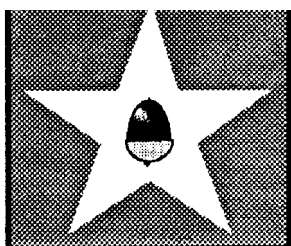


Conflict Studies Research Centre

Dr Steven J Main

Kaliningrad 2001

September 2001



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Synopsis

Kaliningrad region, which became part of the Russian Federation at the end of WW2, is cut off from "Holy Mother Russia" by Lithuania. Although not particularly important to the Russian Federation economically - indeed, its economic development lags seriously behind those of its immediate neighbours (Poland, Lithuania) - it is of great value to the Russian Federation in terms of its geostrategic position on the Baltic Sea. Kaliningrad boasts an ice-free port and is also the home base of the Baltic Fleet, "the best Fleet in the Russian Navy". Moscow has begun to exert greater control over the region's affairs, in preparation for further EU expansion in the area and Moscow's own wish that the region be a model for the development of the Russian-EU relationship. Future NATO expansion in the area, however, may see the Russians turn the region back into a "fortress".

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Introduction

In many respects Kaliningrad oblast' is unique, not in its economic or political relationship with the centre, but in its strategic value to Moscow as Russia's most westerly point facing Europe. Indeed, a quick look at the map shows that Kaliningrad itself is further west than Warsaw and yet, despite this, for many in Russia itself, let alone the other countries of Europe, Kaliningrad is a place little talked about - until comparatively recently - and badly understood. Although in comparison with many of the other subjects of the Russian Federation, it is small in terms of geographical size, as well as in terms of its share of gross industrial and agricultural production, it is of great value as Russia's most westerly window on Europe and giving Moscow access to a vital ice-free port system and one of the most important trading seas in Europe, the Baltic Sea.

Kaliningrad is also significant in that it could represent a model for the future development of the relationship between Russia and Europe: the Russian president, V V Putin, has already described the oblast' as a "pilot region" (*"pilotnyy region"*) in Russia's dealings with the EU and, witness the activity of the EU under the presidency of the Swedes, this view is partially reciprocated by the Europeans themselves. Thus, both to Russia and Europe, the region's significance far outweighs its population size, or any series of domestic economic indices. Its relationship with Moscow has been a relatively stable one over the years - apart from an apparent hiccup in the autumn of 1998¹ - and taken overall, Moscow has had considerably fewer problems in dealing with Kaliningrad oblast' than it has had in its relationship, for instance, with Tatarstan, Samara oblast' and Sverdlovsk oblast'. The election of former Baltic Fleet Commander, Admiral V G Yegorov, a man who would appear to enjoy a fair degree of popularity both within the oblast' and in the Kremlin itself, should help to ensure that Moscow does not have any significant problems due to the activities of an "errant" governor stepping out of line.

This paper will examine a number of issues: firstly, it will outline historical, demographic, socio-economic data, important to an understanding and appreciation of the place of the oblast' in contemporary Russia; secondly, it will examine the current political situation within the oblast' in the light of the election of the first governor-admiral in the history of the Russian Federation; thirdly, it will examine the relationship between the oblast' and the Russian Federation, taking into account the creation and operation of the federal districts; fourthly, it will examine the geo-strategic importance of the oblast' to Russia, especially in the light of possible NATO and EU expansion in this part of the world over the next decade and, finally, will conclude by offering an assessment of the question posed recently and frequently: is Kaliningrad oblast' set to remain an "outpost" of the Russian Federation, or will it develop to become a real "pilot region"?

Historical Background

Given the confines of this work, what follows does not claim to represent a comprehensive, or even detailed, historical account of the region since time immemorial. Whilst there are a number of very good accounts published in Russian on the history of this part of the world, in English very few scholars have devoted much attention to the area which we know as Kaliningrad - if we know it at all! In German, we would refer to it as Koenigsberg/East Prussia; in Lithuanian as Karaliaucius - so complicated has its recent history been.² Part of the problem in

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studying most of the countries in this part of the world is the mix of political and ethnic issues, as a result of the effects of war and conquest in the region and of enforced deportations and resettlements carried out even in the 20th century. Kaliningrad has been a witness and a victim of both processes.

