

## RUSSIA AND ESTONIAN SECURITY DILEMMAS\*

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In what follows<sup>1</sup> I argue that the Estonian security situation in 1991–94<sup>2</sup> was characterised by the following features:

- Estonia's small size helped the country to adapt quickly to new economic challenges;
- Russia was perceived as the only tangible source of foreign threat by Estonian politicians and security experts;
- one of the main aims of Estonia was to make Russia accept and condemn publicly the fact of the 1940 occupation;
- Estonian thinking was deeply sceptical about the prospects of Russian democracy;
- Estonia saw a great danger in the Russian desire to secure an international mandate for peace keeping in the former Soviet Union;
- speedy integration with the West was considered to be the main means of guaranteeing Estonia's security;
- there was a slow but steady movement toward greater Baltic cooperation in security matters;
- the Estonian approach to the question of the presence of Russian troops included elements such as making maximum use of the international support for speedy withdrawal, opposing any linkage between the troop question and all other problems, trying to garner Western material support for constructing housing for the departed Russian military etc.;
- there was almost no public support among the mainstream Estonian political forces for the idea of being more flexible and forgiving towards Russian military pensioners;
- the border question was one of the areas where the Russian strategy toward Estonia seemed to work quite well: Estonia was not able to garner any notable international support for its position;
- we can envisage at least four cases when the use of Estonia's armed forces may be contemplated;

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\* Originally published in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1995, 47, 1, 27–45.

- the forces that come to power in Estonia after the spring 1995 parliamentary elections are likely (in the manner of Mart Laar in 1992–94) to be heavily dependent on the general climate of Russian–Western relations. If Russia becomes more assertive, then Estonia will probably be more dependent on Western help and advice.

There are two important variables in the Estonian security equation which will receive somewhat less attention in this article—ethnic tensions and economic security. I tried to tackle the ethnic dimension specifically in an earlier article.<sup>3</sup> The problem of economic security is left aside here for reasons of space—it requires a lengthy separate treatment.

### WHY ESTONIA MATTERS

There is at least one *Realpolitik* reason why Estonia ‘matters’ in the post-Cold War international relations: Estonia (and the other two Baltic states) are a factor in Western policy towards Russia, i.e. towards the heartland of a former superpower which is caught amidst a dreadful crisis and still has a nuclear potential to destroy the whole world. In addition, there are several less important reasons why Western powers continue to be interested in Estonia: the existence of quite vocal Baltic communities—capable of making some electoral difference—in the USA, Canada, Sweden and other Western countries; European (especially Nordic) interest in strengthening the Estonian border regime and in general stability in order to slow down the flow of illegal immigrants, drugs etc. from the former Soviet Union to the West; Estonia’s post 1991 ‘economic miracle’ and its growing relevance in international trade as well as the rapidly improving climate for international investment there, etc. Estonia may be of some interest also in the comparative perspective, as ‘a laboratory of peaceful methods of political struggle’.<sup>4</sup> Whether Estonia will continue to be able to avoid violence remains to be seen, but at least the 1985–94 transition there was remarkably peaceful. Not surprisingly, the Estonian President, Lennart Meri, has often taken pride in the fact that Estonia has accomplished all its achievements without shedding ‘a single drop of blood in interethnic conflicts’.<sup>5</sup>

Several eminent Western analysts have expressed concern about Russia’s future. For example, Brzezinski emphasised in 1993 that ‘in any case, the crisis of Russia’s identity is unlikely to be resolved in an entirely peaceful manner’.<sup>6</sup> Following the December 1993 Russian elections there was heightened concern in the West about the possible rebirth of Russian imperialism. Kissinger summarised it well, writing in January 1994:

At the moment, Russian armies are in Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Latvia and Tajikistan, and participate in some of the local civil wars with strategy that seems to make these new republics—all of them members of the United Nations—rue their independence. The foreign minister of Russia has repeatedly put forward a scheme for a Russian monopoly on peace keeping in the 'near-abroad', indistinguishable from an attempt to reestablish Moscow's domination.<sup>7</sup>

If Russia becomes aggressive, then the effect will be felt immediately in Estonia and in the other Baltic states. In 1988–90 the Baltic states were important catalysts and indicators of the unfolding disintegration of the USSR. In the future, what happens to Estonia and the other Baltic states may similarly be an indicator of a shift in Russian foreign policy.

### ESTONIA'S SMALLNESS: ASSET OR LIABILITY?

Taagepera has said that Estonia is 'the world's smallest continental nation-state with its own distinct language and fully developed modern culture on this language'.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, there are numerous ways to interpret notions like superpowers, great powers, middle powers, weak states and mini-states, etc.<sup>9</sup> But whatever definition is accepted, it seems clear that Estonia will fall into the category of mini-states or, at most, weak powers. Estonia's extraordinary smallness has proved to be both an asset and a liability.

Estonia's small size helped the country in 1992–94 to adapt relatively quickly to new economic challenges: to introduce a stable currency, to stop subsidising unproductive Soviet-era industries, to benefit from the inflow of Finnish and other Nordic tourists, etc. On the other hand, its smallness makes it very difficult to defend Estonia against a potential aggressor with military means or to pursue an independent line in international affairs. Estonia has few natural resources, its main economic resources are the relatively educated and skilled workforce and its geographical location, making Estonia a natural bridge in East–West transit trade. As President Meri observed in November 1993, 'Estonia is economically insignificant, but our experience can be equally useful for the East and for the West'.<sup>10</sup>

### RUSSIA AS A SOURCE OF THREAT

Historically there was competition to control Estonian territory, primarily between Russia, Germany, Poland, Sweden and Denmark, until the area was conquered in 1710 and held for two centuries by Imperial Russia.<sup>11</sup> In the 20th century, the only rival to Russia's (Soviet) domination over Estonia has been Germany. The Norwegian security analyst Olav Knudsen says that the Baltic states 'fall outside all other geographical and political contexts than the Russian and to some extent the German one'.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Estonia was occupied by Germany in the course of the world wars in 1918 and 1941–44.

