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Barack Obama and Security In the East Baltic Sea Region

This paper addresses a number of fears that prevail in the East Baltic Sea Region about Washington's commitment to their security under the administration of Barack Obama. While indicating that the Obama White House may have been cavalier about such concerns, they are unjustified. For example, the new anti-ballistic system that the U.S. intends to deploy in Europe is superior to the one favoured by the Bush Administration. Obama's campaign to reset relations with Russia is good for Europe. And Obama has demonstrated that while he seeks to enhance the image of the U.S. in the world through a display of soft power, he has been resolute in applying hard power in Afghanistan where Russia has been a helpful partner. In conclusion, the Central and East European nations should join the U.S. in its quest to reset relations with Russia although there is no guarantee that it will be a success. Russia in turn must reconcile its differences with the countries in the East Baltic Sea region if it hopes to achieve fruitful relations with the West. At the same time, the EU must develop an energy security program that meets both the needs of the energy producing and energy consuming nations. As yet, this has not happened. Hopefully, it will as the EU takes the measures necessary to respond to the various economic and political challenges that threaten the European Project. The CEE states can rely upon the support of the U.S. but to deny any hostile foreign power the opportunity to compromise their security, they must address problems of corruption within their societies and reconcile points of discord with their neighbours.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2008 Russian-Georgian War, leaders in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) became preoccupied with hard security threats. They observed that Russian tanks were on the move in Europe for the first time since the Cold War while Moscow had wrested territory from a sovereign state. They noted with dismay that the most powerful NATO members, including the United States, blistered the Kremlin with harsh words but not tough actions. Granted Georgia was not a NATO member but it was in the "waiting room" so to speak and was deserving of NATO's protection. As a consequence of NATO's

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tepid response to “Russian aggression”, CEE analysts asked if their countries were attacked, would Article Five be invoked in their defense¹.

Doubts about security were most evident in the East Baltic Sea region where the Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and the Poles shared borders with Russia. They were “on the front lines,” and frequently excoriated by Kremlin hardliners for their “anti-Russian policies.” Military doctrine that justified force to protect Russians living in the former Soviet space was unsettling. Simultaneously they complained about Russia exploiting its energy assets to compromise their economies and to subvert their democracies. On many occasions they were victims of other hostile actions like being subjected to cyber-attacks². But what unnerved them most of all were Russian units conducting offensive military exercises on their borders. In response they urged their American and European allies to recall Carl Bildt’s observation that the best measure of Russia’s intentions were how well or poorly it treated the Baltic democracies.

While pondering NATO’s commitment to their security, they were most concerned about the United States since it was the alliance’s premier military power. It was with some anxiety then that they witnessed the 2008 transition of authority in Washington. Unlike their neighbors to the West, they greeted Barack Obama’s election with apprehension for they had enjoyed close relations with George W. Bush’s presidency. Likewise, they frequently met with Republican Party operatives in the region who helped craft their foreign policy agendas. Among other things, they were encouraged to support U.S. unilateralist foreign adventures and to serve on the front lines in NATO enlargement drives eastward. They accepted claims that Republicans were more resolute than Democrats in their relations with the Kremlin even though there was considerable evidence to challenge that notion. For example, Bush’s naïve claim that he looked into Vladimir Putin’s soul and liked what he saw; his not taking direct action against Russia’s invasion of Georgia; and his not facilitating that embattled country’s march toward NATO membership after Georgia’s independence was placed in jeopardy.

Nonetheless, soon after Obama was elected president, many CEE commentators expressed concern about his administration’s commitment to their security. They cited three reasons for their apprehension:

- Obama scrapped the anti-ballistic missile system that George W. Bush had earmarked for Eastern Europe. They saw this as a victory for Moscow and were outraged that the White House did not even bother to alert them about a decision that so profoundly involved their security.

¹ The Five Day War was cited by many Western commentators as evidence that a new cold war had begun. For example, see Claire Bigg, “Georgia Woes Could Send Ripple Through Other Frozen Conflict,” RFE/RL, August 27, 2008.

² In this connection, see Richard J. Krickus, *Iron Troikas: The New Threat From The East*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2006.

