



**THE BALTIC SEA AREA, INCLUDING THE BARENTS SEA AND THE BALTIC ENTRANCES**

Soviet policy in the Baltic has global implications, for East meets West in this area. The author of the accompanying article describes where, how, and why the Soviets have extended their territory and their influence in the Baltic. He also describes Soviet naval strength in the Baltic area, which Sweden has called the most heavily armed region in the world. In summing up, the author states, "There can be little doubt that the Soviet objective in the Baltic is total domination."

# Soviet Policy in the Baltic\*

By

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With some justice, the Baltic has been called a northern Mediterranean, for it is the drainage basin for a vast area of northern Europe; along its shores have lived a variety of nations; and within its basin has arisen more than one distinct civilization. Great conflicts have been cradled here; Baltic waters have also furnished broad highways of friendly intercourse.

We now have forty years of history in which to observe Soviet policies in the Baltic, policies rooted in both Russian history and in Communist philosophy. The Baltic has always been an objective of Russia's urge to the sea; it gave promise of ice-free ports at the mouths of Russian rivers as well as access to the open ocean. Molotov stated before the Seventh Session of the Supreme Soviet just after the admission of the Baltic States in August, 1940: "The fact that the frontier will be moved to the Baltic coast is of paramount importance to our country. [Besides the other strategic advantages] we shall now have ice-free ports in the Baltic of which we stand in such great need."

The lands between Russia and the Baltic, the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and the Grand Duchy of Finland, all broke away from Russian rule after the Revolution of 1917, despite attempted coups by Bolshevik groups in each country. For a while the political picture was a jumble of conflicts among German, Allied, Soviet, native, and even Polish armed forces and among Bolshevik and other native political groups. In the end the Bolsheviks recognized by treaty the independence of these four states. This act made good sense. Conflict with

Poland and internal conflict were unavoidable at the moment, but any unnecessary conflict was strictly to be avoided in those early days of the Revolution.

In the two decades between the World Wars, there was a remarkable lack of complaint on the part of the Soviet Union regarding her boundaries; only her dynamic policies toward Sinkiang and Outer Mongolia in the middle thirties forecast her future activities in Europe. The small Baltic States were careful in the conduct of their foreign affairs not to give the Soviet Union legitimate cause for complaint. Although Estonia and Latvia gave her special rights in the use of their Baltic ports, Soviet ships made little use of the harbors. This may have been based on a deliberate plan of hostility and intimidation but was at least a partial reflection of the general economic malaise of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union's active return to the Baltic began with the Soviet-Nazi Treaty of Nonaggression of 23 August 1939. The "Secret Additional Protocol" of that treaty divided Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of interest. The Soviet share included a large slice of Poland plus Latvia and Estonia. In a later agreement, the Soviet Union gave up a part of her share of Poland

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\* See also "The Strategic Importance of the Baltic Sea," by Commander T. Gerhard Bidlingmaier, Federal German Navy, in the September, 1958 PROCEEDINGS, and "Sweden's Defense Problem," by Rodger L. Simons in the November, 1958 PROCEEDINGS.

in return for Germany's relinquishing Lithuania, minus Memelland, from her "sphere of influence." This agreement was contained in the Secret Supplementary Protocol of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 27 September 1939. And so began a chain of events which has kept this area in turmoil to this day, twenty-one years later.

After the partition of Poland and the conclusion of the treaties with Germany, mutual assistance treaties were forced upon each of the three Baltic States by the Soviets. In each case the Soviet Union was permitted to garrison armed forces on the territory of the small republic, and in each case this right was exercised promptly. In deference to their erstwhile German partners, all Communist propaganda agencies attempted to create the impression that these mutual assistance activities were directed against possible British aggression. In the circumstances, most of the Baltic people simply were grateful that they retained their sovereignty and that life went along pretty much as usual. The provisions of the treaties, however, were such that an aura of legitimacy would cover the later occupation and absorption of these states. This stroke was postponed until the summer of 1940, when Germany was heavily engaged in the west against France and Britain.

