PORGMUN Research Paper

Baltic Security: East-West Tensions

Introduction

This research paper consists of two parts. The first part provides a general overview and discusses predominantly Russian political and economic evolvement throughout the 90s and the new millennium. It seeks to explain the current state of Russia's diplomatic relations with the West as well as shed on light on the Baltic fears of possible Russian efforts to destabilize the region. The second part examines the relations between Russia and a one Baltic nation, namely Estonia.
It is strongly recommended to pay attention to the additional reading links found at the bottom of each page.

Part 1: A General Overview

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the relations of the Russian Federation and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have continually worsened. Only over the past decade has the security situation in the Baltic region as well as in the whole of Eastern Europe immensely deteriorated. We have continuously been witnesses to numerous speculated and confirmed Russian acts of aggression such as the 2008 Russo-Georgian War or the ongoing conflict in the Donbass region. In the light of these events, the three Baltic States do have some reason to fear that Russia may attempt to internally destabilize them and provoke unrest.

1.1 *The end of all conflicts?*

In the years preceding and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union the situation was nevertheless all quite different. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, published his famous essay "*The End of History?"*.[1] In it, he claimed that all viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism had been exhausted and that economic and political liberalism has achieved an unabashed victory. He asserted that Western liberal democracy will (to some minor exceptions) be universalized as the final form of human

[1] Francis Fukuyama: The End of History?: http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm

government and that a unipolar world has been established. For these reasons, he concluded that the world history has in fact come to an end for any revolutionary events or large-scale conflicts are unlikely to occur in a world dominated and ruled by the West.

History has shown us that Mr. Fukuyama had in this aspect been gravely mistaken. The economic growth of China and the constant unrest in the Middle-East (to give an example) had proved him otherwise – that history has certainly not come to an end and that the world has not at all turned out to be unipolar[2]. This pertains especially to the current relations and tensions between the West and the East; "West" implying Europe and the United States and "East" implying the Russian Federation. Fukuyama indirectly and mistakenly implied that the Baltic region (among many other regions in the world, of course) would never again be a source of a conflict. Since the "West" and the "East" had, according to him, ceased to exist, it was almost unimaginable to think that any insurrection would ever occur in a region that had for decades been on the border between the two. Yet the new millennium brought entirely unexpected turns. The above-mentioned relations and tensions, and the transformation of Russia from a chaotic post-Soviet state into one of the world's powers are the subject of discussion in the following paragraphs.

1.2 Wealth distribution and freedom of expression in Russia

In the 1990s, many had hoped for Russia's democratization and assimilation to core Western values. However, the wild Yeltsin-era transition from the world's largest state-controlled economy into a market-oriented economy produced quite a different result[3]. As the Soviet system was being dismantled, well-placed bosses and technocrats in the Communist Party, KGB, and Komsomol (Soviet Youth League) cashed in on their Soviet-era power and privileges. Taking advantage of their insider positions, these best-connected former nomenklatura leaders along with successful entrepreneurs accumulated much of the country's wealth. When Vladimir Putin became the president of the Russian Federation in 2000 following a series of crises connected to the former president Boris Yeltsin, he said in his inauguration speech that "*We want our Russia to be a free, prosperous, flourishing, strong and civilized country, a country that its citizens are proud of and that is respected internationally."* However, during his two presidential terms, he

[2] The Atlantic: It's Still Not the End of History http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/its-still-not-the-end-of-history-francis-fukuyama/379394/

[3] Science Direct: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366510000345

and his administration butted heads with the above-mentioned powerful oligarchs who had prospered in the post-Soviet years. The loyalty of these oligarchs, who were and are in control of key national industry and media de-facto enabled Putin to take control of Russia. What the West had hoped would become a functioning authentic democratic regime had turned out to be a regime with wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a few. A 2013 global wealth study published by the financial services group Credit Suisse says a mere 110 Russian citizens control 35 percent of total household wealth across the country[4].

An unequal distribution of wealth would not, of course, have to necessarily imply that a liberal democracy cannot function. However, with regards to Russia, the opposite is the case. Critics may say that the Russian constitution does provide for freedom of speech and press; however, government application of law, bureaucratic regulation, and politically motivated criminal investigations have forced the press to exercise self-censorship constraining its coverage of certain controversial issues, resulting in infringements of these rights. In 2013 Russia ranked 148th out of 179 countries in the Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders.