- Obama's pledge to re-set relations with Russia and his eagerness to cooperate with the Kremlin to obtain a nuclear-free world was evidence that another Yalta was in the works.
- Obama's promise to address security problems with soft and not hard power demonstrated that he was irresolute in projecting U.S. military might. A weak president, in turn, made America's European allies more vulnerable to Russian pressure.

This paper will assess the claims in question, demonstrate that they are largely unjustified and provide conclusions regarding the East Baltic Sea Region's security threats from the U.S. vantage point.

1. Scrapping Bush's Anti-Missile System in Eastern Europe

On December 13, 2001 President George W. Bush announced the United States was withdrawing from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Presumably this would pave the way for a U.S. National Missile Defense System (NMD). It would be comprised of three legs—one in Alaska, another one in California and a third in Eastern Europe. In the last case, the project consisted of a radar system in the Czech Republic and anti-missile rockets in Poland. Bush answered protests from Moscow that NMD compromised their nuclear arsenal by indicating that the East European system was small and incapable of nullifying Russia's huge nuclear strike force. Indeed, it was designed to deal with rogue states like North Korea and Iran that represented a more limited nuclear threat to the United States and its allies.

Officials in Moscow refused to accept Bush's assessment of the project. Their fears about his motives were reinforced by the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) that was issued in 2002. According to press reports, this classified document stressed the three interrelated components of the NPR.³

- Modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal (and the addition of accurate conventional munitions with the destruction capacity of a small nuclear weapon) to deter or preempt rogue nations and movements that threatened the U.S. with WMD.
- The adoption of a national missile defense system that would prevent rogue states like Iran or Northern Korea from raining rockets on the United States and its allies.
- Lastly, a wholesale upgrading of the U.S. national security infrastructure to make it a more efficient and effective force.

³ See Stephen Young and Lisbeth Gronlund, "A Review of the 2002 US Nuclear Posture Review," Union of Concerned Scientists Working Paper, May 14, 2002.

For the Russian side the conjoining of Bush's missile initiative with the NPR provided plausible evidence that the Americans were striving for a first strike capability.⁴ Some American analysts supported this dark conclusion. The Union of Concerned Scientists produced a paper that portrayed the NPR in a much more provocative light and two American analysts concluded that the United States had the capacity to launch a first strike against Russia without fear of being devastated by a returning second strike.⁵

Bush ignored Moscow's complaints, indicating that the system could not nullify Russia's huge nuclear strike force. Furthermore, he promised to provide it with detailed information about the project. Still, Russian analysts were not unmindful of an important observation: Bush's Vice-President, Dick Cheney, and his Secretary of Defense, Don Rumsfeld, were long-time and articulate supporters of NMD and they scorned arms control initiatives and instead set their sights on U.S. military dominance.⁶ Consequently, Russian defense planners eagerly awaited their exit from the American political stage.

While a candidate for president Obama indicated that he had grave reservations about deploying a system that did not work to deal with a threat—Iran's ballistic missile arsenal—that had not yet existed. As president he announced on September 17, 2009 that the American missile project in Eastern Europe had been scrapped in favor of a new system that would be deployed first at sea and later in the air and on land with the explicit purpose of meeting the threat of short and intermediate range Iranian missiles.⁷ His announcement prompted a fire-storm of criticism within the United States and in Eastern Europe. Here, his detractors said, was evidence that he was backing down in the face of pressure from Moscow and in the process was compromising the security of Washington's CEE allies.

Several former Eastern and Central European leaders including Václav Havel, Lech Wałęsa and Valdas Adamkus – all who had played a vital role in their country's drive for independence and democracy—wrote a letter to Obama expressing their reservations about his decision. Specifically, they expressed grave doubts about Washington's commitment to the security of the Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania. For these leaders Bush's project did not directly protect their societies against a "foreign" attack but it placed American

⁴ See in this connection, Pavel Felgenhauer, "Little Room For Compromise over Missile Defense," Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, December 11, 2008. For a Russian assessment of the U.S. missile project that is less pessimistic, see Sergei Rogov, "Obama is Formulating a New American Strategy: A Priority of the US Missile Defense Program will be Development of a Regional Missile Defense System." *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, June 5, 2009.

