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## Section:

# UKRAINE AND WORLD

## MILITARY-POLITICAL CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE NATO MEMBER STATES IN THE BALTIC REGION

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**Abstract:** This article analyses a range of problems faced by the NATO member states in the Baltic region in connection with Russian aggression in Ukraine. It is indicated that the Russian Federation boosts its military presence in the Kaliningrad Oblast: it deploys advanced missile systems and armored fighting vehicles to the region, increases its military contingent and rearms its Navy in the Baltic Sea. It is stressed that Russia has violated the 1987 Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles (the INF Treaty) and in recent years has been conducting large-scale military exercises.

It is pointed out that amid the growing threat from Russia, the countries of the Baltic region have to reconsider their military strategies, to join their efforts in order to prevent any possible aggression. The NATO member states, the United States of America in particular, take part in the military drills in the region. Sweden's military cooperation with NATO and the United States of America – a controversial issue in Swedish political circles – is discussed. The question of enhancing military interaction between the members of NATO – Germany and Norway, the United States and Poland – is addressed too. The advantages of building collective missile defense capability in the Baltic region and taking other steps to restrain Russia's aggressive actions are indicated.

**Keywords:** Russian aggression, military aggression, military exercises, missile defense, Baltic region, NATO member states.

The hybrid war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which led to the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and military actions on the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, has prompted the members of NATO to radically revise their defense strategy in Eastern Europe. Andrzej Duda, President of the Polish Republic, said in his interview to *Bild am Sonntag*, "Today, Moscow's imperial ambitions are obvious to everyone, therefore we must strengthen NATO's eastern flank" [1]. He quoted the former Polish President Lech Kaczyński, who, ten years ago, commenting on the Russian aggression against Georgia, made a historical prediction, "Today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic States, and then, perhaps, the time will come for my country, Poland" [11].

The warnings of the Presidents of the Polish Republic and other political leaders, those of the Baltic States in particular, are based on the information about the increasing military presence of the Russian Federation in the region, where it stockpiles modern weapons, which military experts classify as offensive.

Today, there are almost 15 thousand Russian troops, equipped with about 800 tanks, over 1200 armored fighting vehicles, and almost 350 missile launchers and artillery pieces, in the Kaliningrad exclave. At the beginning of 2017, the Kremlin deployed advanced S-400 Air Defense Missile Systems in the region, allegedly as an answer to NATO's deployment of its missile defense systems [15].

In November 2016, the Russian Federation Armed Forces started modernizing the infrastructure and rearming the Baltic Fleet in the Kaliningrad Oblast with the Bal anti-ship missile system and the Iskander-M ballistic missile system. Additionally, a Bastion battalion was deployed there; the operational range and destructive power of the Bastion anti-ship missile system equals to those of the Iskander-M [2].

According to experts, the deployment of new missile systems in the Kaliningrad Oblast has radically changed the military situation in the region. Formally, the Bastion is an anti-ship missile system, but its guided missiles can be effectively used against ground targets. There are no military grounds for deploying the anti-ship Bastion system in the Kaliningrad Oblast. The missile used by the Bastion-P is the P-800 Oniks; it is designed to strike large enemy naval vessel formations and aircraft carriers. But the latter do not operate in the relatively small Baltic Sea. The anti-ship missile system of the Russian Navy Baltic Fleet is the Bal. Thus, in case of a potential conflict, the main task of the Bastion and the Iskander-M systems, as well as of the redirected to Baltiysk two Project 21631 Buyan-M corvettes, armed with the Kalibr missiles, will be to destroy ground targets [2].

The operational range of the above missile complexes is another point to be taken into consideration. According to Russian sources, the Oniks missile can strike ground targets at a range of 450 kilometers and the Iskander-M, a range of 500 kilometers. The Bastion system can be used to launch the Kalibr missiles (1,500 kilometers). If deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast, the Kalibr missiles can reach Central Europe, the Baltic Sea, and most of the Scandinavian Peninsular [17]. One of the arguments used by the United States in order to convince their allies to support American withdrawal from the INF Treaty was that Russia deploys intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles with nuclear warheads in the Kaliningrad Oblast. During a foreign ministers meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels on December 4, 2018, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, "All allies have concluded that Russia has developed and fielded a new ground-launched cruise missile system – the SSC-8, also known as the 9M729". (The INF Treaty banned all US and Soviet ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, while the estimated range of the 9M729 cruise missile is of 2,500 kilometers.) Thus, all allies "agree that Russia is therefore in material breach of its obligations under the INF Treaty," Stoltenberg said [10].