As part of East Prussia before World War 2 (1939-1945), Königsberg was a prosperous part of Hitler's Third Reich. Königsberg and East Prussia had long been part and parcel of German history: the Order of the feared Teutonic Knights had made Königsberg their seat of operations in 1457; Frederick III had himself crowned there in 1701; the whole concept of "Prussianness" and the "Prussian" army officer was born and nurtured in the region. In a more peaceful vein, the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg. More menacingly, in June 1941 it was used as a staging ground for one of the main axes of attack against the USSR and remained an important naval base for the duration of the War. The final assault against East Prussia, launched by the Red Army in April-May 1945, witnessed intense fighting, and the operation cost thousands of lives on both sides. Even today, the sacrifice of the men who took the city still rings with a resonance which the present local political leadership thinks worthy of recalling:

*"It is obvious that Kaliningrad is a military trophy of the Soviet Union. Our region is a small piece of compensation for the millions of lives given in World War 2 ... 55 years ago, Soviet soldiers entered this land. And today, there are still survivors of the East Prussian operation living in our oblast'. But with every year, these veterans become fewer and fewer ... Simply, we must understand that all of us are protectors of our Fatherland, everyone is, in their own way."*³

Thus, up until 1945, East Prussia was as much part of Germany, in the cultural and historical senses, as Stirling is to Scotland, or Reading to England.

However, as early as December 1941, the Battle for Moscow having just been won and a mere 6 months after the initial horrendous defeats inflicted on the Red Army by the *Wehrmacht*, Stalin felt confident enough of eventual victory to open discussions with the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, concerning post-War frontiers. In effect, he proposed the dismemberment of East Prussia between Lithuania (technically, at the time of the German invasion, part of the USSR) and Poland.⁴ Given that there was a lot more fighting to be done, the proposal vanished out of sight and was not to resurface until the Tehran Conference (December 1943). Having won a decisive victory at the Battle of Kursk in the middle of 1943 - which effectively wrested the strategic initiative from the Germans on the Eastern Front for the duration of the War - the Soviet delegation had a considerably stronger hand in dealing with their Western counterparts, in terms of discussing the future shape of Europe. The USSR could now not only make its demands heard but ensure they were treated with respect. By January 1944, the British War Cabinet agreed that it had no "decisive objections" to the Russian "absorption" of Königsberg. Despite an earlier promise to the Poles, both the Yalta (February 1945) and the Potsdam Conferences (July-August 1945) sealed the fate of the city and the surrounding area:

*"The Conference has agreed in principle to the proposal of the Soviet Government concerning the ultimate transfer to the Soviet Union of the City of Königsberg and the area adjacent to it."*⁵

The USSR had never claimed that, either ethnically or historically, these lands had been held or inhabited by Slav peoples, not least because both the Poles and the Lithuanians also had very strong claims on the territory. Simply put, this was a small part of Germany, won at high cost by the Russians which, to all intents and purposes and with the agreement of both the UK and the USA, became part of the USSR's war booty. Koenigsberg had long been a coveted prize and, indeed, had been a war aim of the Tsarist government in the First World War, boasting the best port facilities in the immediate area: pre-1914, 75% of the goods exported from Koenigsberg were Russian in origin. Offering the Russians an ice-free, warm water port all year round, Koenigsberg was simply too much of a prize for Stalin to give up.⁶

By decree of the praesidium of the USSR's Supreme Soviet, the region was transferred to the administrative control of the RSFSR (Russia), not the Lithuanian SSR, on 7th April 1946.⁷ This was a viable arrangement as long as the USSR included both the RSFSR and the Lithuanian SSR; of course back in 1946 no one inside the USSR, and very few outside, thought realistically that this position would change. A few months later, after the death of the president of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin, both the city and the oblast' were renamed in his honour on 4th July 1946.