⁵ Young and Gronlund, *op. cit.*, and Keir Leiber and Daryl Press, "The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006, pp. 42-54.

⁶ For insight into the men and women who would play a pivotal role in crafting foreign policy in George W. Bush's administration, see James Mann, *Rise Of The Vulcans*, New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

⁷ For a brief discussion of Obama's views on disarmament and missile defense, see Jonathan Alter, *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*, New York, Simon and Shuster, 2010, pp. 354-55.

personnel in the line of fire.⁸ In short, Washington's pledge to honor Article Five of the NATO Treaty would take on greater weight were Americans at risk in event of an attack "from the East." But they saw Obama's decision as placing in question his pledge to honor Article Five.

2. Re-Setting Relations with Russia

In their letter to Obama, the East European statesmen expressed concern about his plan to "re-set" relations with Russia. "Our hopes that relations with Russia would improve and that Moscow would finally fully accept our complete sovereignty and independence after joining NATO and the EU have not been fulfilled. Instead, Russia is back on as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th century agenda with 21st century tactics and methods." The authors feared "that the United States and the major European powers might embrace the Medvedev plan for a 'Concert of Powers' to replace the continent's existing, value-based security structure."⁹ In official circles throughout the East Baltic Sea region one heard similar expressions of concern, for example, by Lithuania's president Dalia Grybauskaite who said that she had refused a meeting with President Obama because she saw his disarmament discussions with Russia "not in line with interests of Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries."¹⁰ She, and other leaders in the region, urged Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to consider concrete operational measures that the U.S. could take to safeguard the security of the states that occupied the former Soviet space.

Without them, the Poles and Balts feared that at some point they might be subjected to the same kind of Russian assault that the Georgians experienced in 2008. Perhaps of more immediate concern, Moscow's knowledge that they were defenseless made it easier for the Kremlin to pry concessions from them when it came to commercial matters and diplomatic relations. Words of support were not sufficient to placate their fears; concrete measures had to be taken by NATO with the full support of Washington to accomplish that objective. The stark truth was that NATO did not have operational plans in place to defend the East Baltic Sea Region.

⁸ RFE/RL, "An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe," July 16, 2009.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Editor, "Has Grybauskaite helped Lithuania break free from hostage status," *The Lithuanian Tribune*, September 14, 2010.

3. Obama is Soft on 'Hard Security' and Has Turned His Back on Europe

Reservations about Obama's lack of resolve in meeting hard security threats are in keeping with a narrative crafted by his Republican opponents; namely, that like his Democratic predecessors, he is "soft" on national security matters. At the same time, CEE commentators underscored that it was a Republican president, George W. Bush who opened NATO's door to the Poles and Balts and now Obama was closing it to the Georgians and Ukrainians.

Meanwhile, the CEE media cited Obama's refusal to attend the May 2010 EU Summit as further evidence that his foreign policy priorities no longer included Europe. Clearly the two wars that America was fighting in the Greater Middle East demanded his attention but he was too cavalier in ignoring the legitimate security concerns that many in Europe still harbored—those who resided in the former Soviet space in particular. They also noted that while the U.S. was outside the EU, it had influence in Brussels and major European capitals that could be applied to help the CEE members press their concerns and advance their interests in EU bodies in relations with Russia. What they desired in particular was a common EU Russian policy, not one comprised of bi-lateral arrangements between Berlin, Paris and Rome on the one hand and Moscow on the other one. That arrangement simply left them out of decisions that keenly affected their welfare.

With encouragement from "friends" in the U.S., they excoriated Obama for not doing more to help the embattled Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvilli. For example, when he requested Washington provide his Army with anti-tank, anti-aircraft and other offensive military hardware, he was denied them. Moreover, while Secretary Clinton made pledges of support for Georgia's security, Washington did not press for Georgian membership in NATO. Why? The answer was obvious: because President Obama feared that if he did so, his campaign to reset relations with Moscow would be placed in jeopardy—and among other things withdraw Kremlin support for the new START Treaty—an initiative that many in Eastern Europe cited as further evidence that Obama's Washington was fixated on relations with Russia "at any cost."