During the fall of 1939, the Soviets attempted to negotiate a similar treaty with Finland. Also, territorial demands were made of Finland in return for territory from the Soviets in Central Karelia. What the Soviet Union sought was greater security for Leningrad and the Gulf of Finland and for Murmansk. The Finns refused. After the breakdown of negotiations, Helsinki was bombed on 30 November 1939, to start a war which was much more difficult, protracted, and embarrassing for the Soviets than expected. After the Red Army finally began to make progress, the war was brought to a sudden halt, which seemed to much of the world as precipitate and unexpected as its beginning. The reasons for this have been much wondered at since. Some assumed that Germany had exercised her influence toward this end. Others, in a better position to know, believe it was the threat of Western intervention which spurred Moscow on to an early settlement. The peace terms were practically the same as the pre-

war demands. Finland ceded all of the Karelian Isthmus, including Vyborg and the islands of Vyborg Bay, areas north and west of Lake Ladoga, and other areas, including, in the far north, the Rybachi Peninsula at the approaches to Petsamo. And, among other concessions, the Hanko Peninsula at the entrance to the Gulf of Finland was leased for thirty years as a land, air, and naval base. The changes effected by another treaty, signed in 1944, included the substitution of the enclave of Porkkala for Hanko and the loss of Petsamo. Finland thereby lost her exit to the Barents Sea, and the Soviets thereby gained a common boundary with Norway.

At the end of World War II, on 9 May 1945, Soviet forces occupied the Danish Island of Bornholm and seemed to settle down immediately for an indefinite period. At Potsdam, the United Kingdom and the United States agreed to an already accomplished fact: Polish administration of eastern German provinces to the Oder River and its tributary, the Neisse. They also agreed to support, at the peace settlement, the Soviet annexation of northern East Prussia, including Memelland. The greatest failure of the Soviets toward achieving their total domination of the Baltic would seem to be their failure to secure the north coast of West Germany. At Potsdam she reportedly tried to secure participation in the international control of all entrances to the Baltic from the North Sea, including the Kiel Canal. According to Goering, Molotov, as early as 1940, had expressed his government's requirement for approaches to the Baltic, the Sound, and the Skagerrak. A month before the war in Europe ended, Radio Moscow reportedly announced the Soviet Union's intention of occupying points in Denmark. In any case, Russia was finally on the Elbe, almost in sight of Atlantic waters. Except for the almost-holiday-excursion of Russian forces to Paris over one and a quarter centuries before, this was the farthest westward extension of Russian power.

*Expansion Techniques*—Most of the additions to the Soviet empire have come through outright military conquest and annexation, but this expansion has been enormously aided, especially in the consolidation phase, by a special technique. This is the practice of using a nationality that is split



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### SWEDEN MAINTAINS A FAST, MODERN NAVAL FORCE IN THE BALTIC

The Swedish destroyer *Småland* is shown making knots in the Baltic. Sweden has not been intimidated by the build-up of Soviet forces in the Baltic, but has increased her own guard of naval forces, and also has fortified islands and coastal areas over the protests of Moscow.

by the Soviet border to justify expansion. The "capitalist-exploited" kinsmen across the border become the subjects of sympathetic propaganda. The group on the Soviet side of the border then claims the authority to speak for the whole "greater" nation. Eventually the "oppressed" group is "liberated" and the two are then combined under the protection of the Soviet Union. This technique is something of a refinement of the irredentist policies of Germany, but, being multi-national, it has no spatial limits. It is also a refinement of a method of expansion by "osmosis" employed by Tsarist Russia, whereby an area was penetrated by more or less peaceful means and then simply annexed. This "osmosis" system was practiced, for example, in the Cossack area of the Ukraine and throughout most of Siberia. It was a method not much different from the American expansion in the West.

The new split-nationality method was first used, unsuccessfully, after the Revolution of 1917 in an attempt to regain the Baltic States and Finland. It was attempted again, also unsuccessfully, during the Finnish War. The policy succeeded, however, when the Ukraine annexed areas of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and White Russia annexed most of eastern Poland. In the light of this much-used expansion technique, the possible future role of East Germany and of the Karelo-Finnish

Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as of similar Communist political units around the Soviet periphery, is clear.

Of course, expansion does not depend on having a split nationality along the border. When such is not the case, the system is modified. Military conquest (always announced as "liberation") is followed by installation of Moscow-trained natives in the governments of the "liberated" countries. Thereafter, fratricide and intra-party cannibalism in good dialectical style have to make do as a revolution in the country concerned.