However, in order to ensure the complete "sovietisation" of the region two things had to happen: first of all, the Germans had to leave the region; secondly, other nationalities from the USSR had to be brought in. Given the past experience of the Soviet authorities, deporting the Germans was not a big problem: in the archives of the Kaliningrad regional authority are two decrees of the USSR's Council of Ministers, issued on 11th October 1947 and 15th February 1948 "On the re-settlement of the Germans from Kaliningrad oblast', RSFSR, to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany." The Germans were allowed to take with them 300kg of personal belongings, as well as a 15-day supply of food. The last trainload (deported in everything but name), left the city on 21st October 1948. The deportation process saw over 102,000 Germans being made to quit the region by the end of 1948; the last 193 Germans, mainly highly qualified specialists, were forced to leave the area by the end of 1951.⁸

Now the mass campaign of sovietisation began. Throughout 1946-1951, thousands of Russians and non-Russians from different parts of the USSR poured into Kaliningrad oblast', or were simply sent there, in order to ease the burden on the war-devastated western regions of the USSR. On average, in the period 1946-1951, 36,600 annually settled in Kaliningrad oblast'; after that, the number fell sharply to just 5,000 per year. But, by then, the twin processes of deportation and importation had more or less been completed. Kaliningrad had not only been "de-germanised" but also "sovietised". This produced its own problems, not least being the immediate drain on scarce resources (the region was still recovering from the famine of 1946), as well as a feeling which even after three generations is still prevalent amongst the population of Kaliningrad oblast', that they do not belong there. They are not indigenous to the area and are, at best, third generation "immigrants". This can help to explain why, for instance, most of the young people are more inclined to visit other countries in the Baltic Sea region (Poland and Germany, for instance), than Russia. They lack an emotional attachment to the region, despite the fact that it has been an "integral part" of Russia for over 50 years.

Given its important strategic position, it was not long before the region became, to all intents and purposes, a closed area to both foreigners and many Russians: if

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you did not have business there, you simply were not allowed to go there. As the USSR's most forward region facing the West - and the use of East Prussia as a staging post for one of the main axes of attack against the USSR in June 1941 was not forgotten either by Soviet military planners or the senior Soviet political leadership - it became one of the most secretive, highly militarised areas of the FSU, becoming "home" to the USSR's Baltic Fleet and, at one point in the 1990s, containing some 200,000 military personnel.

This very brief overview of the history of the region already points to a number of issues which are relevant today:

1. A number of states have potentially awkward claims to the territory, both in terms of history and shared culture. In historical and cultural terms, Germany has the strongest claim - part of East Prussia, it was one of the key areas in the creation of the modern German state. However, both Poland and Lithuania also have important claims to the region: in the early Middle Ages, the Order of Livonia was in charge of the area and, indeed, the first work published in Lithuanian was published there; in the 15th century, the Polish crown occupied these lands and the Teutonic Order swore fealty to the Polish Crown; it was only in the 17th century that the lands became part of the kingdom of Prussia.⁹ Thus, these lands have been fought over and ruled by all the major powers in the region. The emotional as well as historical and cultural attachment to these lands should neither be overlooked, nor underestimated: for instance, the German Chancellor Schroeder, in his recent meeting with President Putin, still openly referred to Kaliningrad as Koenigsberg and there are still many Lithuanians, not necessarily nationalist, who refer to Kaliningrad as "Lithuania Minor" and who believe that Kaliningrad is an inalienable part of Lithuania's statehood, deeply inter-woven into their culture and their history;
2. As the USSR's/Russia's most westerly point, the interests of the security of the state have always been uppermost in the minds of the men in the Kremlin. Therefore, in dealing with the area, most of the country's leadership spent more time in ensuring that the military presence in the region was high and that the combat forces in the area were kept in a state of readiness, than in caring about the region's social infrastructure. In 1946, it was effectively sealed off from other parts of the Union and became the USSR's most geographically advanced military outpost. Thus, not only did the border and the region become hermetically sealed, even against "fraternal" Poland and "socialist" Lithuania, but the region also became highly militarised and earned itself the sobriquet of a "garrison state"¹⁰;
3. As a result of the above, Kaliningrad oblast' has always had the additional burden of a significant military presence. When the oblast' was part of a large Union and could rely on a share of a Union federal budget, it could cope with this, but given the shrinking Russian federal budget and the initial increase in the military presence in the region in the 1990s, as well as the outdated nature of the local economy, the defence burden became too great for the region to shoulder. Not enough was invested in the region's social infrastructure and, consequently, given yet another influx of Russian migrants from other parts of the CIS due to the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the local economy has found it difficult to absorb them. Kaliningrad is one of the very few cities in the Russian Federation which has witnessed an increase in population since 1989.