The above observations are cited to justify fears regarding the Obama administration's resolution in protecting the East Baltic Sea Region from military threats "from the East." While officials in these countries may have cause to express reservations about Obama's policies in their neighborhood, their most pessimistic concerns are unwarranted.

4. The Truth about Obama's Anti-Ballistic Missile System

Robert M. Gates, who had previously endorsed the missile site in Eastern Europe when he served Bush as Defense Secretary, explained why he had changed his mind and now favored the one introduced by President Obama. Bush's system had been designed to deal with the threat of Iranian ICBMs, but intelligence reports indicated that it was a long-term one. The U.S. had to address the near-term threat of Iranian short and intermediate range missiles that were soon to be operational. What is more, under Bush's program, the U.S. could not achieve protection until 2017, but under the new one, its first phase would be completed by 2011. At that time, "...we will deploy proven, sea-based SM-3 interceptor missile weapons that are growing in capability in the areas where we see the greatest threat to Europe." This Aegis system, Gates emphasized, works and is cheaper than the Bush project!¹¹ Many commanders in the Pentagon felt pretty much the same way and questioned the prudence of spending such vast sums on a system of questionable value at the same time that U.S. forces were over-stretched as a consequence of fighting two wars in the Greater Middle East.

But what about the charge that Obama scrapped Bush's system under pressure from Russia? He responded, "Russia had always been paranoid about this (the system in Eastern Europe), but George Bush was right. This wasn't a threat to them." He added, "If the byproduct of it is that the Russians feel a little less paranoid and are now willing to work more effectively with us to deal with threats like ballistic missiles from Iran or nuclear developments in Iran, you know, that's a bonus."¹²

Still, even those who agreed with Obama's decision to deploy a new missile defense system took issue with the way in which it was announced. For example, in a Washington Post op-ed, Ann Applebaum, a highly respected American columnist and wife of Poland's foreign minister, Radek Sikorski, scolded the administration for not directly forewarning the interested parties about his decision.¹³ Many CEE officials first learned about it via the media and not through diplomatic channels. Here was a typical example of how a new inexperienced American administration was prone to make mistakes that a more seasoned one would have avoided. It was not done out of rancor but nonetheless it was a needless affront that many European observers saw in keeping with Obama's reluctance to keep EU leaders "in the loop."

¹¹ Robert M. Gates, "A Better Missile Defense for Safer Europe," *New York Times*, September 20, 2009.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ann Applebaum, "Letting Europe Drift," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2009. For an analysis of the new system, see Greg Bruno, "National Missile Defense System: A Status Report," New York: Council on Foreign Relations, March 18, 2009.

5. A Reset in Relations with Russia is Good for Europe

In a June 2008 Berlin address, Russian president Medvedev called for a new era of security cooperation between America, Europe and Russia.¹⁴ The “Unipolar Moment,” where the U.S. operated as the world’s hegemon, was over and all of the security institutions associated with American global domination, including NATO, no longer functioned. His words received a polite reception but did not prompt a concrete response to them.

Two months later, the “August War” precluded a serious, unemotional discussion of the proposal. Critics asked: “How could the West condone such talks when Russian troops had penetrated Georgian territory while Moscow had wrested both Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Tbilisi proclaiming that both enclaves were independent states.” Others noted that the “value gap” superseded any “common interests” that the West shared with Russia. But soon afterwards, while not dismissing such reservations, supporters of serious security talks with Russia said the Georgian War actually demonstrated just how important such talks were if further fighting in Europe was to be avoided. Moreover there was disturbing evidence that the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s policies were a provocation and he had not conducted his affairs in a manner that enhanced Georgia’s prospects for membership in NATO. Even if Moscow tricked the young rambunctious Georgian President into launching an attack against South Ossetia, he took ill-considered actions that made this possible. The EU produced a report that inferred that he started the war in the first place. Similar charges were made by private security analysts.¹⁵ Subsequently American and European leaders turned their backs on him less his capricious antics prompt another military exchange with Russia.¹⁶