A modification of both these techniques was employed in the annexed territory around Kaliningrad. To ensure the loyalty of this new colony, the native Germans were simply expelled and their places taken by Soviet colonists, mostly Great Russians.

Because the Baltic is a prime point of contact between East and West, the Soviet Union's Baltic policies have global importance. In Russia this importance apparently is never forgotten.

The Baltic Sea is a permanent salient cutting into the heart of European Russia. Elsewhere along the thousands of miles of the circumference of the Soviet Union, she either has the unquestioned right to do as she pleases or her neighbor is so like a member of the family that there is not much anyone can say

or do without Soviet permission. There are exceptions: the land borders with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, and the short water borders with Japan and the United States. The Caspian Sea and most of the Black Sea can be classified as satellite areas.

One of the more interesting policies of the Soviets has been the attempt to apply the principles of *mare clausum* to the Baltic and Black Seas. According to this policy, the two seas would be closed to the warships of all states except the littoral states, who alone and jointly would decide all policies within the sea and would control all exits. This policy has never been accepted in international law, and the Western powers have consistently and firmly opposed it.

The Soviet Union's claim to sovereignty over territorial waters within a twelve-mile limit has had serious repercussions in all her peripheral seas. Early in 1946 the Soviet Union began seizing Danish and Swedish fishermen. The fishermen were tried for such offenses as violating Soviet coastal laws, spying, and attempted sabotage. For a while it could not be determined what was behind these arrests. The Soviet government had

never been explicit about its territorial waters law, but a handbook on international law issued by the Soviets, in 1947 claims that a state's control may extend as far as her security requires. Other Baltic states claim only a three to four nautical mile limit. Protests and proposals to submit the question to the International Court of Justice either were ignored or were answered by replying that no international body had legal competence to judge in a purely domestic matter. Whatever the original purpose of the Soviet position, the policy was put to good use in waging psychological and cold war. Seizures went up noticeably during such times as when the Scandinavian states were considering joining NATO.

The most serious incidents occurred in 1952. On 13 June, a Swedish military aircraft, a DC-3, disappeared east of Gotland with its whole crew. An unarmed Swedish Catalina aircraft was shot down three days later while looking for the first. Despite Soviet contentions to the contrary, evidence gathered by the Swedish government proved that both planes were over international water even by Soviet definition. After much note-writing,



United Press International Photo

#### THE SOVIETS PATROL THE WESTERN REACHES OF THE BALTIC WITH SUBMARINES

The Soviet Navy, second largest in the world and with the world's biggest submarine force, has forty per cent of its ships stationed in the Baltic. These vessels make up the North Baltic Fleet, based at Tallinn, and the South Baltic Fleet, based at Baltiisk.

Sweden dropped the matter because of the fear of endangering her neutrality. Significantly, treason trials were pending against several Swedish Communists at the time of the shooting. Intimidation by seizing, shooting, propaganda, note-writing, and other means appears to be a fixed and deliberate element of Soviet policy in the Baltic.

The evolutionary attitude toward the Nordic Council may reflect a significant change in the Soviet over-all foreign policy. This Council was established in 1952 as a consultative body for the co-ordination of problems of mutual interest. The Soviet Union prevailed upon Finland to refuse to join the Council, which consisted originally of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. But a massive peace offensive was launched in 1955, especially toward Sweden, not a member of NATO. This operation included a good-will visit of the Soviet Fleet to Stockholm and exchanges of athletic teams, labor delegations, Red Cross officials, and others. According to Lyman B. Burbank, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in October, 1956, this offensive was "directed toward the restoration of confidence in the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions and, incidentally, the withdrawal of American forces in Europe." Other undoubtedly related actions included returning Porkkala to Finland and allowing that country to join the Nordic Council, actions "clearly designed to create neutralist sentiment in Scandinavia and to weaken the existing strength of NATO." Presumably Russia feels that a Finland within the Council can have more influence on the other members than a Finland outside the Council. It may be remembered that shortly after the Soviet withdrawal from Porkkala, the Althing (Parliament) of Iceland, another member of the Nordic Council, asked the United States to evacuate its forces from that country.

