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Russia's Northwest Strategic Direction

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A unique set of security issues has emerged from Russia's northwest strategic direction in the post-Cold War era.¹ The conjunction of Russian transformation and crisis has recast security issues in the Baltic and Nordic regions, reducing the risk of military conflict but raising a host of issues associated with Russia's Baltic relations, especially the status of the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia and the dangerous legacy of a nuclearized Kola peninsula. The Western response to these issues, particularly in the Nordic countries and international institutions, has introduced a new subregional security system in Europe.

Given other European crises in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, one could ask whether the issues associated with the northwest constitute a hot spot in the absence of open hostilities and military confrontation. The sensitive Baltic issues make the case. There is potential for linkage to other concerns, notably the proposed union of Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia, which sophisticated Russian commentators have labeled a "hysterical" response that does not reflect Russian long-range interests in the region or in Europe.² In a recent essay the eminent historian of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis, asserts that the post-Cold War world is noteworthy for the shifting tectonic plates of international security. Gaddis suggests that a "geological" approach, reading the past history of seismic events, could help us to foresee where likely "earthquakes" would shape 21st-century geopolitics. He suggests that we are all now "living in Candlestick Park," alluding to the 1989 San Francisco earthquake.³

While Gaddis focuses on the macro aspects of geopolitics and past patterns, his point also applies to regional security problems, especially those affecting Russia and the successor states. These new shifts are best examined in their regional context and not from a global or ideological context. In the new geopolitical context, hot spots may include overt tensions and also ecological challenges that threaten peace and stability. With NATO involved in its first large-scale combat operations in Yugoslavia and the ensuing chill in relations between Russia and the West, the northwest may not seem a serious issue on a global or even European scale. Closer examination

shows that such subregional security issues will have their own profound impact on European security *and* global stability. Indeed, the much-touted military exercise, *ZAPAD 99*, which the Russian Ministry of Defense and General Staff initiated on 22 June 1999, explicitly linked the threat of regional conflict in this region with nuclear escalation in response to the threat of mass, precision strikes against military targets in the theater.

For the first time in a decade, Russian super-sonic, cruise-missile-armed Tu-160 "Blackjack" bombers streaked down the coast of Norway while Tu-95 "Bears" probed Iceland's airspace. As Minister of Defense Igor Sergeyev noted, "The exercise tested one of the provisions of Russia's military doctrine concerning a possible use of nuclear weapons when all other measures are exhausted." Russia's military crisis has raised security challenges in the northwest direction, causing a different subregional dynamic in Europe. Here the ethno-national tensions and ecological dangers challenge neighboring states as much as conventional military threats.

With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia finds itself in a complex and protracted process of internal reform and international adjustment. The threats that gave structure to the Cold War military confrontation across Europe have disappeared, but new challenges have emerged. Ethno-national conflicts, economic dislocations, political instability and massive demographic changes have become pressing concerns for the international community. In the absence of ideologically driven competition, geopolitics and broader definition of issues involved in national security have brought about a new conceptualization of international security. As Jakub M. Godzimirski argues, geostrategic space, historical experience, national identity and economic framework shape and delimit Russian foreign and security policy in general and its regional dimensions in particular.⁴ Godzimirski suggests that five core issues have shaped the debate on Russian foreign and security policies:

- Protection of Russia's territorial integrity.
- Protection of Russian minorities in the near abroad.
- Participation in international organizations.
- Safeguarding support from the west for economic reforms.
- Maintaining a strategic balance with other great powers, especially the United States.⁵

In the current context of Russia's domestic situation and international environment, some commentators have argued that the relative importance of military versus Russian national security has declined. As K.S. Gadzhiev observed:

"The concept of security includes identifying, systematizing, and evaluating all possible sources and parameters of threats. Today, national security does not depend on the armed forces alone, but on a number of other factors as well: economic might; the ability of industry to compete; the quality of the education system; the well-being of the citizenry, their mind-set, etc. Sources of real-world threats to the security of most, if not all, states include: terrorism; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; ethno-national conflicts and inter-religious conflicts; environmental degradation; the slowing or halting of economic growth. Four decades ago, despite the harm they brought, narcotics smuggling and various epidemics could be considered non-political. As such, the use of force was inappropriate for their resolution. Today, such factors as narcotics trafficking and AIDS have taken on a political and foreign-policy dimension.

Currently, in addition to providing for a country's physical security and territorial integrity, national power must be realized in all of its aspects, and the following factors must be taken into consideration



in the process: the problems of the World Ocean; environmental pollution; energy resources; economic productivity; discount rates; population numbers; and many other factors that are made stronger by the growing interdependence. It is therefore obvious that the resources a country may have at its disposal represent only one aspect of power. The actions and reactions by which the actors relate to one another comprise another aspect. To put it differently, the national power of an individual state can only be defined within the context of its relations with other states and their perceptions of one another."⁶

In this context the present crisis of the Russian military should be analyzed not from the perspective of a "zero-sum" game that translates declining Russian military power as an inherent benefit to its neighbors, but as a problem affecting national, regional and global stability and security. The collapse of the Russian military and the unresolved legacy of Soviet militarization pose a very different set of dangers and risks.

The Crisis of Russian Military Reform

For almost a dozen years civilian and military leaders in Moscow have spoken of military reform as a process under way. In that same period the Soviet Union and its armed forces have collapsed.⁷ Russia emerged as its chief successor state and nationalized those armed forces that remained under its sovereignty.⁸ Subsequently, those armed forces were defeated in the course of a civil war with the breakaway Chechen Republic. Since then, the Russian military has made sporadic attempts to reform and reduce forces. The armed forces became victims of what one author called "a time of troubles."⁹ Reduced in numbers and underfunded, the Russian armed forces are a hollow shell of the Soviet armed forces. With an official strength of 1.2 million men, this current force goes unpaid and has become the step-child of a government in crisis.

