deals on the Baltic states and Kaliningrad.⁶ Putin, after urging partnership with NATO and saying that he did not oppose their membership in NATO, publicly urged Russian residents to agitate against Baltic governments.⁷ Russia's government and politicians regularly threaten the Baltic states with economic war if they join NATO and Russian diplomats habitually tell Baltic officials that Russia is going to return.⁸ Since economic war has long been Moscow's official policy, it is unlikely that the Baltic states' exclusion from NATO would soften the Kremlin's resolve.⁹

Nor does Moscow want them to enter the EU, although it claims otherwise. Indeed, during Yevgeny Primakov's tenure in office, Moscow demanded that, since Baltic membership would injure its economic interests, Russia must obtain from Brussels compensation for anticipated lost benefits before Moscow would accept their membership. Russia effectively presented the EU with an ultimatum demanding compensation while simultaneously alleging violations of minority rights as grounds for blocking Baltic accession into the EU.¹⁰

Many Russian writers regard the Baltic region as an area they could blow over if they but carelessly nodded in that direction. Or they portray those states as parasitic economies which survive by exploiting Russia.¹¹ Neo-geopoliticians like Aleksandr' Pikaev apparently also remain unable to see the area in any way but an imperial and atavistic perspective of Realpolitik. Pikaev drew five lessons concerning Russo-Baltic relations and regional security.

First, when the Baltic states are under Western influence, their territory invariably becomes a pathway to attack Russia. Peace with Russia only comes when they "enjoy de facto or de jure independence from the outside world." Second, if Russia is isolated from the Baltic Sea's warm-water ports, it will not cease striving to shatter that geopolitical barrier. (Here Pikaev overtly threatens revisionism and war even though nobody is isolating Russia from these ports.) The third lesson is that Baltic security is unthinkable without Russia. While, surely, Russia must participate in any regional system, such thinking chauvinistically demands precedence and unequal security and betrays a desire to postpone any discussion of European security until Russia can dictate its terms.¹² Russia's refusal to denounce the 1940 annexations as such intentionally raises questions about the current Baltic states' legality and shows the attempt to intimidate these governments.¹³

If Pikaev's fourth lesson is that Russian democracy is a guarantee of Baltic security, then Yel'tsin's and Putin's failures to democratize, Putin's regime of police capitalism, and Primakov's and then Putin's accession through "constitutional coups" enhance regional instability, insecurity and the need for NATO's presence. Finally, Pikaev's fifth lesson is that interrupting Baltic states' economic cooperation with Russia injures them more than Russia. This justifies Russia's ham-handed economic warfare against the Baltic states. Moreover, Putin and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov share this apparently official view.¹⁴

Evidently the Baltic states should forego a chance for prosperity to benefit Russia! More generally, across Eastern Europe, Moscow seeks control over energy supplies, ports

and strategic economic sectors, subsidizes political parties and compliant politicians, and uses energy companies, the foreign intelligence service (SVR), and organized crime, often jointly, to establish strategic positions in these states, conduct "disinformation" against pro-Western politicians and governments, and undermine pro-Western policies.¹⁵

Key issues for NATO

Today it appears that the Baltic states will join NATO. Russia's demand for NATO's demilitarization as its condition for accepting enlargement is dangerous and displays Moscow's continuing inability to accept European realities.¹⁶ NATO and EU enlargement is part of the broader evolution of a normative European security community with a common commitment to democracy and liberalism.¹⁷ By resisting this process Moscow isolates itself from Europe rather than Europe isolating Russia.