Post 1991, Estonian security thinking excluded any discernible threat from the West. As the Chief of the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence Forces, Colonel Laaneots, stated in 1992, there 'is no danger from Germany'.<sup>13</sup> Russia was perceived in 1991–94 as the only tangible source of foreign threat by Estonian politicians and security experts. A leading official of the Estonian Defence Ministry, Hannes Walter, wrote in December 1993:

There is only one state in the world, influential politicians of which have publicly threatened to eliminate the Republic of Estonia. To say bluntly that Estonia needs a defence against the Russian threat is not an unfriendly act but an acknowledgement of reality.<sup>14</sup>

The new assertiveness in Russian foreign policy became more visible following the December 1993 parliamentary elections. But already long before that, in February 1993, Lennart Meri expressed the opinion that democratic rearrangements in Russia were 'in retreat before an aggressive foreign policy conception, oriented toward neo-colonialism'.<sup>15</sup> The tough statements about the 'near abroad' by President El'tsin, the Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, and other high-ranking Russian officials triggered a response on various levels from Estonia. For example, on 10 February 1994 the Estonian State Assembly adopted a resolution protesting against 'the deepening imperialist tendencies in Russian foreign policy by which the Baltic states are included in the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation'.<sup>16</sup> Commenting on the 24 February 1994 address by El'tsin, the Estonian Foreign Minister, Jüri Luik, said that Russia had made its interests absolutely clear, giving itself 'liberty to interfere in other states' domestic affairs whenever it thinks it necessary'. Luik added: 'It seems that the demolition of the totalitarian war machine has been stopped and they consider it important to restore it'.<sup>17</sup>

The Estonian image of Russia is often coloured with personal love–hate reminiscences. This applies to Meri, who was deported to Russia in 1941–46.<sup>18</sup> During a meeting with senior Kremlin officials in 1993, Meri said 'I hate Russia', following this remark with a lengthy pause. But just as outrage began to mount, he continued: 'The Russia, that is, of Molotov, Lenin and Stalin. But I also love Russia, the Russia of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chaikovsky'.<sup>19</sup> In an interview he said of his Siberian years: 'For the fact that I am alive, I am grateful to the Russians there. They did not know the Prussian discipline, but compassion. It feeds hopes'.<sup>20</sup>

## THE BURDEN OF 1940

The mainstream Estonian approach to statehood is based on the assumptions that (1) Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940–91; (2) the citizenship and other related questions should be settled under the international law covering occupation. From the legal point of

view there is no difference between the 1938–45 Nazi occupation of various European countries and the Soviet occupation of Estonia. As one Estonian expert put it, according to the Geneva convention, from 12 August 1949 an occupying country is not allowed to resettle part of its civilian population in the occupied country;<sup>21</sup> (3) Russia is the legal successor to the USSR and shares responsibility for the consequences of the Soviet occupation, etc.

One of the aims of Estonian foreign policy in 1991–94 was to make Russia accept and condemn publicly the fact that Estonia was occupied by the USSR in 1940. It is not difficult to see that such an acknowledgement would have strengthened the Estonian bargaining position in negotiations over humanitarian issues, Russian troop presence, interstate borders, compensation for pre-1940 property, etc.

Estonian political forces tried unsuccessfully in 1989–91 to compel Gorbachev to accept the fact of the 1940 occupation. Although the Congress of People's Deputies admitted on 24 December 1989 that Stalin and his associates had used the 1939 Soviet–Nazi secret protocols to 'present ultimata' and to 'pressure with force' other states,<sup>22</sup> neither the USSR nor its legal successor, Russia, ever accepted clearly the responsibility for the forcible seizure of Estonia in 1940. Even more, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vitalii Churkin, told a news conference in Moscow on 27 January 1994 that from a legal point of view 'the events of 1940 cannot be qualified as an annexation, aggression or occupation'.<sup>23</sup> The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Krylov, said on 23 February 1994 that if 'we study the historical documents of the time we will find an appeal by the legitimate Estonian authorities for the country to be admitted to the Soviet Union'.<sup>24</sup>

Estonian thinking in 1991–94 was often focused on tracing the links between the USSR and Russia. This appeared clearly, for example, in connection with El'tsin's visit to Japan in autumn 1993. A leading right-wing Estonian newspaper, *Eesti Aeg*, mentioned in an editorial that Russia's approach to the successor question was selective: it accepted the Soviet heritage when it was 'useful'. Since El'tsin asked forgiveness for the treatment of Japanese prisoners of war, *Eesti Aeg* concluded: Russia 'proved in Japan that it can apologise to other states for injustices done by the Soviet Union... Estonians will certainly start to respect Russia if its President, Boris El'tsin, apologises to Estonians for deportations'.<sup>25</sup>

On 22 February 1994 the Estonian parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of an appeal to parliaments of the UN member states. The MPs wanted Russia to condemn formally what they termed 'the 1940 aggression of the Soviet Union against the Republic of Estonia, the illegal occupation and annexation by the Soviet Union as well as the accompanying genocide against the Estonian people'.<sup>26</sup> The appeal also pointed out that the USSR 'exterminated and deported' Estonian citizens, which was contrary to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948, and brought

its civilian population to Estonia for resettlement *en masse*, which was contrary to the IV Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.<sup>27</sup>

### ESTONIAN SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY

There is a widespread and well documented belief among strategic analysts all over the world that democracies usually do not start wars.<sup>28</sup> Since Russia throughout its history has mostly been ruled in a non-democratic manner, it is quite difficult to assess 'lessons of history' in this particular case. But it should be pointed out that democratisation in Russia has at least twice benefited Estonia. First, the whole brief period of more or less liberal rule in Russia after the March 1917 revolution played an important role in creating preconditions for Estonia's independence (even if the independence itself was in practical terms gained in the war against Communist Russia in 1918–20).<sup>29</sup> Second (and more important), the current period of Estonia's independence started in 1991 as a direct result of the democratisation of the USSR in general and Russia in particular.