Military reform under current Minister of Defense Marshal Sergeyev has involved bureaucratic consolidation and rationalization, primarily emphasizing sustained strategic nuclear forces as the ultimate military guarantee of great power status. These measures included consolidating all

strategic forces under one command, unifying the air forces and air defense forces, abolishing the command of the ground forces, reducing the number of military districts from eight to six and reorganizing the ground forces into 10 active divisions.¹⁰ Budgetary constraints and a declining GDP suggest further manpower reductions to a force of 600,000. The Ministry of Defense budget over the last several years has not even been sufficient to pay the salaries and allowances of its officers and men. Reform has amounted to nothing more than restructuring and force cuts to save money. In short, planning for reform has continued, but funding has delayed actual execution.

Diagnosing the Patient

The Russian military's problems are chronic, numerous and deep. Low morale reflects the military's diminished status in society. The top-heavy officer corps has a shortage of junior officers and leads a conscript pool based on a small portion of eligible age cohort drawn from Russian youth with health and social problems. Brutal hazing in the barracks causes suicides among recruits, and criminalization and corruption permeate the force. Grossly inadequate training, minuscule procurement of new weapons and looming block obsolescence in the first years of the next century, and the officer corps' disdain for and distrust of the current government complete the picture of a dying military. As an acute observer noted, the military's inability to deal with its own decline into chaos and disorder has gone hand-in-hand with remarkable marginalization in Russian national politics. Disgruntled officers perceive their caste as sheep going to the slaughter.¹¹ Each time the sheep complain of starvation, the political shepherds respond with another round of cuts in manpower. One of the Yeltsin government's most vocal critics, Colonel Viktor Baranets, used precisely that language to describe Russia's "lost Army."¹² The much-publicized film *Chistilishche* [Purgatory], written and directed by nationalist journalist Aleksandr Nevzorov and produced by the oligarch Boris Berezovsky, carries the metaphor even further, depicting the Russian army in Chechnya as a crucified Christ.¹³

Indeed, the Russian National Security Concept, published in December 1997, plays down military threats to Russian security and emphasizes internal (economic) threats as the predominant national security concern.¹⁴ Under these circumstances the Ministry of Defense has sought to maintain about one-third of Russia's conventional military equipment operationally ready for the Ground Forces, Air Forces and Navy. In the Ground Forces only three divisions and four brigades stationed in the Moscow, Leningrad, North Caucasian and Siberian military districts are maintained in permanent combat readiness — fully equipped but manned at 80 percent.¹⁵ By assuming low risk of a general war, these forces prepare to deal with widely dispersed regional contingencies.



A *Typhoon* class SSBN with Northern Fleet. Northern Fleet retains the strategic nuclear mission but faces declining numbers of boats and reduced patrols while also dealing with the pressing, expensive program of decommissioning and decorating nuclear submarines.

The financial meltdown of August 1998, coupled with a deepening crisis of state finances and a political leadership's vacuum sustain the vector, and momentum of military reform, nailed shut the coffin on Yeltsin's Russian Armed Forces. They now occupy a limbo between the militarized edifice of the Soviet armed forces and the transformed armed forces needed for Russia and its society today.¹⁶ Failing to overcome the legacy of the former and achieve the latter has created significant problems for Russia and dangers to international security and stability.

Now, according to Prime Minister Yegeny Primakov, Russia is engaged in a process of stabilization and reform. Internationally, it is "gathering strength" to reassume the role of a great power in Eurasia.¹⁷ Military reform has not emerged as a priority for the prime minister, and President Yeltsin, for all his statements and promises over the last six years, has proved more adept at restructuring the national security apparatus and playing "musical chairs" with his national security leadership than at genuine improvements. Unless Russia collapses, which informed observers still see as unlikely, one can anticipate the rebirth of its military power in the first decades of the 21st-century.¹⁸ But the armed forces and the institutions that will support them will be different—a far cry from the mass industrial army and militarized industrial order of the Soviet past. Whether the military is an instrument of a democratic Russia, a benign presence in the international security environment or an instrument for undermining the current international order in a particular region will depend to a significant measure on the way the armed forces emerge from their current limbo. Further cuts without a rational reform program carry grave risks for Russia and its neighbors. As Hans-Hermann Hoehmann and Christian Meier have pointed out, the Soviet Union was "a *security risk by strength*," and Russia has become "a *security risk by weakness*."¹⁹

The militarization of the Soviet state and society make it impossible to overcome the serious problems confronting the Russian military without addressing the profound political, economic, social and spiritual problems facing Russia during this transition. While noting significant positive changes in Russia, Ambassador Rene Nyberg recently outlined problems that contributed to the risks associated with Russia's current weakness.²⁰ Many of these problems have deep roots in the Soviet period but have become much worse in the last decade.

- First, there is the unresolved legacy of collectivization: land reform is not progressing to revive agricultural productivity.²¹
- Second, the public health crisis unheard of in a peacetime industrial nation, has led to an absolute decline in population by two million since 1991, declining male life expectancy and an epidemic rise in certain communicable diseases. However, some key health problems, such as alcoholism, are not amenable to easy solution short of profound changes in the national life style. Insufficient investment in public health only makes this crisis and its consequences worse.²²
- Third, there is a demographic crisis associated with the migrations of dislocated populations within Russia and the other Commonwealth of Independent States. Significant population flight from the Russian north and far east are direct consequences of the disappearance of state subsidies to sustain these regions and their substantial

defense-industrial complexes. Nyberg estimates the population exodus from Murmansk in the last decade at nearly 20 percent.²³