The Nordic Council could grow in importance. The thesis of Burbank's article is that Scandinavian integration is growing at the expense of NATO strength and unity. It may be significant that by a sometimes accepted geographic definition of Scandinavia, the Soviet Union is a Scandinavian power. From time to time she acknowledges this aloud. Even by certain ethnic definitions she is a Scandinavian power; since 1940 she has

had a Finnish "nation" of her own in the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic. Actually, the Finns are not Scandinavian by blood.

As one additional related incident, the Swedish Prime Minister reported upon his return from a trip to Moscow in 1952 that Soviet officials openly expressed the hope that the Swedish policy of neutrality would be accepted by other Scandinavian and other north European governments.

### Defense Policies: The Soviet Navy

A number of unclassified estimates of the strength and organization of the Soviet Union's naval forces and critiques of her naval doctrine have been published. A brief review will help to put her naval policies in the Baltic in proper perspective. Hanson W. Baldwin of the *New York Times* and Raymond L. Garthoff of Rand, are the authorities for much of the following data.

The whole naval philosophy of the Soviet Union is fundamentally a continental concept. It is a concept almost forced on her by geography and confirmed by her history, itself largely shaped by geography. The Voroshilov Naval Academy has defined the role of the Navy as "the handmaid of the Soviet Army," a point of view shared by the former Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Kuznetsov. Although Kuznetsov was dismissed in 1945, there seems to have been no fundamental change in this concept. The role of the Navy during World War II was a defensive one, and, even in this role, one of its most heroic actions was in the defense of Leningrad as a ground force. Mahan's thesis that naval power is often decisive in warfare has not been accepted. The main task of the Soviet Navy is the control of the peripheral seas, and, according to Mr. Baldwin, the achievement of this is the extent to which the phrase "command of the sea" has meaning to the Soviet Admiralty.

But in recent years this basic concept has been enlarged and complicated by two other influences: the desire for prestige and a growing acceptance of a concept of a naval *guerre de course*. Mr. Baldwin defines the latter as "a form of naval warfare traditionally practiced by inferior sea powers—the minelaying campaign, the attack by stealth, surprise, and

speed upon convoys and commerce, and raids or blows upon enemy coasts." There are indications that this concept is leading to the development of long-range, raider-type vessels, especially submarines capable of launching missiles.

The desire for prestige, evident in many official public statements, could lead to somewhat irrational actions. For example, the newest cruisers of the *Sverdlov*-class, while excellent by Western standards, yet seem undergunned for their size but quite heavy for their apparent purpose. They displace at least 12,800 tons and perhaps as much as 5,000 tons more. Khrushchev has been quoted as saying that they are useful for transporting diplomats to meetings!

The Soviet Navy is the second largest in commission (the British being second by counting its "moth-balled" fleet) and has by far the most submarines. But its strength is divided among four principle fleet commands: the Northern or Arctic Fleet, the Baltic Fleet, the Black Sea Fleet, and the Pacific or Far Eastern Fleet. In addition, there are at least nine inland sea, lake, and river flotillas: the Caspian Sea, Sea of Azov, Lake Ladoga, Lake Onega, Volga River, Dnieper River, Amur River, Sungari River, and the Danube River. The estimated strength as of 1957 was 30 cruisers, 150 destroyers, 500 submarines, 500 motor torpedo boats, 1,000 minesweepers, 4,000 naval aircraft, and other types numbering in the hundreds. This force, while not a negligible one, has many weaknesses as an offensive arm in an all-out war. Its defensive power, however, is quite formidable, its minelaying capacity, for example, being one of its greatest capabilities.

Judged solely by her naval strength, the Soviet Union considers the Baltic her most important sea frontier; approximately forty per cent of her naval strength is kept on station there. The Baltic Fleet is actually divided into two numbered fleets, the Fourth (or South Baltic) Fleet based at Baltiisk (Pillau), and the Eighth (or North Baltic) Fleet at Tallinn. It is well served with numerous and excellent ports and its facilities run all along the coast to the border of West Germany. The East German island of Rugen, in fact, is one of the strongest fortresses in the Baltic. Three years ago it was reported to have missile

launching sites, fighter and bomber fields, radar installations and a new base for large military seaplanes. Dago and Osel near the Gulf of Riga, and several islands in the Gulf of Finland, as well, are virtual fortresses.