Generally speaking, centuries of co-existence with Russia have apparently increased Estonians' scepticism about the prospects of Russian democracy. The scepticism was one of the recurrent themes in numerous lectures by President Meri, who often concluded that the 'Baltic countries know Russia much better than Washington, Paris or Bonn'.<sup>30</sup> From Meri's point of view, there was a real danger of fascism in Russia. Speaking about the December 1993 parliamentary elections in Russia, the Estonian President blamed the Western powers for not stopping fascism in Russia: 'I am disappointed that the CSCE has lost a significant opportunity to support Russian democracy. It is nice for them to have sent hundreds of observers, but instead of watching whether the boxes were properly sealed they should have watched out for Nazi parties who, under the guise of democracy, are intent on toppling the very same democracy'.<sup>31</sup> A prominent Coalition Party activist, Endel Lippmaa, told the Coalition Party conference in February 1994 that Estonia should evacuate all Estonians from Russia, since the situation was like it was in the early 1920s, i.e. Russia 'is headed toward dictatorship'.<sup>32</sup>

Direct links between Tallinn and Moscow were in poor shape in 1992–94. The Estonian Foreign Minister, Jüri Luik, said in January 1994 that since Russia did not take Estonia as an equal partner, 'Estonian policy toward Russia and a great part of Russia's policy toward Estonia is conducted through the Western countries'. Luik expressed hope that 'it will not stay this way'.<sup>33</sup> The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Estonian parliament, Vello Saatpalu, wrote in March 1994 that Estonia may need the services of an international mediator to conduct negotiations with Russia.<sup>34</sup>

## RESISTING RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING ABROAD

Estonian policy makers in 1992–94 predicted quite dire consequences from the way Russia developed and implemented its concept of the 'near abroad'. As Meri put it in November 1993, the Russian doctrine of the 'near abroad' declares all the states on Russian borders as belonging to its sphere of interest. 'If Europe does not find an adequate response to the regrettable Russian Monroe doctrine ... then it will lead to even more dramatic conflicts than in former Yugoslavia'.<sup>35</sup>

Estonian security policy vehemently opposed Russian endeavours to acquire an international peacekeeping mandate in the former Soviet Union. For example, the then Estonian Foreign Minister, Trivimi Velliste, firmly resisted Russia's idea in his address to a meeting of foreign ministers of the CSCE in Rome on 30 November 1993. Velliste said the 'blanket and enhanced role' that Moscow was seeking in the former Soviet Union departed from the general principles of peacekeeping.<sup>36</sup> Following a joint article by Douglas Hurd and Andrei Kozyrev in *Izvestiya* on 14 December 1993, supporting a Russian peacekeeping role in the former Soviet Union, Estonian papers reacted angrily. The Tallinn-based *Baltic Independent* expressed those feelings very succinctly: 'What Mr Hurd is doing, albeit hedged with all sorts of (fairly meaningless) conditions, is handing the former captive nations of the Soviet Union back to the Kremlin's sphere of influence'.<sup>37</sup>

## ESTONIA'S ORIENTATION TO THE WEST

There was considerable sympathy for the idea of Estonia's neutrality before 1991 (for example from the Popular Front in 1989)<sup>38</sup> but it soon withered away and was then replaced with the desire to integrate with the European Union, NATO and other Western international organisations. As two Estonian analysts, Mare Haab and Peeter Vares, emphasise, the revision of neutrality policies among the Western neutrals made the Balts even more cautious about choosing that option for themselves.

Neutrality, it was thought, could, under new conditions, be an efficient means of providing guarantees for the security of the Baltic states only if they had armed forces which were able to withstand aggression from a large power. However they did not have such armies nor would they have them in future.<sup>39</sup>

The desire to include Estonia in Western military structures was often expressed in the context of a wider pro-Western orientation. Luik encapsulated well the dominant mode of thinking in 1994: 'Estonia's speedy integration with Europe is the main means of guaranteeing Estonia's security'.<sup>40</sup> A similar theme was addressed several times by President Meri. For example, in November 1993 he said the Baltic states would 'integrate into Europe economically, politically and militarily'.<sup>41</sup> In his Independence Day speech in February 1994 Meri reiterated:

Estonian security policy should be based on economic integration, first with the Baltic states, then with the Baltic sea states and the European Union.<sup>42</sup> A member of the ruling coalition in the Estonian parliament, Aap Neljas, wrote in January 1994 that participation in European cooperation organisations 'helps to strengthen the identity of Estonia as a European state in the eyes of ourselves and others'.<sup>43</sup> Any formal affiliation with the CIS was of course completely rejected by mainstream Estonian political forces.

