

## Kaliningrad: a fortress without a state

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The militarised enclave of Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) is in a unique position amidst the ruins and successor states of the USSR. A regime some 15,000 square kilometres in size, it was once a portion of Prussia, then Germany, then the USSR and is now divided from Mother Russia by Lithuania and some 350 kilometres. Yet for all that, it is overwhelmingly Russified, and its multi-ethnic population represents a fine microcosm of the old Soviet state: as one Russian observed to the journalist Anatol Lieven, "*here, you find the pure form of Soviet Man - a mixture of people from different areas, with no culture of their own*". (Lieven, 1993: 209). As if cultural isolation and a disputed historical pedigree were not enough, the region was built up to become one of the most heavily militarised regions of the former USSR, ensuring that it retains the interest of both Moscow and the rest of Europe.

### Historical evolution

As a part of the region known as East Prussia, Königsberg was under the administration of the Teutonic Knights, who founded the city as one of their main fortresses in 1255. It became the seat of the Grand Master of the Order in 1457, which it remained until the region was ceded to the Kingdom of Poland in 1525, when Prussia became a Polish duchy. Tensions between the Protestant Lutheran Prussians and the Catholic Poles mounted and in 1660 Poland ceded the region back to Brandenburg-Prussia following defeat at the battle of Warsaw, although the Poles still controlled West Prussia. Thus, the region has a tradition of being an isolated enclave. The Great (Second) Northern War of 1700 - 1721 saw ascendancy in the Baltic region shift to Russia, but despite a period of Russian occupation in 1758-62, during the Seven Years War, Königsberg remained a Prussian territory. It duly became part of the (Prussian-dominated) German state when it was formed in 1870.

In the pre-war period, East Prussia became a haven for Baltic nationalists fighting Russian occupation, with Tilsit becoming a centre from whence underground publications were smuggled throughout the region. During World War One, Russian attempts to advance into East Prussia were defeated in 1914-15, and