- Fourth, Russia has witnessed a dramatic process of de-industrialization during the same period. The gigantic Soviet industrial complex with its emphasis upon military effectiveness collapsed with *Gosplan* and *Gossnab*. Privatization brought profits to the new owners as they disposed of their enterprises' resources but did not introduce production based on market criteria. Indeed, Nyberg asserts that privatization has gone hand-in-hand with "primitivization"—collapsing infrastructure that supports the national economy.²⁴ This claim is raised by concerned officials from the Russian north. In October 1995 Igor Shkiper, president of the Union of the Far North and Polar Cities, warned the union's congress that the region was dying as a result of insufficient funding. On 10 October, the Federation Council announced that the government had provided the northern territories with only 77 percent of the oil, 63 percent of the coal and 64 percent of the food allotted to them in the 1995 budget.²⁵
- Fifth, the central state's authority has collapsed and devolved many aspects of state power to the oblasts and republics by default rather than design. Only in Chechnya, however, have local authorities taken up arms against the center in a drive to leave the Russian Federation.
- Finally, men — not laws — rule Russia. Without the rule of law there is no foundation for structuring the complex competitive relationship among the federal authorities, the oblast/republic governments and local authorities. Without a binding contractual-constitutional relationship cementing these relationships, Russia cannot effectively govern itself toward democratization or rejuvenate the national economy on a market basis.²⁶

While these weaknesses affect all of Russia, there are compelling reasons to address the problem regionally. Russia remains a vast country, but in this "time of troubles" it also must face problems with a weakened central government. Regional dynamics affect both the internal reform prospects and Russia's immediate neighbors' security prospects. Indeed, Alexandr Nemets argues that this weak central government has abandoned its responsibilities to peripheral regions in what he calls "a horizontal crisis shifting." The center's policies of neglect have devastated and robbed peripheral regions, "especially the Russian Far East, Eastern Siberia, the regions of the Russian North, and the North Caucasus zone."²⁷

The Northwest — Baltic/Barents Region

The rationale for a subregional approach to the problems associated with Russia's weakness thus has several foundations. The subregional approach reflects the primary focus of Russian national security policy, in which subregional and regional interests and threats have gained importance over global concerns.²⁸ Moreover, military literature has focused on threats of local conflicts that could escalate into regional wars and general conflicts.²⁹ Russian and Western military system analysts also stress the importance of regional threats in determining levels of defense sufficiency.³⁰ Other policy areas reinforce this military component of sub-regional security. Tensions between the regions and the center threaten to disintegrate the state itself. Godzimirski examines Russian security policy in the Baltic Sea and Barents area, noting:

"The situation may deteriorate further if central authorities are unable to fulfill their economic obligations to the regions. If so, the regions may be forced to end their cooperation with the centre, and may further decide that they are better served by horizontal cooperation with other federal subjects or even with other states."³¹

Godzimirski also points out that there are few ethnic threats to Russian integrity in the Baltic/Barents region and that the federal subjects in the region are relatively dependent on the central authorities for their economic survival. He concludes that "the most substantial danger for witnessing a sovereignty parade in these areas is thus a lack of transfers from the central authorities."³² He identifies two federal subjects in the Baltic/Barents region that might join such a parade—Karelian Republic, some of which had been part of interwar Finland, and Kaliningrad, an exclave (geographically separated from Russia proper). Both might find cooperation with neighboring states an appealing solution to local problems as support from the center evaporates. The problems of the Russian Arctic are particularly stark because the Soviet regime fostered intensive settlement. The dense population in the Arctic depends on defense industries and cannot be sustained without cash transfers from the center so depopulation is a likely consequence. A Finnish assessment foresees returning to an agriculture economy and an intense crisis in the nickel-producing city of Noril'sk, which had to be partially evacuated during the winter of 1995. Noril'sk is also one of the most ecologically threatened cities in Russia. The hope for the region is Western and Russian private investment in the vast mineral, timber and energy resources.³³

Thus, while central support and foreign investment loom large as factors in sustaining Russia's territorial integrity, the current financial crisis makes such support and investment seem more and more remote. In the Baltic/Barents region maritime issues assume capital importance. Thus, the Federal-Target Program "World Ocean," announced in January 1997, has a significant regional component and focus. The program places special emphasis upon key littorals, including the Baltic and Barents, as foundations of Russian maritime power and the base from which to exploit oceanic resources.³⁴ It addresses mobilizing national resources to support Russian naval/maritime protection of national and geopolitical interests. The program also seeks socio-economic development of coastal regions and a stabilization of its maritime commercial complex, including merchant marine and fishing industries, oceanic mineral resources and Russia's oceanographic research. Indeed, the program notes that more than 80 percent of Russia's oil and gas reserves are located in the shelf of its northern seas. The program focuses on cooperation among the various agencies and institutes of the Russian state to sustain the study and exploit maritime resources and potential. At least one program supporter considered the establishment/re-establishment of a Naval Ministry as vital to the success of the World Ocean Program.³⁵ The program was announced at a time of significant problems precisely in the Baltic-Barents littoral.

Baltic Security Issues

The perception of security issues in the Baltic/Barents region has profoundly changed since the end of the Cold War. In the Baltic, which was a Soviet *mare nostrum*, geopolitical changes have recast the region. After the Baltic states regained their independence, Russian troops withdrew from their territory. Russia's Kaliningrad oblast is now isolated by land from Russia and depends

on transit through Lithuania. Progress to update the Conventional Forces, Europe, CFE agreement has been substantial, and it appears that Russia will agree to a cap on treaty-limited items in Kaliningrad and Pskov oblasts as part of a general demilitarization of Baltic security issues.³⁶ A unified Germany has emerged as a major player in the Baltic, while Sweden and Finland, Cold War "neutrals" and nonaligned states, have joined the European Union and NATO's Partnership for Peace. There is even an persistent debate in both capitals about the advantages of joining NATO.³⁷ With Poland's recent admission to NATO Lithuania borders an alliance member. On the basis of a German-Danish initiative, the Baltic Sea States Council was established in 1992 with a membership of the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway), Germany, Poland, Russia and the European Commission. This forum has served to enhance democratic development and address environmental issues in the region.³⁸