In spite of numerous probes into the origins of the Five Day War, it has been overlooked that if George W. Bush had not invaded Iraq, it is unlikely that there ever would have been a Georgian-Russian war in 2008. Russian defense planners knew that burdened by a war in Iraq that had cost many lives and billions of dollars and a return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the American military was badly over-stretched and was not prepared to take counter-military measures in Europe. Simultaneously, the international stature of the U.S. had plunged under Bush’s stewardship and by this time few European leaders

¹⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, Berlin Address, June 6, 2008, President’s Office, Moscow, Russia. For a comprehensive discussion of Medvedev’s Plan, see Richard J. Krickus, *Medvedev’s Plan: Giving Russia A Voice But Not A Veto In A New European Security System*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2009.

¹⁵ For an analysis sympathetic to Russia’s actions and critical to those of Georgia, see Mark Almond, “Plucky little Georgia? No, the Cold War Reading Won’t Wash: It is Crudely simplistic to Cast Russia as the Sole Villain in the Clashes over South Ossetia, The West Would Be Wise to Stay out,” *The Guardian*, August 8, 2008.

¹⁶ See for example the views of the “liberal hawk,” Michael O’Hanlon, “Don’t Rush Georgia and Ukraine Into NATO,” *Washington Times*, December 2, 2008.

wanted to be associated with Washington. To make matters worse, the calamitous economic meltdown was waiting in the wings. Under these circumstances, the military-minded in Moscow believed they could act without interference from a discredited leadership in Washington.

While powerful European NATO members like France and Germany continued to pledge support for Georgia's membership in the alliance, they also indicated that the time was not ripe for that event. American officials made similar pledges and provided Tbilisi with military equipment but denied Georgia offensive weapons. (On this matter of NATO enlargement, many in the CEE region forget that it was a Democrat, Bill Clinton, that took the initiative to pave the way for the eventual membership of all of the so-called "new European" members—although he was supported by Republicans in Congress in this endeavor.)

Having lost faith in the Bush administration, Moscow reacted favorably to Obama's election assuming that a John McCain victory would freeze American-Russian relations—a condition that existed in the last four years of Bush's term. Among other things, Russian commentators noted that one of McCain's foreign policy advisers, Randy Scheunemann had worked as a paid lobbyist for the Georgian government. Some even believed that the McCain camp had encouraged Saakashvili to engage in provocative actions with the expectation that a conflict with Russia would somehow help McCain in his presidential bid.

In the spring of 2009, Obama met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and later Prime Minister Putin indicating that he favored a reset in relations with Russia. This was in keeping with policies favored by Republican statesmen like Henry Kissinger and George Shultz who argued that harmonious relations with Russia were vital to U.S. security objectives—fighting global terrorism, stemming the proliferation of nuclear weapons and addressing global warming.¹⁷ The most immediate and urgent effort to reset relations, of course, was the ratification of what has been called the New START treaty.

According to the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy that Obama signed, "We seek to build a stable, substantive, multidimensional relationship with Russia, based on mutual interests."¹⁸ In this connection, the American and Russian presidents initialed a document that replaced the expired START nuclear arms reduction treaty that George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev had signed in 1991. Following the lead of some of Obama's political opponents, observers in the CEE region expressed alarm in face of these initiatives. They were deemed as proof positive that the Obama administration was prepared to bow to the Kremlin at the expense of the USSR's former satellites and Republics.

American officials like Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to the region and sought to ameliorate the fears of those who harbored such concerns.

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, "Building on Common Ground With Russia," *Washington Post*, October 8, 2008.

¹⁸ U.S. National Security Strategy, May 2010, The White House, p. 44.

She observed that good relations with Russia would actually enhance not subvert the security of all of the former communist countries of Europe. Her counterparts in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome made similar observations. Conversely, would the Balts and Poles feel more secure were U.S.-Russian relations on a cold war footing?