But other key issues exist for NATO and the Baltic states. First is the Baltic states' readiness to shoulder membership's military burdens. Across Eastern Europe, leftist, Euroskeptic, and pro-Moscow factions oppose increased defense spending and submission to the EU's *Acquis Communautaire*.¹⁸ There is a real danger of their victory, although most citizens in aspirant countries currently support European integration. But the Baltic states must fulfill NATO's military desiderata and their own Membership Action Plans (MAPs) under NATO's "supervision" to enter the alliance.¹⁹

The second key issue is NATO's relationship to the EU's Common European Security and Defense Program (CESDP). While this may seem a "theological" question, it actually is of utmost importance, for if this inter-organizational relationship were to fail or even malfunction, there would be enormous and enduring repercussions. This issue is particularly important to states that are members of NATO but not the EU, to the Baltic states that seek membership in either or both organizations, and to states that are members of the EU, but not NATO (e.g., Finland and Sweden).

Ideally, European integration and trans-Atlanticism should be harmonious processes. But Europe's smaller countries, including the Baltic states, insist that the trans-Atlantic principle be preeminent. They all advocate America's leading role in Europe, rightly fearing that otherwise their interests will be sacrificed on the altar of the larger states' competing national interests or that any one of those states might make a deal with Russia at their expense.²⁰ Not surprisingly, many small European countries, not just the Baltic states, still have well-founded reservations about Russian policy.²¹

Baltic participants strongly advocate their membership, underscoring their commitment to a democratic order, liberalism and cooperative security. They also insist that they will fulfill NATO's and the EU's requirements. They frequently reiterate their ability and desire to contribute to European security and not be mere security consumers. They see NATO enlargement not in terms of preserving or extending new European dividing lines but rather as a way to end their ambiguous status and Russia's talk of red lines. NATO and the EU, for their part, must show that Russia no longer can define for itself a privileged status and sphere of influence in the Baltic region or in Europe. Indeed, if Russia truly considers using tactical nuclear weapons in Europe against the Baltic states and NATO, that is all the more reason to act and not hold back. Simultaneously Baltic leaders argue that only NATO, and not the EU's notional "rapid reaction forces," can defend them against real threats.

While French analysts view the CESDP as a potentially independent and purely European replacement for NATO, it still exists only on paper, claims to the contrary notwithstanding.²² Nor did the Baltic states accept earlier French pressure to choose between the EU and NATO.²³ No one can be certain that, if future threats to regional and/or European security occur after 2003 when the CESDP is supposed to materialize, then an effective strategic military-political consensus among major European contributors to (and directors of) that force will develop sufficiently quickly. Thus important questions surround the CESDP and its ability to provide security.

It remains uncertain whether European governments will financially support the CESDP's headline goals of 60,000 men to conduct planned missions by 2003. No force besides NATO currently can enforce or make peace in Macedonia or elsewhere. As Richard Perle wrote, "[I]f a modest reduction in the level of American forces deployed in Bosnia sounds the alarm in Europe, what should we make of the Blair-Chirac fantasy that the EU will soon be poised to go it alone when there's trouble in Europe?"²⁴

Moreover, Russia's relationship with the CESDP remains unclear. Moscow provisionally welcomed the CESDP because it supposedly weakens and divides NATO even as it solicits Russian participation. But Russia is very uncertain about the CESDP's future direction and therefore wishes to be regularly informed and consulted concerning the program's developments.²⁵ While Moscow certainly wishes to reduce NATO's viability in Europe, will it then accept a force that is supposed to act from the Baltic to the Transcaucasus? It is quite possible that the CESDP will be too weak to succeed, but rather will drain resources from NATO, become a mechanism that corrodes the alliance from within, and fail to bring security or reliable defense to states that most need it.

Until these issues are confronted and resolved, East European skepticism about the program and preference for NATO and the American connection will exist. But despite the caviling about US unilateralism, in fact the allies have told America that they would follow America's lead if the US were to define the NATO consensus concerning criteria and who should be invited at Prague.²⁶ Obviously this is a far cry from the terrible press that "United States unilateralism" received earlier in Europe. President Jacques Chirac of France said on his Baltic trip in July 2001 that the determination about Baltic membership in NATO was essentially Washington's decision and strongly hinted at support for their membership in NATO and the EU.²⁷ Apparently this consensus emerged at NATO's Brussels summit in June 2001 and owes much to President Bush's Warsaw University speech that articulated an expansive and inclusive vision of the future map of European security.²⁸ Conceivably, American protagonists of "coalition-building," in their eagerness to please Putin, could hamper this trend.