At the same time the idea of Estonian neutrality was not completely dead in 1993–94. For example, one political scientist, Toomas Varrak, expressed the view in the leading right-wing newspaper *Eesti Aeg* that Estonia's neutrality was an option 'to be considered seriously'. Although he did not rule out the option of joining NATO as an 'extreme measure', he said that Estonia should not 'hasten to become a part of the conflict between the interests of the great powers'.<sup>44</sup>

Estonian thinking in 1993–94 generally did not question the overall Western orientation, but displayed a certain disappointment with the behaviour of the leading Western powers. Some Estonian analysts thought that the USA and other great powers did not care about the fate of mini-states like Estonia. The leader of the opposition Party of Entrepreneurs, Tiit Made, suggested in February 1994 that Estonia should stop 'idealising the leading Western powers' and seek allies among the states who themselves feel a danger from Russia.<sup>45</sup> An activist of the radical right-wing Estonian Citizens' Union (himself a US citizen, living in Washington), Hellar Grabbi, wrote in January 1994 in a leading Estonian newspaper that concessions to Western governments were often concessions to Moscow. Grabbi emphasised that, unlike the current one, the Estonian government in 1920 defied recommendations by Western governments and concluded peace with Soviet Russia, 'ensuring its independence for twenty years'.<sup>46</sup> Even the former Foreign Minister, Trivimi Velliste, suggested in January 1994 that many American Kremlinologists, such as the US Undersecretary of State, Strobe Talbot, were 'too emotionally involved in their areas of expertise to be impartial advisers'.<sup>47</sup>

The Estonian government was also criticised for reducing its activities in the former Soviet bloc too far. As *The Baltic Independent* put it, the foreign ministers of the independence period, Lennart Meri, Jaan Manitski and Trivimi Velliste, were accused by critics of 'spending too much time in the West, and ignoring visits to Moscow'.<sup>48</sup> In February 1994 Peeter Lorents, one of the leaders of the opposition Coalition Party, said the main failing of Estonian foreign policy had been insufficient attention to relations with the CIS.<sup>49</sup> In 1994 it apparently became evident to the government too that the Russian/East European directions of external activities should be strengthened. As the new Foreign Minister, Jüri Luik, told parliament on 17 February 1994, Estonia would turn its 'diplomatic efforts' to the East while retaining its current 'orientation' to the West.<sup>50</sup>



## ESTONIA AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Perhaps it is fair to say that in 1991–94 Estonia moved towards integration with at least three different types of international organisations.

First, there were organisations like the United Nations, CSCE and CBSS (Council of Baltic Sea States),<sup>51</sup> membership of which was granted practically automatically for Estonia as a sovereign state. Some of these organisations, like the CSCE, proved to be important for managing ethnic tensions in Estonia.<sup>52</sup>

Second, in May 1993 Estonia was admitted as a member of the Council of Europe.<sup>53</sup> This was certainly a significant victory for Estonia, especially in its propaganda battle with Russia, since in this way the democratic nature of the state of Estonia was further confirmed.<sup>54</sup>

Thirdly, Estonia was aspiring to become a member of organisations like the European Union, West European Union<sup>55</sup> and NATO, which are more or less clubs for advanced Western nations. For example, on 1 December 1993 the European Community's governing commission decided to begin discussions on Baltic participation in free trade agreements with the community.<sup>56</sup>

Estonian integration with NATO proceeded with moderate speed in 1991–94. In December 1991 a political declaration on joint activities between NATO and the Baltic states within the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was signed in Brussels.<sup>57</sup> More than two years later, in January 1994, Baltic leaders endorsed the NATO 'Partnership for Peace' plan,<sup>58</sup> and on 3 February 1994, in a largely symbolic ceremony at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Luik signed Estonia into the ranks of this partnership.<sup>59</sup>

While it was quite clear in 1991–94 that NATO was not willing to offer explicit security guarantees for Estonia or other Baltic states, the movement towards NATO was still seen in Tallinn as a search of such guarantees against Russia. Apparently the perception in Moscow was similar: for example, Russia was the first country to react to Lithuania's formal application to become a member of NATO at the beginning of 1994, condemning the move as 'destabilising'.<sup>60</sup> Therefore it was not surprising that many Estonian politicians were worried that 'by including Russia in the algebra of the partnership formula. NATO will dilute—or worse, nullify—its effectiveness as a security alliance'.<sup>61</sup> The head of the Estonian parliamentary defence committee, Rein Helme, wrote very explicitly about this: 'When you think how naive some Western politicians are in eagerly wishing Russia to be in NATO, then I develop a fear of NATO becoming another United Nations Organisation'.<sup>62</sup>

In 1991–94 Estonia and Russia engaged in battles in the UN, the CSCE and the Council of Europe over the treatment of Russians and other ex-Soviet citizens in Estonia. In 1992–94 Estonia was generally quite successful in defending its human rights record in the framework of the

CSCE and Council of Europe,<sup>63</sup> while it suffered a setback in the UN. More specifically, in a letter to the General Assembly on 5 November 1993, the Russian ambassador to the UN, Yulii Vorontsov, had charged Estonia and Latvia with a policy of 'velvet-gloved "ethnic cleansing"'. In a consensus resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary General to keep the member states informed about human rights developments in Latvia and Estonia, resolving to reconsider the item in the future.<sup>64</sup> Estonian officials tried to play down the significance of the UN resolution about human rights in Estonia and Latvia, emphasising that it 'was not a defeat', since the resolution just said that there were 'problems with national groups'.<sup>65</sup> Opposition politicians in the parliament, on the other hand, criticised the Estonian Foreign Ministry for its failure to prevent the adoption of an 'uncomfortable' resolution about human rights in Estonia and Latvia.<sup>66</sup>

Most mainstream Estonian political parties in 1993–94 supported the continuing presence of the CSCE mission in Estonia and the openness of Estonia to numerous international human rights missions and inspections to monitor human rights, i.e. they were in favour of multilateralisation of the minorities and human rights issues. But there were also dissenting voices. For example, Tiit Made asserted in February 1994 that Estonia had 'allowed the international organisations to make too many prescriptions'. He said the CSCE was a 'meaningless organisation for Estonia, since it was created by the Soviet Union to conduct its imperialist interests... The CSCE representatives in Estonia have shamelessly advanced Russia's business in Estonia, interfered in internal affairs of Estonia and instigated international tensions in Narva.'<sup>67</sup> Sometimes, there were also disagreements between the CSCE mission and some Estonian institutions. For instance, the Estonian Institute for Human Rights expressed its dismay over the fact that the CSCE mission in Estonia in its report of 10 January 1994 took the view that the state of Estonia had emerged as a result of the disintegration of the USSR, and therefore that Estonia was responsible for the citizens of the USSR who moved to Estonia during the Soviet occupation.<sup>68</sup>