But the most significant endorsement of the U.S.-Russian reset came from Poland's Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, an enthusiastic fan of Lady Margaret Thatcher who for years was deemed a "hard-liner" by Kremlin commentators. While the U.S. Senate was debating the merits of New START—specifically, Republican Senator Jon Kyl said that he and his colleagues could not ratify the treaty before the new Congress was formed early in 2011—the former American Enterprise Institute analyst wrote an op-ed that created a buzz in global foreign policy circles. He observed that New START, the European Missile Defense System and a reset in U.S.-Russian relations were in the interest of Poland and all of Europe. He also noted that failure to ratify New START could promulgate doubts about NATO's credibility including its commitment to Article Five.¹⁹ His upbeat attitude, of course, was bolstered by his awaiting the arrival of American soldiers who would help construct a Patriot anti-aircraft system in Poland. The mere presence of "American boots on the ground" gave credence to the Obama administration's pledge to defend the East Baltic Sea Region.

Of course, in the aftermath of the tragic 2009 death of Polish president Lech Kaczynski and many prominent Polish civilian and military leaders, the world was captivated by what happened next: a dramatic improvement in relations between Warsaw and Moscow. The sympathetic words and actions of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in particular were deemed noteworthy. Indeed, that tragic event and Russia's response to it explains, in part, why the Polish government subsequently has reset relations with Moscow.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, a man whose name does not bring smiles to the faces of the Kremlin overlords, joined the chorus of Western analysts who have characterized Putin's expression of harmony between Warsaw and Moscow as a possible huge resetting of relations between these ancient adversaries. "I do not think that this is a game on the part of Russia," he wrote in *Time Magazine*, "this is something sincere and very new." The former national security advisor of President Jimmy Carter and a man with influence in the Obama administration concluded that if this is evidence of reconciliation on the part of Poland and Russia, "it will be geo-politically potentially equal to the importance of German-Polish reconciliation."²⁰

The Baltic states, however, while acknowledging that they favored harmonious relations with Russia, remained wary of the re-set initiative in large part because, unlike their larger Polish neighbor, their diminished heft made them more vulnerable to pressure from Russia. So in the run up to the important

¹⁹ Radek Sikorski, "Time To Ratify New START," *Project Syndicate*, November 11, 2010.

²⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "From Poland's Tragedy, Hope for Better Ties with Russia," *TimeCNNWorld*, April 19, 2010.

Lisbon NATO Summit in mid-November 2010, where a new strategic concept and joint ventures with Russia would headline the gathering, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians remained watchful.

Meanwhile, White House officials cited positive Kremlin responses to security cooperation with the West. For example, it endorsed tougher international measures that were aimed at forcing Tehran's compliance with UN demands that its representative be allowed to inspect Iran's nuclear facilities. Furthermore, Russia backed tough words with concrete actions when it canceled the sale of S-300 anti-aircraft Missiles to Iran at a cost of something approaching one billion dollars. Simultaneously, Russia has provided the NATO-American International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan with land and air routes to supply its troops there. Ports in Latvia had been exploited for this purpose and Lithuania's port of Klaipeda would also serve a similar function beginning in December 2010. Russia has trained Afghan helicopter pilots, funded development programs and provided the ISAF forces with critical intelligence and arms (albeit not free of charge) to help them destroy al-Qaeda terrorists and to dismantle the Taliban that threaten the government of Hamid Karzai and the independence of his people.

6. Obama Has Been Resolute in Projecting U.S. Power

The administration of President Obama is no less supportive of its allies in the East Baltic Sea region than was true of his predecessor. Obama remains committed to the security of all of NATO's members. Indeed, his pledge to honor Article Five is enhanced by the fact that he has helped burnish America's image in the eyes of the international community. During the Bush years, it had plunged so fast that even European public opinion indicated that people feared an abuse of American power more so than similar actions on the part of Communist China. In spite of all of his difficulties at home and some setbacks abroad, Obama retained the capacity to influence foreign leaders in a manner that Bush could not equal. Also, at Tallinn, his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton indicated that the U.S. pledge to defend Europe with U.S. nuclear weapons deployed there would be honored even after New START was ratified and Washington would address European concerns about Russia's large tactical nuclear weapons arsenal.

In sum, claims--as well as evidence--that the U.S. no longer pays adequate attention to Europe must be measured against several realities.