4. If the region is to move forward, then it has to take into proper account all of its historical roots, in particular its German past. This is something which Kaliningraders themselves do not appear to have difficulty with - witness the numbers of "nostalgic tourists" visiting the region, 60% of whom are German by nationality.¹¹ It is more of a problem for the Russians in Moscow. Having been denied knowledge of the history of the region, Kaliningraders now seem to be very keen not only to discuss openly the less pleasant side of their historical record - such as the enforced deportation of the Germans - but also to re-emphasise their overall "Europeaness", and that they want the standard of living that they see all around them. They are no longer in denial of their past, whilst not denying or denigrating the fact that they are Russian. As with other groups of Baltic Russians, their history has been closely tied in with the ethnic Baltic populations: history and fate have brought about a set of circumstances where, in Kaliningrad's case, they are the dominant population in this particular community.

Socio-Economic Profile of the Region

Kaliningrad oblast' is 15,100 square kilometres in size, with a population (as of 1st January 2000) of 948,500, the overwhelming majority of which is Russian by nationality (78.5% according to the 1989 census figures). Density of the population is 62.8 per square kilometre, one of the highest figures for the Russian Federation. The vast majority of Kaliningraders live in the region's capital, Kaliningrad (423,700). The other towns of the region are considerably smaller than Kaliningrad, namely Sovetsk (43,900); Chernyakhovsk (43,000); Baltiysk (31,500, also the home port of Russia's Baltic Fleet) and Gusev (28,000).¹² The oblast' is made up of 13 administrative sub-regions, including 22 towns and 5 smaller settlements.¹³ In terms of its physical borders, to the north and the east it shares a 280-kilometre border with Lithuania, and to the south a 232-kilometre border with Poland. It has a coastline with the Baltic Sea of just under 184 kilometres. A frequent mistake made by many commentators is that Kaliningrad oblast' shares a border with Belarus'. If this were so, then Russia would not have the problem of securing transit rights through Lithuania to supply its military garrison in the region: it would simply send everything through its Union ally, Belarus'. In fact they are around 80 kilometres apart. From Kaliningrad to the nearest point of the Polish border is only 70 kilometres, from Kaliningrad to the nearest point of the Lithuanian border, it is only 35 kilometres. These are important factors when examining Russian security concerns over possible further NATO expansion in the Baltic region.

Highlighting its comparative geographical isolation from the rest of the Russian Federation is the fact that the nearest oblast' centre to Kaliningrad is Pskov, some 800 kilometres away. A further look at the geographical distances between Kaliningrad and the other major cities of the region is also instructive in underlining how close, physically at least, Kaliningrad is to Europe: from Kaliningrad-Vilnius 350 kilometres; Kaliningrad-Riga 390 kilometres; Kaliningrad-Warsaw 400 kilometres; Kaliningrad-Berlin 600 kilometres; Kaliningrad-Stockholm 650 kilometres; Kaliningrad-Moscow 1,289 kilometres.¹⁴

According to the regional administration's official website, the population figure can be further broken down (1999): 77% of the population living in towns and cities, the remaining 23% in the countryside. The population is divided, as in many other parts of the Russian Federation, unequally between male and female: 48.3% male

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and 51.7% female. Able-bodied and fit to work make up 60.9% of the population, those too young to work 19.6% and those too old to work 19.5%. Reflecting its complicated history, the oblast' has representatives of 97 different nationalities, including Belarussians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles and Armenians.¹⁵