The statement of US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, made on December 5, 2018, was quite categorical: if Russia did not come back into compliance with the INF Treaty, the United States would begin a six-month process of withdrawal [7].

In October 2018, Russian news agencies informed that the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation had deployed its latest Samarkand electronic suppression systems – Samarkand-U, Samarkand SU-PRD-K2, Samarkand PU-PRD-D – to its Navy bases in several strategic regions of the country, including the Kaliningrad Oblast [16].

Rearming its missile military units in the Kaliningrad Oblast, the Russian Federation launches the technical upgrade program of its Armed Forces, scheduled through 2020, which has had less priority until recently. Throughout the last decade, Russian missiles, deployed in the region, had been used as a means of intimidation and propaganda, aimed to prevent the European countries, Poland in particular, from deploying the elements of American missile defense systems on their territory [2].

In the context of these events, the countries of the Baltic region are very concerned about massive military drills conducted by Russia throughout recent years. For instance, on September 14 to 20, 2017, Russia and Belarus were holding joint strategic exercise, supervised by the Chiefs of the General Staff of the Russian and Belarus Armed Forces – the largest one in recent years. About 12,7 thousand troops, about 70 military aircrafts and helicopters, up to 680 units of weaponry – including about 250 tanks, 200 artillery guns, multiple launch rocket systems and mortars, and 10 vessels – participated in the military exercise. It was carried out on the proving grounds in Belarus, and in the Kaliningrad, the Leningrad,

and the Pskov Oblasts of the Russian Federation. The exercise scenario involved blockading and eliminating extremist groups that were given external air/sea support [17].

A serious signal for NATO was the Russia-China naval exercise Joint Sea 2017: it was the first time that the warships of the two countries practiced together in the Baltic Sea. Since 2012, China and Russia had been conducting joint naval drills only in the Southeast Asia seas. About 10 different class vessels, more than 10 aircrafts and helicopters of Russia's and the PRC's naval forces took part in the exercise. The PRC's Navy was represented by the missile destroyer Hefei, the frigate Yuncheng, and the supply ship Luomahu [14]. The tactical groups of Russian and Chinese naval forces practiced inspecting a suspicious vessel, saving a man overboard, transferring dry cargo between participating ships, and providing assistance to a sinking ship. The exercise included artillery firing at air and surface targets; the aircrafts and helicopters of the Baltic Fleet Air Force simulated air attacks of an imaginary enemy [13].

In the light of the above events, the countries of the Baltic region had to reconsider their military strategies and to unite their forces in order to block possible aggression on the part of the Russian Federation. According to a CNN report, in the summer of 2017, the United States Air Force deployed long-range B-52 bombers and 800 airmen to Great Britain in support of joint exercises with NATO allies and partners. The nuclear-capable B-52 Stratofortress took part in a series of joint exercises that primarily took place on Russia's doorstep – specifically in the Baltic Sea, the Arctic, and along Russia's border with several NATO partners; the United States military sought to reassure its European allies amid questions surrounding President Donald Trump's vision for America's global role and foreign policy aspirations [12].

On September 11–29, 2017, concurrently with the joint Russia-Belarus strategic military drills Zapad 2017, Sweden conducted the Aurora 17 military exercise, the largest one in 23 years. Aurora 17 involved the forces of Sweden, the United States, and some other NATO member states – with the total of more than 20,000 military personnel. In the scenario of the exercise, Sweden was attacked by a foreign invader. Sweden and Finland are not the members of NATO; but amid the threat posed by Russia, the Swedish Ministry of Defense called for a permanent American military presence in the region. After the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea, Russian fighter aircrafts were repeatedly spotted and intercepted by the NATO air forces in the Baltic region [18].

It is significant that the United States participation was quite substantial: around 1,300 troops, the Patriot missile defense batteries, the Apache AH64 helicopters, a mechanized unit from the Minnesota National Guard, equipped with Abrams main battle tanks and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, and the destroyer USS Oscar Austin to the drills. The cooperation involved military interoperability, retraining, and international operations.