First, Obama inherited a poisoned legacy from Bush. As many analysts including Republican statesmen like General Brent Scowcroft and James Baker--respectively the elder Bush's national security advisor and his Secretary of State--have indicated, there was no justification for the wrong war in Iraq.

Saddam Hussein did not have sufficient WMD—and no nukes—to threaten the U.S. and he was not linked to al-Qaeda. So Obama not only inherited that disaster, he also inherited the “right war” in Afghanistan that the younger Bush had ignored for many years and as a consequence has facilitated the Taliban’s return.

It is noteworthy that Obama did not dither but deployed 30,000 more U.S. troops to fight in Afghanistan; under his leadership, U.S. special forces have been especially bold in killing Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders; and in spite of protests from Pakistan, Obama has ordered a dramatic increase in drone strikes against terrorists in Pakistan who use it as a base to attack NATO and U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Second, Obama with the shift in global power West to East, has had to address the rise of new global players that exist outside of Europe such as Brazil, China and India—the so-called BRIC powers.

Third, Obama inherited an economic meltdown from Bush that has denied him the luxury of establishing his own global agenda in a coherent and deliberate manner. Instead, he has lurched from crisis to crisis while the American people have attacked him for not restoring the U.S. economy. Recall also that in the 2010 Congressional elections the American electorate and the candidates ignored foreign policy even though their country was engaged in two wars.

Finally, Obama’s political adversaries in advancing their electoral prospects have adopted an obstructionist political posture that has hampered him in his effort to decisively address America’s daunting problems domestic and foreign.

Conclusions

In a press conference following the NATO Summit in Lisbon, members of several CEE governments gave Washington their blessings in its reset in relations with Russia:

- Latvia’s foreign minister, Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis said that he supported the U.S. Congress ratification of New START and added, “We support very strongly...this policy of President Obama...his administration is very important for our region.”
- Nickolay Mladenov, Bulgaria’s foreign minister said, “...we wholeheartedly advocate the ratification of Start.”²¹
- Lithuania’s foreign minister Audronius Ažubalis also endorsed the treaty.
- Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė met with President Obama at Lisbon and said: “Article Five has finally become applicable in real

²¹ “European Foreign Ministers in Support of New START Treaty,” 20 November, 2010, America.gov.

terms for the Baltic States. We have everything we requested for at the summit meeting. We have security guarantees for Lithuania and an open door policy for NATO, which means that all democratic countries will be able to join if they conform to the set requirements.”²²

Prior to the Summit, American officials were reluctant to comment about security guarantee, as one U.S. diplomat reminded an inquiring analyst, “it is not prudent to do so.”²³ But in November the Polish newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, reported that NATO had in place a plan to defend the countries of the East Baltic Sea Region. Those for Poland that were developed in 1999 had been updated and new ones for the three Baltic countries were being considered. Responsibility for the operations would be assigned to the NATO Joint Force Command in Brunssum, the Netherlands. In event of attack, 9 divisions would be deployed to protect the region. In addition to four Polish ones, the U.S., the UK and Germany would provide troops. U.S. and British warships also were identified as members of the task force and several ports in the East Baltic Sea would serve them. Air units already operating in the Baltic Air Policing system would provide cover along with other air units.²⁴

Soon afterwards, documents circulated by WikiLeaks revealed that in January NATO had agreed to extend defense contingency plans that had been designed for Poland to be extended to the Baltic countries. The documents confirmed earlier reports that a deal of this nature was in the pipeline.²⁵

From the perspective of American analysts who closely follow developments in the East Baltic Sea region, several final observations are in order.

- Following the example of Poland, the Baltic countries should join the major Western powers in the campaign to cooperate with Russia in addressing Europe’s common security problems. This will not be accomplished through a Grand Concert of Europe but rather through a step-by-step process where success on easy areas of reconciliation will serve as confidence building measures to address more difficult ones. In essence, this process was endorsed by NATO at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010. That said, the adoption of the New START Treaty represents a victory for the reset campaign but there is no guarantee that in the final analysis it will promote long-term security cooperation between the West and Russia.
- Henceforth the EU will play a larger role in safeguarding the security of the East Baltic Sea Region than has been true of the past when NATO was the only source of security. But as Dmitri Trenin has observed, Russia must make an effort to resolve its differences with the Baltic countries

²² Editor, “NATO’s cooperation with Russia will be beneficial for Lithuania too,” The Lithuanian Tribune.com, November 21, 2010.