In terms of the economic picture, the regional economy is an industrial-agrarian one, with emphasis on the industrial sector. According to official government figures, in 1998, in terms of gross regional product, the industrial sector accounted for 30.5% of the total, whereas agriculture accounted for only 6.7%. Goskomstat also recorded the oblast's share in Russia's overall GNP as 0.4%; in industrial production 0.4%; the same figure was recorded for its share of gross agricultural production.¹⁶ The following industries played the dominant role in industrial production - food (including fishing), energy, machine-building, timber. In the agricultural sector, most dominant were milk production, dairy herd farming, potato and vegetable production. Kaliningrad oblast' also has a developed chicken-breeding industry, as well as a growing fur trade. Even so, unemployment has grown: the number of officially registered unemployed grew from 26,200 in 1992 to 79,000 in 1998 (14.7%).¹⁷

The real rate of unemployment, though, is reckoned to be considerably higher, especially in the countryside, where there has been speculation that it has reached as high as 40% in certain areas. Given the fall in agricultural production across the board in the oblast' between 1991-1998 (meat production fell from 46,400 tonnes in 1991 to 9,800 tonnes in 1998; during the same period, sausage production fell from 11,400 tonnes to 4,400 tonnes; milk production fell from 546,100 tonnes in 1991 to 268,200 tonnes by 1996, etc)¹⁸ there is every possibility that there was a related increase in the number of rural unemployed.

Despite the oblast' being very badly hit by the ruble crash in the autumn of 1998, figures for 1999 showed that the oblast' produced goods and services to a total value of 10.3 billion rubles - the food industry accounting for 41.9% of that total, followed by machine-construction (16%) and timber (7.1%). In terms of natural resources the region is not poor, it produces a high quality oil, has reserves of gas, brown coal, peat and amber. Oil was first discovered in the region as far back as 1963; 20 years later, it was also discovered off the Baltic shelf. Commercial production of oil was begun in 1975, reaching an annual peak of extraction in 1986, when 1.5 million tonnes was extracted.¹⁹ As the oblast' lacks an oil refinery plant, all oil has to be exported abroad - to Lithuania - for refining. In 1996, some 757,000 tonnes of oil were extracted in the region. The region's reserves of oil have been estimated at 130 million tonnes, 50 million tonnes on land and a further 80 million tonnes offshore. Commercial gas extraction began in 1983 and there is a gas pipeline, Kaliningrad-Vilnius. In 1994 alone, Kaliningrad oblast' exported 300 million cubic metres of gas, as well as 800,000 tonnes of oil.²⁰ Kaliningrad also has an estimated 400 million tonnes of peat.²¹ Despite all these energy resources, though, its annual production of 400 million kilowatts of electricity is not enough to meet the region's requirements, so it still has to import electricity from the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania.²² It goes without saying that this gives Lithuania an important card in its relations with Russia. Kaliningrad oblast' has 80% of the world's known reserves of amber - possibly its single most famous commodity. The region's timber industry is one of the most important sectors of the economy and throughout the 1990s the region accounted for 10% of Russia's production of cellulose and just under 2% of its production of paper.²³

Kaliningrad oblast' has a well-developed transport infrastructure, at least in comparison with many other regions of the Russian Federation. The total length of the regional rail network is 756 kilometres (including 100 kilometres of track connecting factories to the region's internal rail system). The network has 55 railway stations and in general is the single most important transport system, both for people and in maintaining the region's external economic ties. In fact, Kaliningrad has the second most highly developed rail network in the Russian Federation, being beaten only by Moscow region.²⁴ There are regular rail services between Kaliningrad and Russia, Belarus', Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Latvia, etc.²⁵

A similar picture also exists in relation to the region's road network, although this has more to do with the region's German rather than Soviet past. The oblast' has 4,600 kilometres of roads, all of them hard surfaced. The density of roads is 300 kilometres per 1,000 square kilometres of territory, more than 10 times the Russian national average.²⁶ This places Kaliningrad oblast' on a par with the other Baltic countries and in a much stronger position than the other regions of north-western Russia. The region boasts 9 federal highways.²⁷ There are regular bus connections with Belarus', Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, etc.²⁸