1.3 Russia Foreign policy

The fact that Russia today manifests itself as Western-like liberal democracy, when it in fact is strikingly reminiscent of an oligarchy[5] (or neo-liberal autocracy[6]), would not, with regards to international diplomacy, be the most serious problem. The fact that much of its wealth has been accumulated in the hands of a few and that it to a degree does not respect some basic democratic principles to which it claims to commit may be of substantial concern to the domestic population and various non-governmental organizations across the globe but not necessarily to the world's diplomatic community. A slightly different regime in Russia would also not directly contradict Fukuyama's assertions about the end of history, since a differently functioning but still a more or less democratic and a capitalistic regime would not necessarily imply that a conflict between this and other regimes has to inevitably take place. In fact, in the first decade of the new millennium, Russia was considered a reliable partner of NATO and the European Union. However, the situation has since then changed

[4] Business Insider: http://www.businessinsider.com/putting-russias-unparalleled-wealth-disparity-in-perspective-2013-10
[5] BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16276956
[6] New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/11/opinion/masha-gessen-the-myth-of-the-russian-oligarchs.html?_r=0

dramatically. With the domestic political situation stabilized, with the massive economic growth in the 00s[7], and with the power situation consolidated, Russia once again began to play a key role in international diplomacy as its predecessor, the Soviet Union, had done so in the Cold-War era.

The foreign policy of Russia has since the assumption of presidency by Vladimir Putin in 2000 undergone a significant transformation. Throughout the 2000s, the relations between Russia and the United Kingdom deteriorated due to the "spy rock" affair as well as due to the fact that the United Kingdom had granted political asylums to prominent Putin opponents such as Boris Berezovsky (in 2003) or Alexander Litvinenko (in 2006). In February 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Putin rejected the concept of a unipolar world[8] and criticized what he called the United States' monopolistic dominance in global relations.[9] *"I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world. (...) Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force - military force - in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts."* In 2014, with NATO's decision to suspend practical co-operation with Russia and all major Western countries' decision to impose a host of sanctions against Russia,[10] Putin's Russia's relationship with the West came to be characterized as assuming an adversarial nature. These recent events along with the constant unrelentingly sharp anti-Western rhetoric coming from the Kremlin all seem to indicate to the West that Russia has set out on a path to revive its imperial past rather than on that of integration.[11] The following paragraph returns to what is discussed at the very beginning – the security situation in the Baltic region.

1.4 Russian-Baltic relations overview

Over the past twenty-five years, the three Baltic States have clearly signaled their desire to be outside any claimed Russian sphere of influence. But with the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula and with the speculated Russian involvement in Ukraine, fears grow that Moscow could soon turn its eye to other states where a sizeable minority is ethnically or linguistically Russian – these would precisely be the three Baltic States.

[7] The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/10765120
[8] Putin Munich speech transcript: http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml
[9] New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/world/europe/11munich.html?pagewanted=all
[10] BBC: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26838894
[11] Foreign Policy: http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/21/putins-empire-of-the-mind/

[12]These fears are not irrational: over the past year, Moscow has continually asserted that it has the right and the obligation to protect Russians anywhere in the world.[13] Events of the past are not too comforting either. The Soviet Union never formally acknowledged its presence in the Baltics as an occupation and considered the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics as its constituent republics. Today, the Russian government and state officials maintain that the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states was legitimate. In 2004, Russia expressed strong discontent when the three former Warsaw Pact members joined the NATO. At the point where we find ourselves today, there can only of course be speculations to what Russia's next steps in the region might be. However, the relations between Russia and the Baltic states remain tense.

In order to fully comprehend the events and relations of today regarding the Russian Federation and the Baltic States, we provide below a brief history of their 20th century relations, with particular focus placed on those of Estonia since they could be considered the most critical out of the three Baltic countries.

[12] Financial Times: http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/71d9145c-3268-11e4-a5a2-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3T30Jqzdg

[13] The Washington Post: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-reserves-the-right-to-use-force-in-ukraine/2014/03/04/92d4ca70-a389-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html

Part 2: Estonia-Russia relations

2.1 History

2.1.1 World War Two and before

Diplomatic relations between Bolshevist Russia and the Republic of Estonia were established on 2 February 1920, following the Estonian War of Independence.[14] Before the beginning of the Second World War, the Soviet Union and Estonia had ratified various non-aggression treaties such as the "Kellogg-Briand Pact", the "Non-aggression treaty" of 1932 and "The Convention for the Definition of Aggression" .

In June 1940, the Soviet Union attacked and subsequently annexed Estonia. With the Ribbentrop-Molotov signed, Estonia could hardly defend itself. In the one year that preceded the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 and the subsequent fall of Estonia into German hands, ten thousand Estonian men were deported to Siberia while another thirty thousand were forcibly relocated to the Soviet Union. The former Estonian president Konstantin Päts was arrested and deported by the Soviets to Ufa in Russia.[15]

2.1.2 World War Two and after

After Estonia was re-occupied by the Soviet army in 1944, about 80 000 people fled Estonia. Then until 1949, a guerilla war was lead by Estonia partisans against the Soviet forces. In 1949, the Soviets deported about 21 000 Estonians to the Soviet Union, which, as a result, broke the basis of the partisan movement. For the next forty years, until 1989, Estonia was governed from Moscow. As part of the goal to more fully integrate Baltic countries into the Soviet Union, mass deportations were conducted in the Baltic countries including Estonia and a policy of encouraging Soviet immigration to the Baltic states was promoted. In 1920, ethnic Russians made up 8.2% of the population of Estonia; today ethnic Russians make up 24% of Estonia's population. Over the course of the Cold War, the United States and the West considered the presence of Soviet troops in Estonia an accupation and did recognize exiled Estonian diplomats and officials. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Estonia declared its independence in 1991. However, it took three more years before all Russian troops were withdrawn from Estonian territory.