²³ Off the record conversation with an American diplomat in the region, September 2010.

²⁴ The Editor, “Nine possible divisions for defense of Baltic States and Poland,” The Lithuania Tribune, November 18, 2010.

²⁵ “The US embassy cables: The documents,” guardian.co.uk, December 6, 2010.

just as it has with Poland. Indeed, a larger issue is involved here; fruitful EU-Russian relations are unlikely as long as tensions between the Balts and Russians are not reconciled²⁶. The community of Baltic Americans is not large and it is not rich but it has strong bi-partisan support that allows it to punch above its weight. For example, the press conference where CEE leaders announced their support for New START provides evidence to this effect. As the *Washington Post* has revealed, Republican Senator George V. Voinovich (who has announced his retirement) probably encouraged the Obama White House to organize the event. The Senator from Ohio had made clear that while he supported New START, he would not endorse it until he was convinced that the Baltics states and its neighbors in Eastern Europe were not harmed by its passage. Over the years Voinovich has frequently visited Lithuania's Embassy in Washington in a display of support for its security.²⁷

- A reset in relations between Russia and the East Baltic Sea states is not likely to happen as long as Moscow exploits its energy assets at the expense of its neighbors in the East Baltic Sea region. As Keith C. Smith, the former U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania has written, "Moscow's divide-and-conquer tactics have successfully prevented greater inter-European cooperation on both economic and security issues."²⁸ All of the Central and East European states are vulnerable to energy blackmail given their dependency upon Russian hydro-carbon exports. The EU has failed to address this issue.
- To rectify it, Smith urges the EU to develop a cohesive energy policy that fairly addresses the interests of both energy providing and energy consuming states. However, given the fact that the larger EU countries like Germany prefer bi-lateral rather than an EU approach to Europe's dependency on Russia's energy supply, it is foolhardy to assume that present trends are leading in this direction. Indeed, Europe's economic troubles and fears about the viability of the Euro have fed the euro-skeptics and other interests that represent an ominous threat to the entire European Project. While some staunch supporters of the EU are hopeful about Europe's economic troubles giving new life to the drive for a unified Europe with a strong executive—a prerequisite for fruitful relations with Russia—facts on the ground seem to indicate a less promising future for the EU. This means the countries in the East Baltic Sea Region in the short turn must try to achieve energy security on their own with the help of their friendly Nordic neighbors. Hopefully, in the long term Germany, and the other major powers of Europe, will

²⁶ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and Poland: a friendship that must not fail," *opendemocracy.net*, December 2, 2010.

²⁷ "Mary Beth Sheridan, "Arms treaty's approval is another White House save," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2010.

²⁸ Keith C. Smith, "Russian Energy Dependency and the Conflicting Interest Of Old and New Europe," Center For Strategic and International Studies, May 12, 2010, p. 2.

find it prudent to create an energy security system that breeds unity not disunity within the EU.

- Corruption and not advancing Russian tanks represent the greatest security threat to the countries in the East Baltic Sea Region. Corrupt practices upon the part of judges, law enforcement and other government officials as well as doctors and educators have a profound and deleterious impact upon societies in the region that have made considerable progress in their drive to create democratic polities and free market economies. Pervasive corruption compromises economic development; among other things, it discourages foreign investment, subverts commercial relations and promotes economic inequality. Simultaneously, the misuse of public authority fosters widespread political alienation, which, in turn, facilitates demagogic politics. Under these circumstances nations cannot muster the unity required to cope with external threats to their security. Indeed, national disunity invites provocative actions on the part of hostile foreign elements.
- Disunity among the East Sea Region countries continues to deny them the opportunity to collectively resolve common threats to their security. For example, Polish-Lithuanian relations recently have been characterized by harsh rhetoric and an inability to reconcile a host of disputes that foster enmity between both peoples. It is incumbent upon Poland and its smaller Baltic neighbors and not the EU or the U.S. to resolve their differences.

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