On the one hand, the active participation of the United States in the Aurora 17 exercise indicates that the Pentagon is aware of Sweden's importance for the military operational planning in the region; at the same time, it is a clear signal for Moscow – in case of a conflict in the region, NATO will help Sweden to defend itself, though formally it is not a NATO ally. On the other hand, the participation of the Patriot missile defense batteries in the Aurora 17 exercise should be regarded as Sweden's tender for the purchase of the above system; its value is estimated at about \$1.2 billion; the delivery is planned to commence in 2020 [6].

Another important fact is that one more non-NATO country – Finland – took part in the Aurora 17 exercise; it contributed about 300 persons, an infantry company, two NH90 transport helicopters, 6-8 multirole fighters F/A-18 Hornet. Participation in the exercise was the practical implementation of Finland's defense policy for 2016–2020 and the Action Plan for deepened defense cooperation between Sweden and Finland [1].

In 2014, Helsinki and Stockholm announced the intent to strengthen their defense cooperation; the sides settled the following issues: the development of a bilateral standing Naval Task Group, the Swedish-Finnish Naval Task Group (SFNTG), enhanced cooperation in the areas of ground forces training and exercises, the development of a combined Finnish-Swedish Brigade Framework, the increase of interoperability between the Swedish and Finnish Air Forces [4]. Though the Swedish-

Finnish military cooperation in case of war is not legally regulated, the joint exercise is a step toward the prospective interaction of their Armed Forces, should the region be involved in a conflict.

Stockholm is aware of the fact that, in view of its strategic position in the Baltic Sea area, Sweden can get involved in a conflict between Russia and NATO; it has to be prepared for the possibility of aggression from Russia, which, in case of a conflict in the region, would seek to “deactivate” the Swedish Armed Forces and military infrastructure. For instance, the occupation of Gotland, Sweden’s largest island, and the deployment of a long-range missile defense system there, would give Russia air and sea advantage in the Baltic region. In order to prevent such scenarios, Sweden develops closer cooperation with the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance. In 2014, Stockholm signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Host Nation Support; and in 2016, the bill on the MoU was adopted by the Swedish Government. The Memorandum, following a national decision, allows NATO troops to be deployed to Sweden; it also allows for logistical support to Allied forces located on, or in transit through, its territory during exercises or in a crisis [6].

The military cooperation of Sweden with NATO and the United States, which has been intensified in the last three years, is a controversial issue in Swedish political circles. The minority of the Swedish political elite and society consider that remaining neutral, Sweden can stay out of conflict. Though, being an EU member, Sweden is obliged to demonstrate solidarity with any other member state subjected to aggression.

Despite the fact that the majority of the political elites support the current defense policy of the Government, even the governmental coalition is not unanimous in their view of the development of cooperation with NATO and the United States. The Ministry of Defense pursues pragmatic cooperation, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not support such a policy. Thus, contrary to the position of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted that Sweden should adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. On July 7, 2017, Sweden as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council voted in favour of the UN General Assembly’s resolution – in opposition to the NATO member states, other nuclear weapon states, and the non-aligned Finland. Experts claim that in future, the ratification of the Treaty can become an obstacle to Sweden’s accession to NATO and worsen the country’s relationship with the United States. In view of these facts, the Government of Sweden made a decision to launch an inquiry into the consequences of the ratification of the Treaty [6]. In February 2017, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation met for the first time in three years. Shortly before that, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallström had made a statement, advocating a broader approach to relationship with Russia, which would involve a political dialogue, strategic patience, promoting cooperation and people-to-people contacts. Such a stance, among other things, was a factor behind adopting a political decision to use the port of Karlshamn as a base for the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. According to experts, whatever the differences in the positions of the two Ministries, in the coming years, Sweden will balance between cooperation with Moscow and support for sanctions against Russia, moderately criticizing it for breaching international law. At the same time, Sweden will strengthen its cooperation with NATO [9].

In answer to the extension of Russia’s presence in the region, Germany and Norway, the Baltic NATO members, continue to reinforce their cooperation. On August 22, 2017, the Ministers of Defense of Germany and Norway had a meeting at the Eckenförde Naval Base in the Schleswig-Holstein, Germany (German submarines armed with Electronic Warfare Support System are stationed in Eckenförde; it was also the garrison and headquarters of the Naval Protection Force, a marine unit of the German Navy; the Naval Force Protection Battalion, which succeeded the Naval Protection Force, was formed in Eckernförde on April 1, 2014). At the meeting, strategic naval cooperation between the two states was discussed. The context of the meeting was purchasing Type 212NG (Norway-Germany/Next Generation) submarines, an improved version of the Class 212A boats, four for Oslo and two for Berlin, from Germany’s ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) [8]. The contract signing was scheduled for 2019. It was agreed that the first submarine would be delivered by 2025, and four

more boats between 2026 and 2030. Today, the German Navy has six Class 212A submarines, which entered service between 2005 and 2016 [8].