Regular train and bus connections to various parts not only of the CIS and the Baltic states, but also to the West, ensure that people now have an opportunity that not all that long ago was not afforded to them: the possibility of seeing how their neighbours live. As a former closed territory where contact with "foreigners" (not necessarily only Westerners) was either forbidden or strictly controlled, the ability to travel abroad has important consequences not just locally, but also nationally. The region also boasts an "international" airport, Khrabrovo. This is basically an offshoot of the main domestic airport, situated some 24 kilometres from the city. The domestic airport operates regular flights to 29 different cities of the CIS (including Almaty, Murmansk, Rostov-on-Don) but, for the time being at least, only one international carrier operates from Khrabrovo, namely SAS. SAS have recently upgraded the planes which operate the route Copenhagen-Kaliningrad, but still only fly a daily flight to the city, 6 days per week.

Thus, the region has a well-developed internal transport network, especially by Russian standards. However, arguably its single most important transport asset is to be found at sea. There can be little denying the fact that access to an all-year, ice-free port, along with the geo-strategic position of the region, is one of the main reasons why Kaliningrad region is still important to the Russian Federation. Even if Russia develops its port infrastructure in and around Kronstadt and St Petersburg, Kaliningrad could still be a major player in helping the revival of the Russian economy. Although their share of freight traffic in the Baltic Sea region has declined over the years (the entire port complex of the region is estimated to be working at slightly over 30% capacity)²⁹, nevertheless there is great scope for development in this particular area. In 2001 freight was shipped from Kaliningrad to the Caribbean, Kiel, Hamburg, US east coast ports, etc, so there is a volume of traffic already there. With proper investment - which is an ongoing call from many within the region - the Kaliningrad port system could play an important role in the rejuvenation of the local economy and help Russia regain lost business, as well as create new business in the future.

The relative ease of access to foreign climes for many Kaliningraders contains many positive features, not least in allowing them the opportunity to interact with all of their neighbours, freed from the burden of political ideology and enforced isolation.

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And yet geographical proximity to a number of the major cities of Europe actually serves to underline the feeling that Kaliningrad is still so far from Europe. Through the media Kaliningraders see how their neighbours live and begin to ponder how best to improve their lot. Since 1991, Poland and the Baltic states have visibly improved their position economically. Unless change in the relationship between Moscow and Kaliningrad is introduced, and quickly, then as the living standards of the neighbouring countries continue to improve - as a result, for instance, of entry into the EU - Kaliningrad's perception of being cut off from improvement could lead to a growing demand for greater control over its own affairs. Kaliningraders who return from abroad could well form a new political force within their community, demanding a much greater say in how their society is run. This danger seems to have been in the mind of governor-admiral Yegorov, in an interview he gave to the Russian-language Latvian newspaper *Chas* in February 2001:

*"If the federal centre [Moscow] does not develop a clear programme, or a concept for the development of Kaliningrad oblast', there will be an outburst of separatism, based on economics - everyone all around us lives better than we, this means that we must separate from Russia ..."*³⁰

Although Yegorov is against any loosening of the bond between Kaliningrad and Moscow, nevertheless he is very aware of the dangers that could be posed by a continuing lack of investment in the region's economy by the federal centre; the impact of travel abroad on Kaliningraders, and the fact that, as he himself mentioned in the interview, within the Kaliningrad political community, there is a political party - the Baltic Republican Party - which actively campaigns for Kaliningrad to become a subject of international law.³¹ Whilst it is unlikely for the time being that separatist tendencies will win the wider political struggle, nevertheless, the federal centre had better clearly map out the way ahead for Kaliningrad as an "integral part" of the Russian Federation.