Since Leningrad is the most important point to be defended, the most vital defenses in the Baltic are those which directly protect that capital of Northwest Russia. The number one defensive position, then, is Kronstadt. The flanks are protected by Vyborg and Narva. Paldiski and Tallinn protect the mouth of the Gulf of Finland. Other important installations are at Ventspils, Lepaya (Litau), and Kaliningrad. Each base adds depth and strength to the preceding installations. In 1940, for example, Lepaya was in an exposed position. The possession of Kaliningrad now greatly enhances the value of Lepaya.

The Swedes may find it hard to be objective in the matter, but they contend that no area in the world is more heavily armed than the Communist areas of the Baltic Sea. It is likely that the strength of Hitler's World War II coastal defenses suffer badly in comparison.

### The Score Card

An assessment of gains and losses for Soviet policy is not easily made. Considering the great advances in the Baltic made by the Soviets, two rather anomalous facts strike the observer. One is that the exits to the North Sea are still free of Communist control. The second is that the Soviets have voluntarily retreated from two important positions: Bornholm and Porkkala. There can be little doubt that the Soviet objective in the Baltic is total domination, and this must include control of the western exits. Such control would not only be a logical end in itself, but also a necessary step toward eventual positions on the Atlantic littoral. As it is, the Baltic does not appear to be a suitable base for long range offensive operations. Better air, naval, and missile bases against American power are found far to the north and east; better land and air bases for offensive blows against Western Europe are farther south. To reach the open Atlantic the difficult channels of the Danish Sound and Belts and the confining waters of the Kattegat and Skagerrak have to be passed. After that there is the North Sea;

and even then the English Channel, the islands north of Scotland, or the straits on either side of Iceland.

The Soviets have made no move to seize the exits, but Stalin reportedly attempted at Yalta and other wartime conferences to secure a share in their control. This desire is implicit in their doctrine of *mare clausum*. G. A. Tokaev, a former Red Army colonel, claims that any future advance in the Baltic area "will be towards Kiel, Copenhagen, and Malmo as the first air and naval objectives, and towards Hamburg and Bremen for the armies, attacking over the easy plains of northern Germany." It could hardly be otherwise, but to say so is not to predict that there *will* be such an advance. In any case, any such advance would be more likely a part of and not the deliberate start of a new world war.

As for the "retreats," they have been more apparent than real. There has been no diminution of defensive power in the Baltic but quite the contrary. No doubt an assessment of new and projected technical developments suggested that the same defensive tasks could be performed more conveniently and more cheaply from bases along the Communist-controlled coast or from islands near the coast. The really interesting factor in these retreats is not so much the why as the when. An advantage of any dictatorship is that decisions can be made in secret and then implemented when most expedient. We have noted how the advances into the Baltic states in 1940 were timed with German and Allied preoccupation in the West. The surprise withdrawal from Bornholm in March, 1946, may have been timed to induce a relaxation of Western apprehension over Soviet aggressiveness in Iran and Turkey. We also saw how the withdrawal from Finland coincided with other activities

of the 1955 peace offensive in Scandinavia.

Neutralist sentiment in the Baltic area has risen and fallen in recent years. At the moment it seems to be on the wane. There have long been indications, even before the announcement of the Rapacki Plan, that the Soviet Union was laying the groundwork for establishing a broad neutral zone between East and West. If this was a bait deliberately dangled before the West, it is clear that many have bitten. The idea has been an important plank of the political platform of the German Socialists, and it has had strong support among other socialist and liberal parties of the West. Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, in December, 1956, proposed a sort of neutralized buffer zone in Europe. George Kennan developed the idea further a few months later, and it has since been hotly debated as the "disengagement" policy. It is possible, theoretically anyway, that such an arrangement could be worked out to the benefit of all; the only suggestion here is that the idea is not so original as some of its proponents in the West apparently believe.

In Scandinavia, centripetal, and consequently neutralist, forces are at work. Sweden, however, has not been cowed; while remaining neutral, she has kept up her guard, including the heavy fortification of islands and coastal areas over the protests of Moscow. The results of the Hungarian Revolution inspired new enthusiasm for NATO in Iceland. Also, Norway and Denmark have been firm in their resolve to remain in NATO. At the April, 1959, meeting in Washington, NATO in turn rejected disengagement.

The final results of the policies of the Soviet Union may not be manifest in our time, but it is clear that events in the Baltic will affect and be affected by other and perhaps more important events elsewhere.