Oslo has several reasons for choosing Germany's TKMS as the preferred bidder. First, there are political considerations. Germany – as well as Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France – has been mentioned in the White Papers on Norwegian foreign and security policy since April 2017 as one of Norway's most important European allies, a defense cooperation partner. Norway recognizes that Germany plays an ever-increasing role in ensuring European security and wants to draw Germany's attention to Norwegian strategic problems in the Arctic. It counts on increasing German naval presence there through joint training drills and exercises. Second, from a military perspective, giving preference to the German bidder means continuing the submarine cooperation, as the Ula-class submarines also were assembled in Germany [8].

For Norway, the purchase of the submarines is the second-biggest investment in new weaponry after buying fifty-two F-35A multirole fighters, whose delivery is scheduled for 2017–2025. Norway has jurisdiction over large sea areas, some Arctic regions in particular, which are strategically important from Oslo's perspective. Long-distance submarines with big destructive power, capable of remaining underwater for a long time without surfacing, are an essential strategic factor that can help Norway to keep Russia at bay.

Berlin wants this cooperation to be coordinated from Germany, from the Eckenförde Naval Base, which is intended to be an international training center for submarine crews. Germany expects its other allies, the Netherlands and Poland in particular, to join this cooperation. Germany tries to integrate its allies into the fields in which it has strong competences, that goes for both ground and naval forces. In 2016, the Federal Republic of Germany promoted itself as the framework nation to coordinate multipurpose naval operations; it also suggested its naval operation center should be given international status [8].

On April 3, 2018, President Donald Trump hosted the Presidents of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania at the US – Baltic Business Summit in Washington, D.C.; the event was devoted to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence of all three Baltic States. For the Baltic leaders, the meeting was very important for several reasons. The American President had previously stated that European states had to strengthen their own military capabilities through increasing national defense expenditures and contributions to the NATO budget. Besides, Washington voiced its unequivocal "concern" about international money laundering going on in the Baltic States. In February 2018, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) of the US Department of the Treasury released a statement, in which it accused the Latvian ABLV Bank of money laundering and helping North Korea to circumvent Western sanctions [8].

The quadrilateral US – Baltic Presidential Summit was the culmination of a series of high-level working visits between American and Baltic representatives that had taken place in rapid succession since 2014. The purpose of this summit was to discuss US – Baltic cooperation, notably on security and defense in the Baltic Sea area, and to reconfirm the strong United States commitment to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia [3].

In this context, the three Baltic Presidents – Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania, Raimonds Vējonis of Latvia, and Kersti Kaljulaid of Estonia – urged their American counterpart, Donald Trump, to bolster the United States military presence, deploying the elements of missile defense systems on their territory in particular, in order to enhance security along NATO's eastern flank and counteract the aggressive policy of Russia. Right before the Summit, on March 30, 2018, Russia had tested its latest intercontinental ballistic missile Sarmat and announced additional tests in the Baltic Sea between Latvia and Sweden on April 4 and 6 [15].

At present, elements of NATO's missile defense system (sea-based missile defense) are deployed in Germany, Poland, Romania, Turkey, and Spain. In 2017, according to the decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Warsaw (2016), the Alliance started air policing over the Black Sea, using German, Dutch, Polish, and Spanish combat aircrafts. Besides, NATO has enhanced its forward presence in the Baltic region: three multinational battalion battle groups – about 1,000-strong each – are stationed in the Baltic States: British, Danish, and Icelandic battle groups are deployed in Estonia; Canadian, Albanian, Italian,

Polish, Slovakian, Slovene, and Spanish, in Latvia; German, Croatian, French, Dutch, and Norwegian, in Lithuania. The multinational battle group stationed in Poland includes American, Romanian, British, and Croatian units [15].