### TOWARD A BALTIC DEFENCE ALLIANCE?

In 1992–94 it was almost ritualistic to regret that there was not enough cooperation between the three Baltic states. The leader of the opposition Party of Entrepreneurs, Tiit Made, declared that it was 'difficult to see any signs of Baltic cooperation in 1993'.<sup>69</sup> It was also pointed out that the Baltic states usually flock together if there is a foreign threat. For instance, a leading Estonian opposition MP, Toomas Alatalu, emphasised that the October 1993 events in Moscow, Zhirinovskiy's electoral success, and the growing threat from Russia

contributed to Baltic cooperation and 'the local states will start to look for contacts with each other'. Alatalu specifically mentioned such structures as a Baltic free trade agreement, Baltic Council, Baltic Council of Ministers, the so-called Baltic NATO, etc.<sup>70</sup>

The Baltic states had somewhat different orientations in 1991–94: 'Estonia has been developing particularly close relations with Finland and Sweden; Latvia is establishing tighter links with Denmark and Sweden; and Lithuania is looking more towards Central Europe, especially (although selectively) in the direction of Germany'.<sup>71</sup> There were of course several reasons why the Baltic direction was clearly not the primary concern for the Estonian government in 1992–94: the economics of the Baltic states were quite similar and they were often forced to be more competitors for markets and Western aid than partners in trade; the young right-wing leaders of Estonia's ruling coalition were not always able to establish good personal relations with the Lithuanian ex-communist leaders (who won the elections on 25 October 1992 and now form the government)<sup>72</sup> etc.

In spite of these real obstacles, it seems fair to say that the whole period of 1991–94 was characterised by a slow but steady movement towards greater cooperation in security matters, aiming at the creation of joint political and military structures. Some of the early developments included the creation of the Council of Baltic States in 1990<sup>73</sup> and the Baltic Parliamentary Assembly in 1991, which proved to be some, albeit not very effective, forums for interstate cooperation. On 27 January 1993 the defence ministers of the three Baltic states adopted a decision in Riga, according to which a government-level Baltic Committee of Defence would be established within the Council of Baltic States to coordinate joint security policies. The Baltic states decided also to establish a joint coastal surveillance and communications system.<sup>74</sup> On 13 September 1993 the Defence Ministers of Estonia and Lithuania, Jüri Luik and Audrius Butkevicius, and the Commander of the Latvian Defence Forces, Dainis Turlais, signed a declaration on Baltic security and defence cooperation, in Tallinn, noting the necessity to create common air-defence systems, carry out joint activities in defending their land and sea borders as well as their air space, and conduct operational exchanges of information.

Two months later, on 19 November 1993, the Baltic defence chiefs announced plans to create a battalion-size UN peacekeeping force for deployment as early as 1994, in the hope of strengthening their bids to become NATO members.<sup>75</sup> During the meeting of Baltic prime ministers in Vilnius on 12 December 1993 Estonia proposed to create a unified Baltic Defence system similar to NATO, and some days later the Estonian Premier Mart Laar said that joint Baltic military structures 'like those existing in NATO countries' should be created.<sup>76</sup> A meeting of the Baltic defence ministers in Riga on 15 February 1994 decided to work out common Baltic policies on weapons, air defence, peacekeeping etc.<sup>77</sup>

unconditionally.<sup>78</sup> Another nationalist politician, a former dissident and

## RUSSIAN TROOPS IN ESTONIA

According to some estimates, in 1990 there were about 50 000–60 000 Soviet troops in Estonia.<sup>78</sup> Their number then diminished steadily and reached less than 3000 by the end of 1993. While Russian troops left Lithuania in August 1993, there were still about 13 000 of them in Latvia and about 100 000–150 000 in Kaliningrad *oblast'* at the end of 1993 (Table 1).<sup>79</sup>

The Estonian–Russian negotiations about the Russian troops and other (military, border, economic, humanitarian) issues started on 14–15 April 1992.<sup>80</sup> In a curious way the presence of the Russian troops in Estonia was the most complicated and at the same time the simplest among the relevant security concerns. It was complicated, because Russia delayed the withdrawal of its forces and they posed a clear security threat to Estonia. It was simple, because all the mainstream Estonian political forces were unanimous in demanding speedy withdrawal of foreign troops; all the Western powers also insisted on their departure, as did the CSCE and other relevant international organisations. Even Moscow was theoretically in favour of the withdrawal, although it tried to postpone it, linking the question of withdrawal to securing the rights of the retired Soviet servicemen and other former Soviet citizens; to requested changes in Estonia's citizenship policy: to getting compensation for Soviet property in Estonia, etc.

*Table 1*

**Russian Troops in the Baltic States, 1992–93**

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
1992	23–25 000 (February)	50 000 (Spring)	34–43 000 (Winter) 38 000 (Spring) 34 000 (Summer) 20 500 (September)
1993	10 000 (January) 7 000 (April) 6 500 (May) 3 800 (October) 2 600–3000 (December)	23 000 (April)    13 000 (December)	10 000 (January)  9 000 (June) Left (31 August)

*Note:* Estimates by Russian and Baltic sides differ usually by about 1000–2000 men. This table relies more on the Baltic estimates.

*Sources:* *The Baltic Independent*, 24 December 1993–6 January 1994, p. 6; *Hommikuleht*, 12 January 1994, p. 7; *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2, 25, 18 June 1993, pp. 50–56; 3, 1, 7 January 1994, pp. 92–102.