The Baltic states have not only joined the Partnership-for-Peace but have also sought to enhance their relations with the West on the basis of developing joint peacekeeping forces, the BALTBAT (Baltic Battalion) and sending a company of that battalion to join the NORDPOL Brigade with

Multi-National Division (North) in IFOR/SFOR. They recently opened a joint defense college (BALTDEFCOL) in Tartu, Estonia. The Nordic states, led by Denmark, have assisted in these endeavors and have provided leadership for the Baltic Security Assistance Group (BALTSEA), the Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON) and the Baltic Air Surveillance Network (BALTNET), all of which link the Baltic States to the West and provide for greater rationality and burden sharing.³⁹ Denmark has been particularly active in this process, but the other Nordic states also see the security of the Baltic States as an important and necessary part of their own security in post-Cold War Europe.⁴⁰

For the Baltic States NATO membership remains the final goal of their national security strategies. As Valdis Birkavs, the foreign minister of Latvia, recently stated before the Finnish Parliament, NATO and the Trans-Atlantic link are vital pillars of Baltic security. "So long as NATO remains the pillar of European security, Latvia will strive for full membership. We will be full members of Europe and as such, we expect to contribute to the alliance which forms the backbone of the security architecture."⁴¹ In January 1998 the United States signed the Baltic Charter with the Baltic States. While the charter brought greater US support for integrating the Baltic nations into Western institutions, including NATO, it did not promise support for admission to NATO in the immediate future. State Department spokesman James Rubin characterized the charter as a framework for developing US-Baltic relations and a clear statement of US support for "Baltic integration into European and transatlantic institutions." Rubin stated that the US welcomes and supports Baltic aspirations to join NATO, but "the charter is not a security guarantee [and] does not commit the United States to Baltic membership."⁴² Reaction in the Baltic States was generally positive toward the Charter because it enhanced their negotiating posture over minority and border issues with Russia. Some press reports expressed disappointment over the failure to achieve support for immediate entry into NATO, calling the Charter a "consolation prize."⁴³

"Soft security" issues have not replaced "hard security" concerns as the littoral states seek enhanced regional stability. They recognize that credible national defenses are a necessary

security component. Such defenses would not stop a major assault, but they would provide time for international intervention and impose costs upon an aggressor. The armed forces of the three states are quite small. Lithuania has a standing force of 5,250 and a reserve of 11,000; Latvia has a regular force of 4,500 and a reserve of 16,000; and Estonia has 3,510 regulars and 14,000 reserves.⁴⁴ Given the limited financial resources of the Baltic States, there is an inherent tension between those programs that promote integration into international security structures and those that support national defense.⁴⁵

Russians in Latvia and Estonia present a core stability issue.⁴⁶ In Estonia there are about 409,000 Russians among a total population of 1,453,000, but the Russians are heavily concentrated in the cities and the northeast region of the state around Narva.⁴⁷ In Latvia the Russian minority numbers around 700,000 in a population of 2.4 million.⁴⁸ However, both countries have large concentrations of Russians in their capitals. The Baltic nations perceive these populations as Soviet colonizers. Linguistic restrictions on citizenship have been a source of contention in each state. Russian observers have castigated the nationality policies of Latvia and Estonia as introducing apartheid to Europe. This issue has stood in the way of resolving border issues between Russia and the two states.⁴⁹ All three Baltic States have witnessed a shift in their exports and imports toward European Union members over the last five years, and the European Union has given Estonia priority for admission.⁵⁰ However, the Baltics remain heavily dependent upon Russia for energy.⁵¹

Some Russian observers see the emerging "soft security" regime in the Baltic as the best chance for the future stability of the region and Europe. Dmitri Trenin has stressed the advantages of multilateral dialogue.⁵² The single greatest security danger in the Baltic region from the Russian perspective comes from the further enlargement of NATO. Ambassador Yuri Deryabin, director of the Center of Nordic Studies of the Institute of Europe, links Nordic and Baltic security, referring to NATO expansion, especially a second tranche that would include the Baltic States, as the greatest military-political threat to Russia in the region. Such a development would inevitably draw a new dividing line in Europe and isolate Russia.⁵³



(Above, left to right) Baltic defense ministers Talavs Jundzis of Latvia, Andrus Oovel of Estonia and Ceslovas Stankevicius of Lithuania at the December 1997 signing of the treaty establishing the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALTBAT) to cooperate with NATO.; (Right) Nordic and Baltic defense ministers during their June 1997 conference at Kuressaare, Estonia. The ministers endorsed the Estonian proposal to create a Baltic Defense College for the three Baltic nations at this meeting.

Barents Security Issues

While the political boundaries in the Russian north have not changed as radically as in the Baltics, the geostrategic significance of the region has been transformed and security concerns radically recast. During the Cold War, the Kola Peninsula emerged as the basing area for Russia's most powerful fleet with the largest component of the Soviet Union's sea-based strategic forces. Naval and air forces operating from Kola posed a threat to Atlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and provided the surface, subsurface and airborne forces to protect the north bastion of Russian strategic nuclear submarines (SSBNs). Soviet ground forces were of sufficient size and quality to threaten northern Norway, making that country the key to NATO's northern flank.⁵⁴ In the post-Cold War period, the importance of the Kola peninsula has changed radically. As Ingemar Doerfer noted, the military significance of the Northern Fleet has declined and with it the military importance of the region; "Kola is not as important as conventional wisdom proclaims."⁵⁵

The decline of the Northern Fleet highlights the reduced military significance of the Barents area. In part, the fleet's decline manifests Russia's decreasing investment in naval forces. Compared with the decline of Russian naval power in the Baltic Sea, Black Sea and Pacific, the Northern Fleet is arguably more important, particularly its SSBNs, because the deep decline in Russia's general forces has so eroded its conventional forces' combat power.