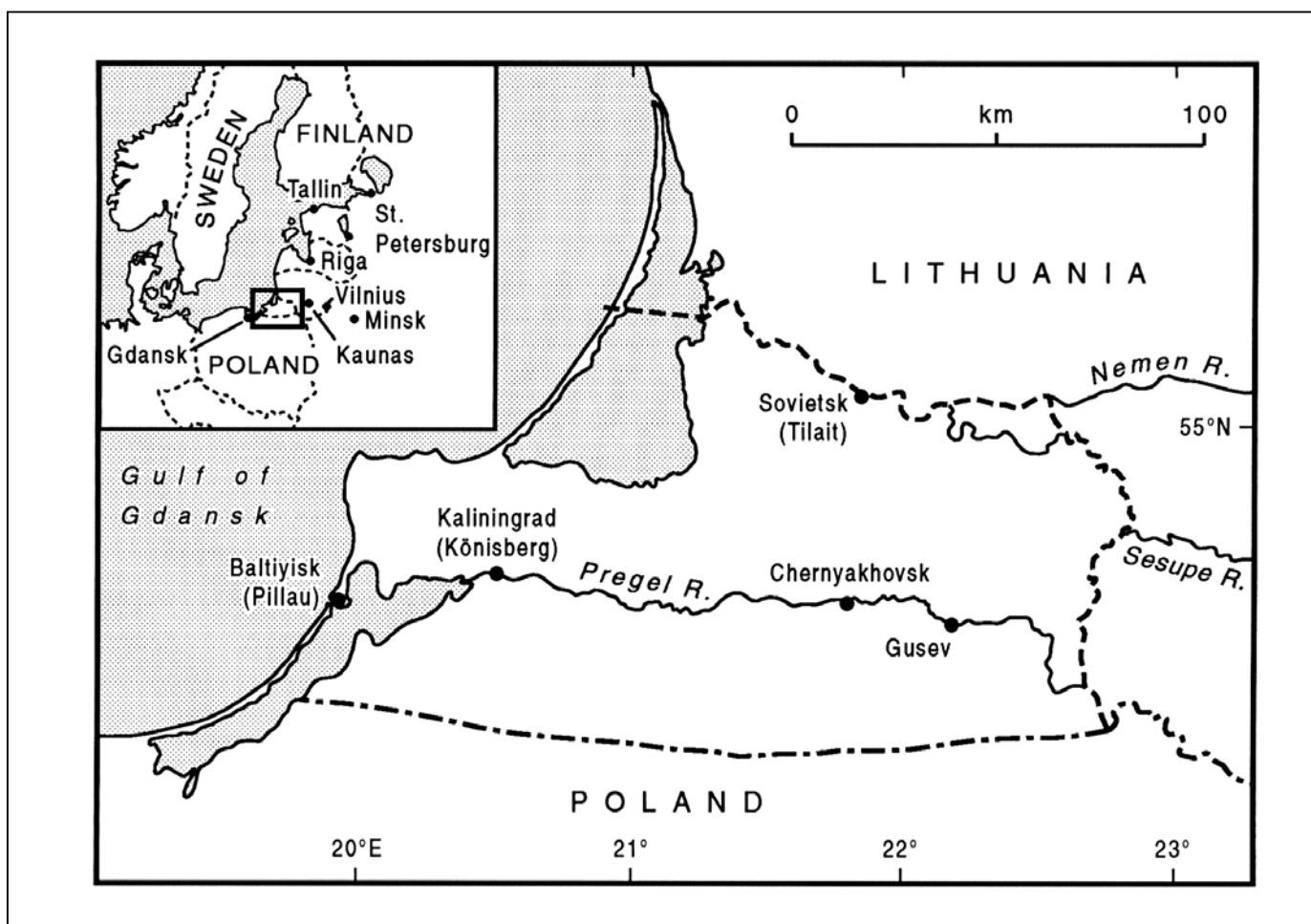
German forces then used it as their base for an advance along the Baltic coast, moving into Lithuania in 1915. After the Great War, Germany retained Königsberg but lost the portions of Poland it had won, once again leaving the region isolated.

Yet the settlements after World War II were to prove more far-reaching. At the 1943 summit in Tehran, Stalin demanded the region on the grounds that the Soviet Union needed to acquire a secure ice-free port on the Baltic. His claim was spurious, in that the USSR had already acquired rights to the ice-free ports of Liepaja and Ventspils in Latvia, but Churchill and Roosevelt were prepared to concede the point in return for guarantees of the sovereignty of the newly reconstituted Polish state. (Vardys and Misiunas, 1978: 143-44). The guarantees proved worthless, but there was little anyone could have done: once four Soviet armies with 137,000 soldiers had taken Königsberg by storm in April 1945, who could have induced them to leave?

The importance of the region - renamed for Kalinin, President of the Russian Socialist Republic in the 1920s - to Moscow was made clear by its status. Rather than linking it to the new Baltic satellite states, it was declared an *oblast* (region) of the Russian Federation itself, while its military forces were subordinated directly to the General Staff. The Stalinist state began reshaping Kaliningrad to its own image. Almost the entire German population was expelled, to be replaced by almost a million Soviet colonists, largely Slavs from Russia, Belorussia and the Ukraine. Kaliningrad became the focus for a major programme of military entrenchment and housed a wide range of land, sea and air forces. With its defence industries and military service centres, the region increasingly acquired the character of a garrison state.

### Soviet Kaliningrad

The enclave's border with Lithuania runs largely along the Nemunas and Sesupe rivers, while its (essentially artificial) frontier with Poland runs largely south of the Pregel river. As of the 1989 census, the region had a population of 871,000, almost 95% Slavic. Of the population, 689,000 (79%) were classed as urban



residents, 182,000 (21%) as rural. (*Pravda*, 29 April 1989). This emphasises the disproportionate role within the region of the garrison city of Kaliningrad, with its population of 401,000, in the territory's economy.