From Estonia's point of view, the presence of Russian troops posed a number of security problems beyond purely military matters. Since the state of Estonia had little or no control over the closed ex-Soviet military areas, and since the Russian military personnel felt increasingly demoralised and betrayed by their own country, it was not surprising that Estonian police often voiced concern over possible links between ex-Soviet military and the mafia-controlled shadow economy.<sup>81</sup>

The Estonian approach to the question of troops in 1992–94 included several elements, such as making maximum use of the international support for speedy withdrawal from the CSCE, the USA and other Western powers; opposing any linkage between the troop question and all other problems; trying to garner US and other Western material support for constructing housing for the departing Russian military, etc.

In fact, some help was forthcoming from the West to build housing for the departing Russian officers. For example, the US government earmarked \$ 6 million in 1993 for the construction of 450 flats for resettled Russian officers and their families. The US government pledged an additional \$ 190 million in 1994.<sup>82</sup>

### SHOULD RUSSIAN VETERANS GET RESIDENCE PERMITS?

According to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in January 1994 there were 10 507 Russian military pensioners who were living in Estonia and had retired before 31 August 1991.<sup>83</sup> Together with their immediate family members their number may have reached 40 000.<sup>84</sup> Pensions to Soviet Army veterans in Estonia were paid by Russia, and they were relatively generous. According to Russian military sources, 'most of the pensioners' were receiving about 1100–1200 Estonian kroons per month in spring 1994,<sup>85</sup> i.e. their income was about equal to the average salary in Estonia and three times higher than the average Estonian pension.<sup>86</sup>

On 1 December 1993 the Estonian cabinet approved a decree essentially permitting an estimated 4345 of those retired officers (born before 1 January 1930) to apply for permanent residence and work permits in Estonia.<sup>87</sup> Estonia considered this a generous gesture, since military pensioners, in the words of a Foreign Ministry official, posed a security threat to Estonia.<sup>88</sup>

Not surprisingly, the decree of 1 December 1993 drew criticism in the Estonian press and from some MPs, who said it granted residence status to 'occupiers' from the former Soviet Union.<sup>89</sup> Ants Erm, the head of the right-wing nationalist Progress Party, said in November 1993 that 'the retired officers of the occupying army must leave Estonia unconditionally'.<sup>90</sup> The protest meeting organised by the Estonian National Independence Party in March 1994 also insisted that all military pensioners and their family members must leave Estonia unconditionally.<sup>91</sup> Another nationalist politician, a former dissident and

member of the parliament, Mart Niklus, emphasised the security threat from the retired Russian military, since 'those men have given their oath of loyalty to the Soviet army'. He also pointed out that the military pensioners born before 1930 might include people who participated in the terror bombing of Narva and Tallinn by the Soviet air force during World War II.<sup>92</sup> An activist of the right-wing Estonian Citizens' Union, Hellar Grabbi, wrote in January 1994 that on the 'question of foreign colonists', the Estonian government had been 'as soft as jelly'. From his point of view the government had made unnecessary concessions to Russia on the question of retired Russian military.<sup>93</sup> Another author suggested that if the 40 000–60 000 members of the families of veterans of the Soviet army were to be 'attached' to Estonia, it would create a new problem of at least 100 000 additional immediate family members who might wish to settle in Estonia. He said that it would be 'very difficult' to stop them coming to Estonia, since 'family reunification' is an area very closely watched by human rights organisations.<sup>94</sup>

There was almost a public support in 1993–94 among mainstream Estonian political forces for the idea of being more flexible and forgiving toward Russian military pensioners. At the same time, the Estonian approach drew a lot of criticism from Moscow, since Russia was demanding full social guarantees for all the military pensioners.<sup>95</sup> Not surprisingly, there was dissatisfaction among some radical Russian groups in Estonia. An organisation of Russian army veterans appealed to the United Nations, the CSCE and the Council of Europe, protesting against 'aggressive nationalism' and 'violations' of human rights. Petr Rozhok, a representative in Estonia of Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, even called on retired Russian military in Estonia to form armed units and use force against Estonian officials. But the statement by Rozhok was condemned by several Russian organisations in Estonia, including the organisations of Russian army veterans, who said they were 'categorically against any calls to offer armed resistance to Estonian authorities'.<sup>96</sup>

### RETURN TO THE 1920 BORDERS?

The Estonian-Russian border was fixed in the Tartu Peace Treaty, concluded between Moscow and Tallinn in February 1920.<sup>97</sup> When Estonia was occupied in 1940 and incorporated into the USSR as one of the union republics, the interstate border between Estonia and Russia became an internal border between two administrative units in the Soviet Union. Following World War II, about 5% of Estonia's territory (in the Narva and Petseri areas) was taken away from the Estonian SSR and attached to the Russian Federation.<sup>98</sup> The return of those territories has been one of the key demands of Estonia since the restoration of her independence. On 12 September 1991 the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Estonia revoked the earlier decisions of the Soviet Estonian state organs to relinquish these territories to the Russian

Federation.<sup>99</sup> On 28 June 1992 a new Constitution of Estonia was adopted, article 122 of which stated that the 'land border of Estonia is established according to the Tartu Peace Treaty of 2 February 1920, and other interstate treaties about the borders'.<sup>100</sup> The Estonian Russian border problem should be taken in the wider context: Latvia has similar problems with Russia, while the Lithuanian situation is quite different, since Lithuania gained territory in 1939–45 and (with the exception of Kaliningrad *oblast'*) does not have a common border with Russia.