As a consequence of START I, block obsolescence and slow pace of SSBN construction, the Northern Fleet's SSBN force has declined significantly in numbers. The Delta I and II boats have been retired from service. Seven Delta IV SSBNs remain with Northern Fleet, along with a portion of the Delta III force.⁵⁶ The number of Typhoon class SSBNs has declined from six in 1996 to four in 1997 because of operational costs and design problems.⁵⁷ Doerfer estimates that only one Typhoon will be in service in 2003.⁵⁸ The first of the replacement SSBN class (Borey), the *Yuri Dolgorukiy*, will not enter service until at least 2003, followed by one Borey each year up to 2010. Critics in the Ministry of Defense newspaper, *Krasnaya zvezda*, however, were less optimistic. Given the level of funding provided in FY 1997, they estimated that the *Yuri Dolgorukiy* would take 50 years to complete.⁵⁹ Regardless of future numbers of vessels, very few SSBNs now in service go to sea on patrols.

Northern Fleet finds itself trapped between declining funds to procure and maintain warships and the impact of new technologies that transform the role of maritime forces. On the one hand, state funding for ship building and major refits was slashed to the bone. On the other hand, a revolution in US conventional force capabilities, as announced in Operation *Desert Storm*, posed a new threat to the fleet. With the revolution in military affairs, the vulnerability of its dock yards, infrastructure and ships in port has increased markedly with the advent of long-range, precision-strike weapons from the sea. As Russian Navy retired Vice Admiral Yuri Kviatkov-sky points out, by the year 2000 the US Navy will possess over 7,300 sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM) launchers and Russia will have 16.⁶⁰ Moreover, the Kola peninsula installations are also at risk from stand-off ALCMs. In the face of such a conventional deep-strike threat, Russian forces would have to respond with nuclear forces. At least one observer has suggested that under current conditions the foremost role of the Northern Fleet is political, demonstrating Russia's preparedness to defend itself when it is more vulnerable to conventional attack than it has been for many decades.⁶¹

Both Russia and the West see such a conflict as unlikely in the new European security environment. The military dimensions of the Barents region are thus not as significant as they were during the Cold War. In their place a new set of dangers and risks associated with nuclear systems have become too prominent. They are an indelible part of the maritime image of the post-Cold War world.

Each great 20th-century conflict has had distinct naval images. With World War I, it was the German High Seas Fleet sailing for Scapa Flow and its scuttling by its crews, followed by the Washington Naval Conference to limit the size of the major navies and stop the then ongoing capital-ship race. With World War II, it was the signing of the Japanese surrender on the deck of the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, followed by the sinking of many old ships as a result of atomic tests in the Pacific. The end of the Cold War had its naval dimensions too. One was the Bush-Gorbachev summit at Malta aboard the cruisers *Belknap* and *Slava*. The follow-on image in this case is a large number of nuclear submarines awaiting decommissioning, decoring, and break-up. The Barents region provides the backdrop for much of that image.

The rise of Northern Fleet to a position of preeminence in the Soviet Navy under Admiral Sergei Gorshkov was associated with nuclear power and nuclear weapons. The Northern Fleet became the primary basing area for the largest concentration of Soviet nuclear-powered surface and

submarine forces. The Soviet Union developed the world's largest fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers. Nuclear power plants provided the electricity for the region's vast military-industrial complex. As Torbjorn Norendal pointed out "northwest Russia has the highest concentration of nuclear installations in the world with more than 300 reactors, the great bulk of them in nuclear submarines."⁶² Awareness of this issue in all its complexity began with the meltdown at Chernobyl in 1986 and the loss of the SSN *Komsomolets* in 1989. Both events sharpened Nordic public awareness of the serious problem. By the late 1980s the Soviet Union faced the challenge of decommissioning and decoring obsolete nuclear submarines. National preparations were inadequate, reflected in persistent rumors about nuclear waste dumping in the Barents and Kara seas.

The end of the Cold War provided greater transparency and more opportunities for international cooperation on complex issues involving Russian nuclear facilities in the Barents region. One manifestation of this transformation was the creation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in January 1993. A Norwegian initiative, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council was established at Kirkenes, Norway, with the aim of the member countries' replacing earlier division and European confrontation with partnership in Northern Europe. Its initial members included Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. With Sweden's and Finland's admission to the European Union, the European Commission became the seventh member of the Council.⁶³

The security environment has been transformed. Norwegian Defense Minister Dag Jostein Fjærvoll, speaking on "Norway, NATO and North Europe," recently observed: "Today, Russia does not pose a military threat to her Nordic neighbors, but the High North is still very important in a strategic geopolitical context."⁶⁴ Given the strained economic situation facing Russia and the size of the problems associated with nuclear safety and radioactive waste disposal, the threat from Russia's nuclear hazards has loomed ever larger in Nordic national security strategies. Norway has mounted a large number of bilateral and multilateral programs to deal with various aspects of the problem.⁶⁵ Tomas Ries of Finland has ranked a nuclear accident in Russia as both the most severe and most probable security threat facing Finland.⁶⁶ Air Chief Marshal Sir John Cheshire, commander in chief AFNORTHWEST, has suggested that NATO forces in the north must prepare to respond to a nuclear disaster in Russia. Cheshire pointed to the 10 nuclear power plants in Northwest Russia and Lithuanian and the 160 nuclear submarines awaiting decommissioning with the Baltic and North fleets. He noted that while civilian agencies have the lead in this area of disaster prevention and consequence management, military forces must prepare for their role because of the scale of the potential disaster and the likelihood that such a catastrophe would develop without much advanced warning.⁶⁷

As of December 1998 the Russian Navy had taken 170 nuclear-powered submarines out of operation, but 130 have not been dismantled and between 110 and 115 still have operating nuclear reactors on board.⁶⁸