Conclusion

Presently most signs point to Baltic membership in NATO after Prague and in the EU soon afterward. Then the Baltic states will be formally part of an indivisible security system that enjoys a pan-European credibility and legitimacy. They will no longer be isolated, confined to a regional ghetto, or wholly subjected to the great powers' caprices. They will be part of the European ensemble, signifying the true meaning of European integration. And if Russia truly desires to play in that ensemble, rather than opposing the Baltic states, it should learn from them.

Notes:

1 The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, the Department of Defense or the US government.

2 James Kurth, "The Next NATO: Building an American Commonwealth of Nations," *The National Interest*, No. 65, Fall 2001, via lexis-nexis.

3 John Roper and Peter Van Ham, "Redefining Russia's Role in Europe," Vladimir Baranovsky, ed., *Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for SIPRI, 1997), p. 517.

4 "OSCE Officially Resolves to Close its Mission to Latvia," *Baltic News Service (BNS)*, 18 December 2001, via lexis-nexis; and "Russia Reluctant to Accept International Opinion on OSCE Closure: Latvian Foreign Minister," *BNS*, 22 December 2001, via lexis-nexis.

5 "Putin Says Russia Had a Good Year in National Call-In," *Russia TV*, 0900 GMT, 24 December 2001, via lexis-nexis.

6 William R. Smyser, "Putin Plays the German Card," and "W.R. Smyser Replies," *Transatlantic Internationale Politik* (English-language edition), I, No. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 32-39; Robert Cottrell and Andrew Jack, "Moscow Wants Say on European Union's

Eastward Expansion," *Financial Times*, 2 January 2001, p. 2; "Germans in Secret Talks with Russians to Take Back Königsberg," *London Sunday Telegraph*, 21 January 2001; Paul Goble, "A De Facto Veto?" ; author's conversations with Baltic diplomats and officials in the Baltic states, May 2000; Bill Gertz, "Russia Transfers Nuclear Arms to Baltics," *Washington Times*, 3 January 2001, p. 1; and Tabassum Zakaria, "Russia Moved Nuclear Weapons into Kaliningrad-U.S.," *Reuters*, 3 January 2001 (also reprinted in Johnson's Russia List,).

7 Federal News Service, National Public Radio Interview and Listener Call-In with Russian President Vladimir Putin, National Public Radio, 15 November 2001, via lexis-nexis; "Putin Says Russia Had a Good Year in National Call-In."

8 Author's conversations with US diplomats and officials in the Baltic states, May 2000; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines, 30 December 2001.

9 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines, 30 December 2001; *Helsingin Sanomat* Internet Version, 16 October 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-1016; "Russian Gas Deliveries to the Baltic Region Halted," *Izvestia*, 30 June 1993, via Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (Henceforth CDPP), XLV, No. 26, 1993, p. 17.

10 Conversations with officials of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, May 2000; Radio Riga Network, 10 December 1999, via FBIS-SOV-1999-1210; and *Neatkariga Rita Avize*, 16 October 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-1019.

11 Aleksandr' A. Pikaev, "Russia and the Baltic States: Challenges and Opportunities," Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin, eds., *The Baltic States in World Politics* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), pp. 134-137.

12 "Russian Gas Deliveries to the Baltic Region Halted."

13 BNS, 12 June 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-0612; and Lietuvos Rytas Internet Version, 12 June 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-0612. Moscow also unilaterally announced that the 1920 Tartu Treaty between Estonia and Soviet Russia is invalid: The Monitor, 3 February 2000, and BNS, 10 March 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-0310.