Near the mouth of the Pregel, the port of Kaliningrad is connected to the Gulf of Gdansk and thus the Baltic by a 42 kilometre canal at the small town and fortified port of Baltysk. As well as shipyards and a port, the city boasts paper mills and plants producing railway rolling stock. Other major centres in the region are Gusev, Chernyakhovsk and Sovetsk (formerly Tilsit).

With a smaller and less militarised population, the Kaliningrad region could conceivably be self-sufficient, but 45 years as a garrison state and a concentration upon military-related industries ensures its dependence upon supplies from Russia, Belarus and Lithuania. The region imports the lion's share of its energy needs, especially electricity from the Ignalina nuclear power station and petrol from the refinery at Mazeikiai, both in Lithuania. As a result, Kaliningrad has proven vulnerable to the rumbling trade war between Lithuania and Russia, which has led to a

severe lack of oil and petrol in the region. Despite the presence of some domestic farming and a small fisheries industry, the region must also import food.

### Military dilemmas

Kaliningrad is one of the most heavily militarised regions of the world, and the withdrawal of forces of the former USSR from Central Europe and the Baltic states has only added to this. The city itself was the command centre for the USSR's Black Sea Fleet as well as its 11th Army. While today's Russian navy is experiencing problems manning, fuelling and servicing its fleet, the naval base is still one of the largest in operation. Baltysk naval base also houses the 36th Guards Naval Infantry Regiment, a 2,500-strong elite marine force.

The 11th Guards Combined-Arms Army, also headquartered in Kaliningrad, represents an even more formidable force, whose main elements are the 1st Guards "Unecha" Tank Division, 1st Guards "Proletarian Moscow-Minsk" Motor-Rifle Division, 18th Guards Motor-Rifle Division and the 40th Tank Division. The first two are also based in the city, while the 18th Division is divided between the towns

of Chernyakhovsk, Chernyshevskoe and Gusev and the 40th is headquartered in Sovetsk. These "tooth" units are supported by a variety of other forces, including the 149th Artillery Division at Kaliningrad and a regiment of Su-24 strike bombers at Chernyakhovsk. A paratroop unit, the 37th Independent Airborne Brigade, has also been transferred to Chernyakhovsk. As befitted its role as a major military command centre, the city also housed three large training academies: the Kaliningrad Military Aviation Technical School, Kaliningrad Higher Naval School and Kaliningrad A. A. Zhdanov Higher Engineering School. All told, then, military personnel within the district number perhaps a quarter of a million.

### Rival Claims

Although the USSR seized the region from Germany in 1945, Germany has no designs upon it. The German population was expelled and, busily developing its newly regained Eastern territories, Berlin has no particular appetite for a fractious multi-ethnic enclave characterised largely by decaying and obsolescent industries and pollution. Poland has perhaps greater claim, although there is again no evidence to suggest interest in pursuing it.

There are certainly Lithuanian nationalists who feel they have moral grounds for the incorporation of what they still call "Lithuania Minor", as the logical conclusion of the declaration of independence of 11 March 1990. Yet the costs of expansion would seem prohibitive in both economic and political terms. At the moment, Lithuania is relatively secure in its internal sovereignty, not least thanks to its relatively low density of Russian expatriates. Whereas Russians in Latvia account for 33% of the population and 30% in Estonia, this is only 9% in Lithuania. This has had a variety of advantages. Not only has Russia been less willing and able to interfere in the republic's internal affairs, but staffing the new police force, army and civil service with trusted locals has been far easier. Incorporation of Kaliningrad would introduce into a country of 3,700,000 some 18,000 - 30,000 Lithuanians - and another 850,000 Slavs. (*The Baltic States*, 1991: 176). The net result would be to raise the proportion of Slavs to perhaps a third.