Considerable evidence confirms the risks from nuclear materials in the Russian Northwest. There were two confirmed attempts to steal fresh nuclear fuel from the North Fleet in 1993, and in 1998 the Russian Federal Inspectorate for Nuclear and Radiation Safety reported eight cases of missing spent fuel rods.⁶⁹ In 1996 a nuclear submarine reactor faced meltdown when a local power company cut off electricity to a dock where nuclear submarines awaited

decommissioning. Only the speedy intervention by naval personnel avoided a serious incident. Finally, in September 1998 at the naval base near Gadzhievo, a disturbed sailor on an *Akula*-class SSN killed eight of his fellow crewmen and barricaded himself in the boat's torpedo room. When troops stormed the torpedo room, they reported that the young man had committed suicide.⁷⁰

As a result of these concerns, a wide range of international and bilateral projects have emerged to assist with the Barents region's nuclear dilemma. Indeed, the nuclear power plant problem extended not only to the power station on the Kola Peninsula but also reached the station near Leningrad and the plant at Ignalina, Lithuania. The European Recovery and Development Bank made available funds to improve nuclear safety at all these plants.⁷¹ According to Ambassador Nyberg, such programs are obviously logical but unfortunately limited.

It remains an incontrovertible fact, however, that the risks entailed in the operation of Russian nuclear power plants represent the greatest physical threat to the European Union. This fact also necessitates the conclusion that Western programs for improving nuclear safety can never be a substitute for Russian efforts to improve the safety of their own installations.⁷²

The nuclear safety problems are daunting and systemic. One cannot address the facilities without also finding solutions for the problem of nuclear waste storage and disposal, which involves regional facilities and more distant complexes, such as the Mayak reprocessing plant near Chelyabinsk in the Urals.

One of the most pressing nuclear problems of the Barents region is the disposal of obsolete nuclear submarines and their reactors. The former Soviet Union had more nuclear-powered submarines than the rest of the world combined. Of 100-115 Russian nuclear submarines in a state of decommissioning and awaiting decoring of their reactors, estimated 50-70 are with the Northern Fleet.⁷³ While an optimal program would involve decommissioning and decoring 10 boats per year, Russia has only completed three to six per year. Slow progress increases costs because the boats must be maintained and a partial crew deployed on each vessel awaiting decoring, substantially exceeding the \$3-4 million tabbed for the dismantling process. Progress has also been slowed by a host of problems with nuclear waste disposal sites in the region and beyond. The Northern Fleet's nuclear waste site at Andreeva Bay is full and risks spilling into the sea. The *Lepse*, a vessel used for storing spent nuclear reactor fuel, contains fuel rods that are stuck in its storage facility. Russia needs to acquire a vessel and railway cars capable of carrying containers with spent naval nuclear fuel. A more distant but critical source of potential nuclear contamination is the nuclear storage facility at Mayak, where vast amounts of radioactive waste are stored in reservoirs. Joint Russian and Norwegian teams have begun assessing the scale of the problem and the risk that a dam break could pose to the Arctic region via the Ob River into the Kara Sea.⁷⁴



A *Hotel* class SSBN in the process of being decored at a Murmansk naval yard.

International cooperation in dealing with the problem of nuclear submarine decommissioning and de-coring has been a hallmark of the new security problems in the Barents region. With the signing of the START I and START II treaties and their significant reductions in US and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals, the problem of disposing of fissile materials from nuclear warheads led to a bilateral agreement to construct a fissile material storage facility. In 1991 the United States initiated the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program to fund projects that would address a wide range of nuclear disposal issues. The FY 1993 program included \$10 million for studying, assessing, and identifying nuclear waste disposal by the former Soviet Union in the Arctic region. Since 1992 the United States has invested \$90 million from Cooperative Threat Reduction funds to pay for its half of the costs of financing the design and construction of a new facility at the Mayak, which is to have the capacity to store 12,500 dismantled nuclear warheads and 50,000 containers of fissile materials.⁷⁵ This measure was initially a US-Russian effort to control strategic nuclear arms, but the problem has taken on broader dimensions.

In 1994 a Norwegian White Paper on problems relating to nuclear activities in the northern region brought parliamentary action to formulate an inclusive plan to deal with the most pressing problems and allocate 403 million kroner for the program from 1995 to 1998.⁷⁶ The plan addressed both nuclear safety and radioactive waste management projects, with the bulk of funds devoted to the latter initiative. Norway collaborated with Russia to improve nuclear safety at the nuclear power station on the Kola Peninsula and supported similar Finnish and Swedish projects at the St. Petersburg and Ignalina, Lithuania, nuclear power stations. Norway is involved in the Nuclear Safety Account program for Chernobyl in Ukraine.⁷⁷ Norway also participates in a project to find alternative power sources [solar cells] for 155 strontium battery-powered lighthouses in Murmansk oblast.⁷⁸

Among the waste-management projects was a joint Norwegian-Russian expedition to the sunken SSN *Komsomolets* to determine the radioactive leakage from its reactor and two nuclear warheads on board. The investigation established that the release was negligible. Norway also has the leading role in an international project to repair the damaged nuclear storage vessel *Lepse* at Murmansk. This project is part of a larger Norwegian-Russian framework agreement that provided for a joint commission to promote cooperation. The agreement provides for tax and

customs exemptions on equipment imported to support Norwegian-funded projects and limits liability of foreign participants in case of nuclear accidents related to the project. Norway has also taken an active role in getting Russia to agree to a multinational framework that covers all partners. The framework fosters broader international cooperation in such efforts and Norway brought such a proposal to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council meeting in March 1999.⁷⁹

Norwegian-Russian programs have focused on the problem of nuclear waste associated with the Northern Fleet. Among the major assistant programs are the following:

- Emptying and decommissioning the nuclear storage facility for naval nuclear spent fuel at Andreyeva Bay.
- Establishing an interim storage site for spent naval nuclear fuel at Mayak.
- Constructing a vessel for transporting containers with spent naval nuclear fuel.
- Building four railway cars for transporting containers with spent nuclear fuel.
- Delivering a mobile facility for the treatment of liquid radioactive waste.⁸⁰

As these programs suggest, Norway has given primary importance to spent nuclear fuel issues that threaten its security. At the same time the programs address all aspects of the Russian nuclear waste system and promote international cooperation in the Arctic region. One key manifestation of such international efforts is the trilateral cooperation among Norway, the United States and Russia.