One of the key concerns of the countries bordering the Russian Federation in the Baltic region is building their own advanced air defense systems. Surface-based air defense, in this regard, is their weakest point. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia currently have only short-range air defense systems. That is why they want the American Patriot surface-to-air missile systems to be permanently stationed on their territory. On July 10, 2017, the Patriot long-range missile system was deployed in Lithuania. The Patriots took part in Tobruq Legacy 2017, a multinational surface-based air defense tactical exercise. It was held concurrently in three countries – Lithuania (Shavle), the Czech Republic (Hradiště), and Romania (Capu Midia). About 2,000 personnel from Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States were trained in joint air command and control structures, and defensive operations. It is for the first time that the United States temporarily deployed the Patriot long-range missile system on the territory of the Baltic States [5]. For Lithuania and Latvia, investments in air defense systems and the upgrading of their Armed Forces are among their military priorities. In October 2016, Lithuania signed a contract for the acquisition of two NASAMS batteries (Norwegian Advanced Surface to Air Missile System, hits targets at the range 25 kilometers and at the height of 15 kilometers) from Norway, a deal worth about €100 million [5].

Back on May 23, 2010, the Patriot air defense missile complexes and 100 United States military personnel were located in Moraq, Poland, about 60 kilometers south of the Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad) border. In April 2015, the then Polish President Bronisław Komorowski said the Polish Government planned to purchase the Raytheon Patriot air and missile defense system. On July 6, 2017, shortly after President Donald Trump had arrived in Warsaw for a summit of Central and Eastern European leaders, Poland and the United States signed a memorandum regarding Poland's purchase of the Patriot missile defense system. In 10 years' time, Poland will have the entire Patriot air defense system; the purchase is expected to total more than €7 billion. The United States Government agreed to sell Poland the Patriot missile system in the latest configuration, such as the one used by the American Army. Poland will also purchase the Patriot radar surveillance and command and control system [15].

Deploying the Patriot medium-range air and missile defense system in the countries of the Baltic region and achieving full operational readiness of the NATO battalion battle groups, the Allies bolster deterrence as a core element of their collective defense.

In conclusion, Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine has made it obvious to the NATO allies that the Kremlin moves from threats to action. That is why special attention is paid to the Baltic region – the countries along the eastern flank of the Alliance that share a border with the Russian Federation. It is there that Russia carries out numerous military drills, and – for the first time in their history – with the participation of the PRC's Navy. Another alarming signal is the deployment of intermediate-range and shorter-range missile systems in the Kaliningrad Oblast. Therefore, the NATO member states in the Baltic region, Sweden, and Finland develop military cooperation with the United States and NATO in order to enhance their security. The situation gets further complicated, as there is no consensus within NATO on the ways of restraining Russia's aggressive behavior. The Russian Federation, in its turn, justifies its increasing military presence on NATO's eastern flank by the fact that the United States carry out their missile defense program and plan the deployment of missile defense elements on the territory of Central European countries. The Kremlin seeks to divide the Alliance over the necessity of deploying American missile defense systems in Europe, and, in future, to oust the United States from European security policy. At the same time, most of the countries of the Baltic region view the United States as the guarantor of their security and are in favour of the US military presence on their territory.

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У статті розглянуто комплекс проблем, що постали перед країнами НАТО в Балтійському регіоні в зв'язку з російською агресією в Україні. Схарактеризовано дії Російської Федерації у Калінінградській області, спрямовані на посилення її військової присутності за рахунок направлення найсучаснішої ракетної техніки, бойових броньованих машин, збільшення контингенту російських військ, переозброєння частин Балтійського флоту. Доведено, що Росія порушила Договір 1987 року про повну ліквідацію ракетних носіїв радіусу малої та середньої дії, упродовж останніх років здійснює масштабні військові навчання.

Показано, що внаслідок посилення російської загрози країни Балтії змушені переглянути свою військову стратегію, об'єднати зусилля задля запобігання можливої агресії з боку Росії. Підкреслено, що у військових навчаннях у регіоні беруть участь країни-члени НАТО, в тому числі Сполучені Штати Америки. Розглянуто питання військової співпраці Швеції з НАТО і США, яка часом викликає неоднозначні оцінки в шведських політичних колах. Звернено увагу на перспективи поглиблення військової взаємодії членів НАТО – Німеччини і Норвегії, США і Польщі. Визначено доцільність створення в Балтійському регіоні колективної протиповітряної оборони, здійснення інших заходів щодо стримання агресивних дій Росії.

**Ключові слова:** російська агресія, воєнна агресія, військові навчання, ракетна техніка, протиповітряна оборона, Балтійський регіон, країни НАТО.