Lithuania is already facing the prospect of Polish separatism. Poles account for only around 7% of its population (some 258,000 as of the 1990 census), predominantly in the south-east of the country and the capital, Vilnius. Yet although most are descended from local inhabitants Polonised in the 19th and early 20th centuries, many were angered and worried by the

government's decision to abolish local councils in Polish regions and a perceived new trend towards "Lithuanianisation". New election arrangements in 1992, for example, effectively broke up constituencies in Vilnius and Salcininkai with Polish majorities and distributed their voters among neighbouring, predominantly Lithuanian areas. The result has been calls for a "Polish national-territorial zone" and growing tensions between ethnic Poles and Lithuanians.

### Prospects

Thus, there are no signs that Vilnius is looking any more favourably at the incorporation of Kaliningrad than Berlin or Warsaw. The problem is that the *status quo* seems no more stable. Even disregarding the incongruity of the survival of this isolated and artificial imperial enclave years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its central European empire, Kaliningrad faces an increasingly grim future. Moscow lacks the resources - political and economic - either to nurture self-sufficiency in the region or to continue to support it. Indeed, the prevailing dynamic within Russia as a whole is towards *de facto* decentralisation, reflecting the increasingly evident collapse of the powers of the centre.

In this light, plans to make Kaliningrad a free port and enterprise zone are likely to be hindered by the opposition of its far more politically influential rival, St. Petersburg. Talk of creating a "Baltic Hong Kong" based around a port capable of handling 25,000,000 tonnes per year alarms the St. Petersburg lobby, and sources in the mayor's office have alluded to a preparedness to use their influence in Moscow to block any such initiatives. In the light of the decision to develop a new seaport with a capacity of 17,000,000 tonnes at Luzhskaya Guba, near St. Petersburg, it is clear that there would be a resistance to such plans for Kaliningrad on both economic and political grounds. Besides, a free port needs a suitable economic hinterland. Given that Vilnius is complaining that Russia is failing to live up to commitments to supply Lithuanian enterprises, it may be unprepared to permit free passage of goods from Kaliningrad. Poland is equally unlikely to favour a rival to Gdansk.

Yet the military bases and forces remain, stranded by economic collapse, with nowhere in Russia to go even if Moscow wished to see them brought home. So long as Kaliningrad remains Russian, and so long as it remains a military enclave, then the joint treaties between Moscow and Vilnius on through passage remain vital. Given that perhaps Lithuania's main railway line is part of the Moscow (Russia) - Minsk

(Belarus) - Vilnius (Lithuania) - Kaunas (Lithuania) - Kaliningrad route, there is no way it can remain unaffected by events within its prodigal neighbour. To this must be added the sobering thought that stranded Russian armies have shown that they can become effectively independent in the hands of strong-willed commanders and when they come to see their fates and loyalties as lying with local interests. The best case is Moldova, where the 14th Army's charismatic General Lebed' has been dictating Russian policy since 1991, and whose forces have all but become the armed forces of the break-away Russian enclave of the "Dneistr Republic". As it is, were their discipline to be overcome by resentment at their poor living conditions and lack of purpose, the forces in Kaliningrad outnumber the entire Polish armed forces, and would be more than a match for the embryonic military structures of the three Baltic states combined.

The threat of instability might thus bring the whole problem full circle. While Germany, for instance, may not be especially interested in Kaliningrad *per se*, it would be anxious to prevent the sort of chaos in north-central Europe which might raise the spectres of refugees, warlordism and greater Russian involvement in the region. Even if one discounts talks of resettling the remaining two million Volga Germans deported by Stalin to Central Asia in the 1940s in Kaliningrad, there is room for positive political and economic engagement. German tourists are beginning to explore the region, and with them are coming the first signs of German investment.

With this may come a role for the European Community, a possibility raised at a four party conference of Russians, Poles, Germans and Lithuanians in Poznan in April 1993. The EC would grumble, but might be the only agency able to broker an internationally-approved and moderated agreement on a demilitarised and economically viable future for the region.

After all, with an estimated 80 per cent of the population favouring autonomy from Russia (Petersen, 1993: 62), there can be few more striking images of the collapse of the functional unity of the Russian Federation.

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