The tripartite Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC) agreement, signed on 1 September 1996, aims to eliminate the military's environmental consequences in the arctic region and involves both nuclear and non-nuclear projects. The nuclear projects include the developing casks and containers for transporting and storing radioactive waste and spent fuel, a mobile purification plant for liquid radioactive waste and intermediate storage for solid low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste.⁸¹ The Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy has become the chief executive agent for all aspects of the submarine decoring and spent naval nuclear fuel programs. Norway has also coordinated its assistance in disposing of Russian SSNs with the US Cooperative Threat Reduction Program for decommissioning and scrapping Russian SSBNs.⁸² During a visit to Moscow in February 1999, Rose Gottemoeller, director of the Office of Non-proliferation and National Security at the US Energy Department, reported progress in bringing Russian SSNs under the Defense Department's CTR program for dismantling submarines for FY 2000.⁸³

One of the most recent initiatives, tying together Baltic and Barents Sea security concerns, is a Finnish proposal launched in 1997 and adopted by the Council of the European Union at its Vienna Meeting in December 1998. "Northern Dimension" encompasses both relations within the EU and external matters involving Russia and the Baltic Sea region, and it seeks to promote stability and well being through economic cooperation and positive mutual dependency.⁸⁴ The Vienna meeting raised a number of issues, and looked forward to further progress on handling spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste in Northwest Russia.⁸⁵ This was also the topic of EU-Russian conversations in Moscow, where Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, president of the European Union, and Jacques Santer, president of the European Commission, met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation via the Council of Baltic

Sea States and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Schroeder and Santer stressed the important contribution that the Northern Dimension initiative could make to regional relations. Both sides agreed to seek means to enhance cooperation on environmental issues, especially spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste in Northwest Russia.⁸⁶ With Finland slated to assume the EU Presidency next year, the Northern Dimension will certainly get even greater play in EU policy. In preparation for that leadership role, Finland plans to host a conference on Northern Dimension issues later this year.⁸⁷

In the Russian Northwest, regionalized and civilianized security issues have dominated post-Cold War international relations. The military security dimension has declined in importance. Nordic, EU and NATO initiatives include Baltic and Nordic concerns and address Post-Cold War security challenges. In the Baltics the primary focus has been on democratic construction and economic development to achieve political-economic stability and successfully integrate Russian minorities. The Barents Sea region has focused on enhancing safety at nuclear installations and disposing of the Soviet Union's nuclear legacy. A wide range of new bilateral and multilateral initiatives deal with nuclear safety, radioactive waste disposal, and nuclear submarine decommissioning, decomring and scrapping. Future progress in these areas will depend on Russia's experiment with democracy, military stability and relations with the West.

NOTES

1. The northwest strategic direction is a term used by Russian military reformers and analysts to refer to the Baltic-Barents region. The five other strategic directions are: western, southwestern, Caucasus-Caspian, Central-Asian and Far Eastern.

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4. Jakub M. Godzimirski, "Russian Security Policy Objectives in the Baltic Sea and the Barents Area," Den Norske Atlanterhavs Komite, *Security Policy Library*, No. 12 (1998), 3-7

5. Ibid., 8.

6. K.S. Gadzhiev, *Geopolitika* (Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya," 1997), 271-272.

7. William Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

8. Jacob W. Kipp, "The Uncertain Future of the Soviet Military, from Coup to Commonwealth: The Antecedents of National Armies," *European Security* (Summer 1992), 207-238.

9. Pavel Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles* (London: Sage, 1995).
10. "Kremlin Approves Major Defense Policy Document," *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, IV (4 August 1998) on: Daniela@Jamestown.org.
11. Georgij Alafuzoff, "Russia's Military Reform: Status and Prospects," in Aaro Toivonen, ed., *Russia's Security Political Prospects* (Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Strategian Laitos, 1998), 104.
12. Viktor Baranets, *Poteryannaya armiya: Zapiski polkovnika genshtaba* (Moscow: Kolleksiya "Sovershenno Sekretno," 1998), 514.
13. *Chistilishche* [Purgatory] a film written and directed by Aleksandr Nevzorov and produced by Boris Berezovsky, ORT Video 1998, 115 Min.
14. "Kontsepsiya national'noy bezopasnosti," *Rossiyskaya gazeta* (27 December 1997), 4-5.
15. "Russia's Ground Forces Designed to Rebuff Large-Scale Aggression," Interfax (3 March 1999).
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17. Evgeniy Primakov, "Russia in World Politics: A Lecture in Honor of Chancellor Gorchakov," *International Affairs*, no. 3 (1998), 7-12.
18. Thomas E. Graham, "Perspektivy dezintegratsii somnitel'ny," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (NG Stsenarii)*, (10 March 1999).
19. Hans-Hermann Hoehmann and Christian Meier, "Russia's Economic Security Complex: Conceptual, Internal and International Aspects," in Aaro Toivonen, ed., *Russia's Security Political Prospects* (Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Strategian Laitos, 1998), 26-41.
20. Rene Nyberg, "Russia and Europe," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (17 February 1999). Nyberg mentions as positive developments the absence of a messianic ideology, the absence of press censorship, the absence of terror as an instrument of state power, and Russia's open borders and extensive contacts with the outside world.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.

25.OMRI DAILY DIGEST, Part I (19 October 1995).

26.Ibid.