In 1991–94 Moscow bluntly refused to talk about any territorial problems between Estonia and Russia. It appears that the border question was one of the few areas where the Russian strategy toward Estonia seemed to work quite well in 1991–94. Estonia was neither able to garner notable international support for her territorial claims, nor to put any considerable pressure on Russia in any other form. No Western country was especially interested in the restoration of Estonia's pre-war borders in the way they were interested in the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics, in strengthening of the border controls between Estonia and Russia, or in Estonia's economic transition and stabilisation. The Russian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anatolii Adamishin, may have understood correctly how limited Estonia's real options were, when he announced in Tallinn in May 1993: 'There cannot be territorial questions between us ... let us freeze this question. Let the future generations decide who is right'.<sup>101</sup> Even radical nationalists like Hellar Grabbi agreed on the *Realpolitik* dimensions of the problem. In January 1994 he said that Estonia should not stand for the borders fixed in the Tartu Peace Treaty 'at any cost', but could not retreat without 'getting something in return'.<sup>102</sup> Other nationalist activists went even further. For example, the leader of the Decolonisation Centre, Jüri Estam, publicly proposed not only to make concessions to Russia on border problems, but even to leave the Russian-populated towns of Narva and Sillamäe to Russia to achieve a more homogenous composition of the Estonian population.<sup>103</sup>

While the idea of ceding more territory to Russia did not receive much support, the Estonian government was increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of a return to the 1920 borders. In February 1994 Luik conceded that there was virtually no international support for restoring Estonia's border with Russia under the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty.<sup>104</sup>

## WHEN WILL ESTONIA NEED ARMED FORCES?: FOUR SCENARIOS

It seems obvious that the military dimension will inevitably play a minor role in Estonian security strategy, since the resources of the country are so small. Certainly Estonia seems to satisfy one of the basic conditions of the weak state, i.e. a state 'which cannot defend itself against external threats by its own strength', and which 'has high or total dependence on external help'.<sup>105</sup> Estonians were also quite sceptical

about the possible military help forthcoming. As a leading official of the Ministry of Defence, Hannes Walter, put it in December 1993: 'We have to recognise that it is unlikely that we will get foreign help in the event of aggression. But if we do not try to defend ourselves, then it is absolutely certain that there will be no foreign help'.<sup>106</sup>

The Estonian Defence Minister, Indrek Kannik, has identified two main 'battle scenarios': (1) an attack by some country; or (2) 'total chaos' in some 'neighbouring country' which will turn its armed forces into 'marauding' gangs.<sup>107</sup> It is possible to spell some of those scenarios out in more specific terms. In other words, we can envisage at least four cases when the use of Estonia's armed forces may be contemplated.

First, there is what we may call the 1940-scenario, i.e. an all-out conquest by Russia.<sup>108</sup> Estonian domestic ethnic tensions may play only a limited role in such a scenario. Attack units were based right near the Estonian border in 1993-94 and it was estimated that the paratroop division near Pskov could invade Estonia at 16 minutes notice.

Second, the heavily Russian-populated north East of Estonia may attempt to secede or plunge into violence, which will create a pretext for Russia's 'peacekeeping' operation to save the lives of Russian citizens. The possibility of such action is mentioned in the 1993 Russian military doctrine.<sup>109</sup> An ingredient of that scenario may be domestic unrest in Estonia, instigated by a group of foreign agents, like the Comintern-inspired failed communist revolt of 1924.<sup>110</sup>

In spite of all the deep legal, historical, geopolitical, ethnic, etc. differences between Estonia and Moldova, the Dniestr conflict in 1990-94 may offer some guidelines about how something similar might also occur and develop in Estonia. The 'Dniestr Moldavian Republic' was proclaimed in September 1990 on the left bank of the Dniestr, and although by 1994 it was still not recognised by any state in the world, it *de facto* continued its existence, backed by the Russian 14th army and the 'republic's' own armed forces.<sup>111</sup> The above-mentioned Estonian defence official, Hannes Walter, also emphasised in December 1993 that the most likely scenario was 'indirect aggression' which in his view had 'already been applied' in Moldova, the Caucasus and former Soviet republics in Asia: 'It is possible to organise a riot and support it with Cossacks and arms. The agents can declare a counter-government and ask for help from Russia. It is possible to pose in the guise of peace keeping'.<sup>112</sup>

Third, a civil war may break out in Russia and that country may disintegrate into quarrelling 'princdoms'. It is quite conceivable (as in fact happened in 1918) that in this case some remnants of the Russian army will deteriorate into gangs, indiscriminately pillaging towns and villages in Estonia and elsewhere. The need for the Estonian army to be ready to cope with 'armed groups', similar to the ones that emerged after World War I, was explicitly mentioned at the press conference of the ruling parliamentary coalition in Tallinn in March 1994.<sup>113</sup>

Fourth, (as the summer 1993 'Pullapää crisis'<sup>114</sup> demonstrated) violence may also break out in Estonia because some paramilitary or



military units refuse to take government orders, while at the same time enjoying the support of some mainstream Estonian political factions. In other words—although it is not very likely—a violent domestic leash between various pro-Estonian political factions themselves cannot be completely ruled out. One centrist parliamentarian, Jaan Kaplinski, wrote in February 1994: 'I think that although the possibilities of radical-national political terrorism in Estonia are not very great, those possibilities should still not be ignored'.<sup>115</sup>

Some politicians saw an important role for the Estonian army even under the first scenario, i.e. in the case of a full-scale war between Estonia and Russia. The head of the parliamentary Defence Committee, Rein Helme, wrote in February 1994 that Estonia should resist aggression even 'if we remain alone', i.e. are not helped by the West.<sup>116</sup> In Helme's view, by pursuing a total defence policy, Estonia may in ten years time have a military reserve of about 80 000 men. To conquer Estonia, an adversary should then have at least 250 000 men on the field. To apply such force is (in Helme's view) beyond the 'material and political resources' available to Russia.<sup>117</sup> Helme's arguments may not sound very convincing for outside observers, but they at least demonstrate the mode of reasoning in Tallinn about why Estonia needs defence forces.