2.1.3 Present era

[14] http://www.esm.ee/11477/
[15] http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/history/soviet-deportations-from-estonia-in-1940s.html

Russian-Estonian relations were re-established in January 1991, when the presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Arnold Rüütel of Estonia met in Tallinn and signed a treaty governing the relations of the two countries after the anticipated independence of Estonia from the Soviet Union. However, the relations of the two have since certainly not grown in the positive direction.

In 2007, Estonia saw the worst mass protests and riots since the 1944 Soviet reoccupation in what became known as the „Bronze Night". The Bronze Night refers to the controversy and riots that preceded and followed the relocation of the Bronze Soldier of Talinn by the Estonian government. The Bronze Soldier of Tallinn is a monument celebrating the victory of the Soviets in the Second World War, that had been located in the centre of Tallinn, Estonia's capital. However, to Estonians, it was a symbol of Russian oppression and occupation. When the Estonian goverment planned to relocate the statue out of the centre of the city and eventually did so, a harsh Russian reaction followed. It stemmed from the fact that Estonia's ethnic Russians do not agree with Estonia's interpretation of the history of the Second World War and consider the arrival of the Red Army in Estonia in 1944 a liberation. The Bronze Soldier in the centre of Tallinn was therefore of great emotional and personal importnace to them. The Bronze Night protests lasted for two nights and were eventually supressed by Estonian security forces.

Amidst these protests in late April 2007, Estonia became a target of a sophisticated large-scale cyberattacks.[16][17] The series of cyberattacks swampred websites of Estonian organizations, including Estonian parliament, banks, ministries, newspapers and broadcasters. Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet accused the Kremlin of direct involvement in the cyberattacks. Russia called accusations of its involvement "unfounded". Experts, however, believe that such cyberwarfare efforts exceed the skills of individual activists or even organised crime aad require a cooperation of a state and a large telecom company. Russia's FSB security service said in a statement it had detained Kohver in north-western Russia, close to the Estonian border, on Friday as he attempted to carry out an "undercover operation".

In September 2014, Eston Kohver, an Estonian Internal Service official was abducted by Russian forces on the south-eastern border between Estonia and Russia. Russia's FSB security service claims that it had detained Kohver on the Russian side of the border as he attempted to carry out an "undercover

[16] The Guardian: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/17/topstories3.russia
[17] The Economist: http://www.economist.com/node/9163598

operation. However, prosecutors in Talinn hold that Kohver was abducted at gunpoint from Estonian territory.

2.2 Language and citizenship issues

During the second half of the 20th century, ethnic Estonians were deported out of Estonia into the Soviet Union, while ethnic Russians were being forcibly relocated to Estonia. These mass deportations led to the share of ethnic Estonians in the country decreasing from 88% in 1934 to 62% in 1989. Today, Estonian society, comprising both of ethnic Estonians and a large number of ethnic Russians, still remains divided along lines of ethnicity and legal status. The complex integration of Russians into Estonian society stemms from the fact that the Estonian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric grouping of the Uralic language family, which is completely different from the Indo-European languages. Over time, five different integration groups have been observed:

1. Successfully integrated: This group consists of mostly young people, who were born and educated in Estonia. They are Estonian citizens and consider themselves part of the Estonian community. They trust the Estonian state and authorities, and follow Estonian media and prefer it to Russian channels.
2. Russian-speaking patriots of Estonia: These are people are middle-aged, mostly Estonian citizens who do not cope very well economically. They consider themselves a part of the Estonian community but they do speak Russian.
3. Estonian-speaking active and critical: This group comprises of young and active people, who did not integrate well into the Estonian community. Although they are in most cases economically secure, only half of them holds an Estonian citizenship, and others consider Russia (in a predominant majority of cases) to be their homeland.
4. Little integrated: This is the lowest-income group, with mostly undefined citizenship. They do not speak Estonian, distrust state authorities, and lack a sense of security. They follow both local and Russian media.
5. Unintegrated passive: These are mainly older people. They usually have a Russian citizenship, consider Russia their homeland and have no interest in joining the Estonian community.

Integration of Russians in Estonia