27.Alexandr Nemets, "The Prospect for Disintegration Is Significant," A paper presented at the conference, "Federalism in Russia: Now Is It Working? Washington, DC, 9-10 December 1998.

28.M.I. Abdurakhmanov, V.A. Barishpolets, V.A. Manilov and V.S. Pirumov, *Osnovy natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Druza," 1998), 111-155. The authors discuss sub-regional interests in the context of relations with the "near abroad" and address regional issues on the basis of relations with states of the "far abroad." By definition, global issues embrace those concerns that involve relations with the United States.

29.Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev, *If War Comes Tomorrow? The Contours of Future Armed Conflict*, edited by Jacob W. Kipp (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1998).

30.Vitaliy N. Tsygichko, "A Model of Defense Sufficiency for General Purpose Forces," *Voyennaya mysl'*, No. 4 (1995), 14-21; Vitaliy N. Tsygichko and Reiner K. Huber "Strategic Stability of Multipolar International Systems: Two Approaches for Assessment," *Voyennaya mysl'*, No. 1 (1998), 19-27; and Reiner K. Huber and Gernot Freidrich, "NATO Enlargement and Russian Security: A Comparison of Findings from Two Analytical Approaches," *European Security* Vol. 7, No. 3 (Autumn 1998), 28-42. The Tsygichko-Reiner dialogue on sufficient defense in the post-Cold War international system has focused on six axes (Northwest, Western, Southwestern, Caucasian, Central Asian and Far Eastern) and has sought to assess the impact of NATO expansion on the threat environment on each axis over time.

31.Godzimirski, "Russian Security Policy Objectives in the Baltic Sea and the Barents Area," 9.

32.Ibid., 10.

33.Pekka Kauppala, *The Russian North: The Rise, Evolution and Current Condition of State Settlement Policy* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute for Russian and East European Studies, 1998), 27-44.

34."Concept of the Federal Target Program 'World Ocean'" *Rossiyskaya gazeta* (28 January 1997).

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36.Roland Eggleston, "New Arms Agreement Aims to Ease Russian Fears," RFE/RL Newswire, 5/25/99. The preliminary agreement was concluded in late March by 28 states in Vienna and will be presented for signing in November 1999 at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul. NATO members

on their side apparently agreed to force limits on national and alliance forces in the new NATO member states as part of an effort to reduce Russian fears of conventional attack.

37. Ingemar Dörfer, *The Nordic Nations in the New Western Security Regime*, Published by The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, distributed by The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

38. Council of Baltic Sea States.

39. Chris Prebensen, *Nordisk Sikkerhet* (Oslo: Den Norske Atlanterhavskomite, 1999), 33-34. See also Clive Archer, *Norden and the Security of the Baltic States* (Oslo: Den Norske Atlanterhavskomite, 1998).

40. Hans Haekkerup, "Ostersoen i det nye Europa: Danmarks militære ostsamarbejde" (Oslo: Den Norske Atlanterhavskomite, 1997), 10-12.

41. Valdis Birkavs, "Remarks," Meeting of Ministers for Nordic and Baltic Cooperation, Discussion on Security in the Baltic Sea Region, Finnish Parliament, Helsinki, Finland (9 February 1999).

42. Sonja Winter, "NATO: U.S.-Baltic Charter Supports Integration," Washington, D.C. (13 January 1998), RFE/RL

43. US Information Agency, "U.S.-Baltic Charter: A Step Toward NATO or 'a Consolation Prize'?" Washington, D.C. (21 January 1998),
www.fas.org/man/nato/news/1998/98012101_rmr.html

44. *Nordisk Sikkerhet*, 32.

45. A.M. Zaccor, "The Lithuanian Army: A Tool for Rejoining Europe," *European Security* (Spring 1997), 100-113.

46. Clive Archer, "Nordic Involvement and the Baltic States Security: Needs, Response and Success," *European Security* (Autumn 1997), 43-52.

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50. Dzintra Bungs, *The Baltic States: Problems and Prospects of Membership in the European Union in the Stiftung, Wissenschaft und Politik series, Aktuelle Materialien zur Internationalen Politik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998).

51. Godzimirksi, "Russian Security Policy Objectives in the Baltic Sea and the Barents Area," 11.
52. Dmitri Trenin, "Baltic Chance: The Baltic States, Russia and the West in the Emerging Greater Europe" (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1998).
53. Yuri Deryabin, "Bezopasnost' severnoy Evropy," paper delivered at the Norwegian North Atlantic Committee Conference, Leangkollen Norway, 1-3 February 1999, 1.
54. Dorfer, *The Nordic Nations in the New Western Security Regime*, 9-10.
55. Dorfer, "Reinvestigating KOLA," Defense Research Establishment, Stockholm, Sweden (February 1999), 3.
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57. Ibid., 210-211.
58. Dorfer, "Reinvestigating KOLA," 7.
59. *Krasnaya zvezda* (12 February 1997).
60. Iurii Kviatkovskii, "The Future of the Russian Fleets," in: Ingmar Oldberg, ed., *The Russian Navy Facing the 21st Century: Proceedings of a Conference in Stockholm, 2 December 1996* (Stockholm: Defense Research Establishment, 1997), 37. On the role of current and future deep precision strike weapons systems in US naval strategy see: Owen Cote Jr., *Precision Strike for the Sea: New Missions for a New Navy* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Security Studies Program, 1998).
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63. "The Barents Euro-Arctic Council," Nine other states hold observer status with the Council: United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the USA, Canada, Japan and Italy.
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66. Tomas Reis, "In from the Cold: Finland's Security Political Course after the Cold War," A Paper presented at the Norwegian North Atlantic Committee Conference, Leangkollen, Norway, 1-3 February 1999, 4-5.

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80. *Ibid.*, 4.

81. *Nordisk Sikkerhet*, 82.

82. Norendal, 6.

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Photos: Estonian Defense Forces