While it may be more difficult to grasp the logic of those who see a meaningful role for an Estonian army under the first scenario, there are relatively few difficulties in seeing the need for the armed forces under the second, third and fourth scenarios. It seems quite obvious that the Estonian armed forces may be successfully used at the beginning stages of the last three types of crisis to curb the further escalation of violence.

Estonia's armed forces have their traditions back in 1917. After the War of Independence (1918–20) the Estonian army contained 86 000 men and 119 000 paramilitary Defence League members. By 1940 there were approximately 15 000 men serving in the Defence Forces and 105 000 reservists (of whom 43 000 belonged to the Defence League).<sup>118</sup>

The 1991–94 situation was quite different. In March 1994 the Estonian parliament adopted a law on 8–12 months of mandatory military service for all male citizens who are 19–27 years old.<sup>119</sup> In practical terms, the Estonian Defence Forces were already recreated in 1991–92. On 1 January 1992 there were 85 persons in the Estonian defence forces; on 31 December 1992 about 1120 men.<sup>120</sup> In July 1993 the Estonian Defence Forces comprised about 2000 men.<sup>121</sup> As Estonian Defence Ministry officials emphasised in 1993, the target was to create a 4500-strong Defence Force. If we also count planned reserves, then the plan is even more ambitious—as mentioned above, some leading defence experts think Estonia should have reserves of about 80 000 men. In addition to the regular army and reserves there is also a voluntary paramilitary organisation, the Estonian Defence League, which reemerged on 17 February 1990. In 1993 it comprised about 6500 volunteers.<sup>122</sup>

## WILL ESTONIAN FOREIGN POLICY BECOME TOUGHER?

Not surprisingly, the Estonian government took great pains in 1992–94 to depict its foreign policy as successful and without meaningful alternatives. The Prime Minister, Mart Laar, stated in November 1993 that ‘in the given situation we have only two options—to go ahead, clenching our teeth, along the road we have chosen, or to find ourselves one day in the CIS, as has happened to most of the former republics of the USSR’.<sup>123</sup>

The domestic opposition viewed Estonian foreign policy as something which was full of mistakes and failures. At the same time, it is remarkable that there was relatively little criticism of foreign policy from ‘doves’. The absolute majority of critical statements in 1992–94 came from the ‘hawks’, i.e. from public figures like Tiit Made, Jüri Toomepuu, Endel Lippmaa and Hellar Grabbi, who accused the government of being too soft and even appeasing toward Russia, as well as not firm enough in dealings with international organisations. The leader of the Estonian Citizens’ Union, Jüri Toomepuu, stated in February 1994 that ‘Estonian foreign policy has been a policy of crouching down before the enemy and giving in’.<sup>124</sup> The leader of the Party of Entrepreneurs, Tiit Made, asserted that ‘Russia does not respect neighbours who are feeble, humble and without their own opinion’.<sup>125</sup> Hellar Grabbi declared that, unfortunately, the current government ‘has restricted Estonia’s territorial and law-making sovereignty’ without being ‘forced to do so’.<sup>126</sup>

In spite of these vocal criticisms it seems unlikely that *domestic* pressures will cause Estonia substantially to change its policy toward Russia. Any new government that comes to power in Estonia after the spring 1995 parliamentary elections is likely to remain heavily dependent on the general climate in Russian–Western relations. If Russia becomes more assertive and hostile toward the West, then Estonia will probably appeal even more to the main Western powers for help and advice.

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Research Support Scheme of the Central European University for a research project, which made the writing of this article possible. The opinions and findings expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Central European University.

<sup>2</sup> This article covers the developments until March 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Andrus Park, ‘Ethnicity and Independence: The Case of Estonia in Comparative Perspective’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46, 1, 1994, pp. 69–87.

<sup>4</sup> Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Co, Westview Press, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Rahva Hääl*, 9 November 1993, p. 3; *Rahva Hääl*, 26 February 1994, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, Robert Stewart, 1993), p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> *The Washington Post*, 25 January 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Co, Westview Press, 1993), p. 4.

- 9 See, for example, Michael I. Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London, Frank Cass, 1990), pp. 3–65.
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- 12 Olāv F. Knudsen, 'The Foreign Policies of the Baltic States: Interwar Years and Restoration', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 28, 1, 1993, p. 48.
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- 14 *Rahva Hää*, 28 December 1994, p. 2.
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- 16 *Legal Acts of Estonia*, 3, 21 February 1994, p. 67.
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- 36 *The Baltic Independent*, 3–9 December 1993, p. 2.
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- 41 *Rahva Hää*, 9 November 1993, p. 3.
- 42 *Rahva Hää*, 26 February 1994, p. 2.
- 43 *Hommikuleht*, 4 January 1994, p. 2.
- 44 *Eesti Aeg*, 2 February 1994, p. 3.
- 45 *Rahva Hää*, 28 February 1994, p. 3.
- 46 *Päevaleht*, 11 January 1994, p. 6.
- 47 *The Baltic Independent*, 28 January–3 February 1994, p. 3.
- 48 *The Baltic Independent*, 25 February–3 March 1994, p. 3.
- 49 *Ibid.*
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- 51 On the CBSS see 'The CBSS Monitor', *The Baltic Review*, 3, 1993, pp. 29–37 (*The Baltic Review* is an English-language quarterly, published in Tallinn, Estonia); Eve Kuusmann, 'Estonia and Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region', in Pertti Joenieniemi & Peeter Vares (eds), *New Actors in International Arena: The Foreign Policies of the Baltic Countries* (Tampere, Tampere Peace Research Institute, 1993), p. 81–88.
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- 62 *Ibid.*
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