

Chapter 13

The West, Russia, and the Baltic Sea Security in the 2020s in the Light of Danish Foreign Policy: The Future Tasks for NATO in the Baltic Sea Area

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ABSTRACT

The West as well as Moscow challenges the foundations of the European security order. The security order was established shortly after the end of the Cold War in 1990. While growing instability looms over the Baltic Sea region, all the states there should maintain at least low-level regional cooperation with Russia to prevent any further escalation of security tensions. The chapter analyses the West, Russia, and the Baltic Sea Security in the light of Danish foreign policy and the future tasks for NATO in the Baltic Sea area in the 2020s. One key question for the European security community is whether today's confrontation between the EU member states and Russia is the end of its spread to the Baltic Sea region, including Russian districts, and the beginning of a return of geopolitical rivalry in the region. The chapter argues that while each role depicts Denmark as a fringe Nordic country, Nordicness continues to be important, but mostly uncredited, as a source of ideas for Danish foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

Around the year 2004, a NATO membership of the three Baltic states helped tip the balance of power in the Baltic Sea Region. Russia, however, was not able to make a countermeasure to correspond to the threaten of the West. Ten years with a seemingly smooth work period, and agreement to combat the pervasive global terrorism, ended in 2013-2014. The invasion and occupation of some of the eastern parts

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of Ukraine was an eye opener for the West that all was not as it seemed to be in Russia. The arrival of troops and soldiers from all around the NATO area in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Poland to take part in the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in the spring of 2017 was a return not only to the original core task of NATO of collective defence but also a rapid return to the old Cold War atmosphere. In the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (from 2003 the Great Russian Encyclopaedia), you once could read that the contemporary military-political situation of the Baltic Sea was characterized on one hand, by the efforts of the imperialistic circles to turn the Baltic Sea into a bridgehead for NATO, and on the other hand by efforts of the progressive forces to turn the Baltic Sea into a zone of peace. A political analysis that does not quite hold true today, but still there is a grain of truth in the laying of the military-political situation in the Baltic Sea area, in 2021. However, the world changes rapidly.

In autumn 2015, in a TV-Interview on national Russian TV, the Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed that a global or even a regional war would be a disaster, yes, even a planetary catastrophe for the global community. Since the beginning of the new millennium, Russian military theorists as well as other military thinkers all over the world have had to rethink whether the art of war has changed – in 2021, what is a war?, when does a war start? And when does the military element get engaged for instance in a conflict in the Baltic Sea Region? With these thoughts in mind, in the following, we will analyse the Russian interests and neighbourhood relations in the Baltic area, in the 2020s, and how Russia is concerned with this issue. (Kühn, 2018)

At the strategic level, in 2021, the Russian political and military leadership still sees an encircled Russia and at the policy level, the Russia chose the path of strategic solitude three decades ago. Furthermore, with an increased anti-Western stance and a focus on the abovementioned path of strategic solitude, the Russian political leadership increasingly views the European Union as closely associated with NATO and USA. In Moscow, Europe is considered politically weak as it had failed to play a dominant role from a global view. From this Russian point of view, the occupation of Ukraine soil is a mirroring of the actions of the West in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s. A political action to keep the political and military stabilization in the Russian-Ukrainian area and to prevent terrorists and foreign powers to intervene unhindered in Russian internal affairs and inside its borders.

Since 2013, Russia is, therefore, the main reason for the security changes in the Baltic Sea Region. Suddenly, the Baltic Sea Region was in focus, as tensions rose. Recent development and the Russian challenge to the West raise several questions for the West and future Western policies in the area. The Russian definition of national security is broad. The Russian National Security Strategy signed on December 31, 2015 in Moscow comprehended nine different areas: 1) national defence, 2) security of state and society, 3) higher living standards, 4) economic growth, 5) science, technology and education, 6) health care, 7) history, 8) ecology and 9) strategic stability and partnership. Consequently, we must conclude that national security, seen from Moscow, is much more than defence and foreign policy. The area of history is a special ‘weapon’ of Kremlin, old Russian ‘areas’ like the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine are in a way still under Russian supremacy and belong to the Russian political and military domain. This fact certainly makes its marks on the Baltic Sea Region. (Persson, 2018)

Defining the Baltic Sea Region from a Russian point of view may be problematic. It mostly depends on the tradition of the area of studies in a region and the context. However, the main area that theoretically can become a zone of confrontation between NATO and Russia is the three Baltic states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In Russia, the term “Pribaltika”, which came from Soviet times and essentially meant the three before mentioned states, continues to dominate both the political and the expert discourses. Russia keeps seeing these countries as a single international actor, despite any possible differences between

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