14 Interfax, 24 January 2000, via FBIS-SOV-2000-0124; "New Foreign Minister Gives Wide-Ranging Interview," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 30 September 1998, via CDPP, L, No. 39, 28 October 1998, p. 10.

15 US-Slovakia Action Commission: Security and Foreign Policy Working Group: Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Slovakia's Security and Foreign Policy Strategy, 2001; Czech Security Information Service, Annual Report 2000, via ; and conversations with US diplomats and East European analysts, Washington, DC, 6-7 September 2001.

16 See Putin's statement to this effect in Michael Wines, "NATO

Plan Offers Russia Equal Voice on Some Policies," The New York Times, 23 November 2001, pp. A1, 15.

17 Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, "A Framework for the Study of Security Communities," and Emanuel Adler, "Seeds of Peaceful Change: The OSCE's Security Community-Building Model," both in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., Security Communities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 30-58 and 119-160, respectively.

18 The Monitor, 12 July 2001, and for Poland, John Reed, "Worried in Warsaw," Financial Times, 10 January 2002, p. 11.

19 For a discussion of the MAPs, see Jeffrey Simon, "Roadmap to NATO Accession: Preparing for Membership," INSS Special Report (Washington, DC: Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, October 2001).

20 Author's interviews with Czech officials in 1994 and 1997, and with Baltic officials in Tallinn and Vilnius, May 2000; Lars Wallin and Bengt Andersson, "A Defence Model for the Baltic States," *European Security*, X, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 94-97; BNS, 24 November 1999, via FBIS-SOV-1999-1124; Smyser, *op. cit.*; Cottrell and Jack, *op. cit.*; and Goble, *op. cit.*

21 Magyar Hirlap, 16 September 2000, via FBIS-EEU-2000-0918; Sarah Means, "Expanding Democracy to Russia's Back Door," *The Washington Times*, 18 May 2001, p. A19; Ed Holt, "Europe: US-Slovak Report Angers Russia over NATO Membership," *Inter Press Service*, 11 May 2001; *Monitor*, 6 July 2000, via FBIS EEU-2000-0706; and "Russia's Overseas Investment," *The Economist*, 17-23 February 2001, via Johnson's Russia List.

22 For an assessment of some of the issues and problems connected with the CESDP, see Stephen Blank, *The Transatlantic Security Agenda: A Conference Report and Analysis* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002), pp. 3-22. For evidence of continuing military failure among EU members, see Geoffrey Wavro, "Europe Not Ready For Prime-Time War?," *Hartford Courant*, 23 December 2001; and Kim Willsher, "French Farce of the Force De Frappe," *London Sunday Telegraph*, 16 December 2001.

23 Steven Erlanger, "Poland is Pressed to Choose Between Europe and US," *The New York Times*, 4 June 2000, I, p. 8; Martin Walker, "The Turkish Miracle," *The Wilson Quarterly*, XXIV, No. 4, Autumn 2000, pp. 84-85.

24 Richard Perle, "To Chirac from the US Army: We Are Staying in the Balkans," *London Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2001.

25 Alexander Mineev, "Russia, West to Consult over Shaping of EU's Defense," ITAR-TASS, 28 September 2000; Natalya Gudzenko, "Russia Set to Develop a Dialogue with the European Union," ITAR-TASS, 28 June 2001; Alexander Nicoll, "Leaders Set for Renewed Pressure to Boost Europe's Capabilities," Financial Times, 13 June 2001, p. 9.

26 Blank, op. cit., p. 22.

27 BNS, 27 July 2001, via FBIS-SOV-2001-0727.

28 President George W. Bush, "Address to the Faculty and Students of Warsaw University," 15 June 2001, via .

Copyright Boston University Trustees 2002

Unless otherwise indicated, all articles appearing in this journal have been commissioned especially for *Perspective*. This article was originally published at <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol12/Blank.html>.