The Election of Governor-Admiral V G Yegorov

As of 19th November 2000, a new term entered the Russian political lexicon - "governor-admiral". For the first time in the history of modern Russia, the electorate of Kaliningrad region had voted an admiral to the top political position. The former Baltic Fleet Commander Admiral V G Yegorov, who had been widely tipped to win the election partly due to the tacit support he received from President Putin, was overwhelmingly elected governor, winning just slightly under 57% of the votes cast.³² His opponent, the incumbent governor Leonid Gorbenko, was commonly accepted to have presided over a local administration which had become hopelessly corrupt, compelling many of the electorate to turn against him and vote another "man in uniform" to power.³³

This confirmed - if further confirmation was needed - an increasingly obvious trend in Russian politics since Putin came to power: a strengthening of the representation in the country's senior political leadership of men from the so-called power ministries (MoD, Interior Ministry, Tax Police, Security Services, etc): for instance, of the 7 centrally-appointed new Federal District chiefs, 5 had previous careers in the power ministries. The electoral success of retired Lieutenant-General V Shamanov (now governor of Ul'yanovsk oblast') and V Kulakov, former chief of the Voronezh branch of the Federal Security Service, now governor of Voronezh oblast', was further confirmation of this increasing "militarisation" of Russia's political system.³⁴ In the country's influential State Council of around 100 members, there are now 21

generals and 1 marshal. Outside the senior political apparatus, many "graduates" of the Federal Security Service, Main Intelligence Directorate, Foreign Counter-Intelligence Service and Interior Ministry are heads of security for a wide variety of commercial enterprises and banks, and in charge of a number of public organisations.³⁵ Against this background, the election of Yegorov to the post of governor of Kaliningrad oblast' was not surprising. It would appear that Putin is keen to get "men in uniform" into positions of power in the regions in order to further reform the relationship between the centre and the regions in favour of the centre. Putin seems absolutely determined to reverse the de-centralisation process begun under Yel'tsin, when the regions were, to all intents and purposes, told to take as much power as they wanted, as long as they remained within the confines of the Russian Federation. Putin, having witnessed the effects of such a political free-for-all, seems intent on restoring the power of the federal centre, if need be to the detriment of the regions, arguing that such a process will be to the overall betterment of the Federation.

There are a number of reasons why a person like Yegorov, especially in a region like Kaliningrad, would appeal to Putin.

1. As a former Fleet Commander, Yegorov knows both how to obey and issue orders. This does not imply that he is some sort of automaton, simply there to carry out the Kremlin's instructions: his victory was as much due to his own personal standing within the oblast', thanks to his work as Commander of the Baltic Fleet, ensuring that the Fleet did not rust away in dock³⁶, as to the tacit backing of Putin, or the presence of a large military-related electorate in the region.³⁷ He knows well the importance of working within a clearly defined hierarchy and, where one does not exist, would have the necessary experience of creating one. He will run the region in a more disciplined way which, in itself, should endear him to a "centraliser" like Putin.
2. Given his exemplary career Yegorov has not been involved in any of the political or economic wrangling that was such a prominent feature of the previous administration's activities. He has not been involved in the "dirt" of Russian politics.
3. Neither Putin nor Yegorov seem to be in any doubt as regards the true interests of the region in relation to the political unity of the Federation, and will fight against any signs of separatism. As a Russian and, more importantly, one who has served in the Armed Forces all of his adult life, Yegorov will be convinced of the necessity for the region to remain part of the Federation. Yegorov does not seem cut out to be the "maverick" governor, willing to take on the federal power in order to elicit ever greater local control at the expense of the centre. On the contrary, given the geo-strategic importance of the region to Russia and Russia's continuing evolution of its general policy towards Europe, it is extremely unlikely that control of the region would be "given" to anyone perceived in the Kremlin as "risky".

In general, Yegorov's election campaign was a mixture of statements focussing on various "bread and butter" issues relevant to local concerns, such as the growing level of poverty within the region (officially, 39% of the region's population live below the poverty line); the increasing social crisis facing Kaliningrad (15,000 officially registered drug users; 3,500 people with AIDS; a prison population in excess of 10,000), as well as the larger picture: the necessity of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation; the "model" nature of the oblast' in relation to

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Russia's future.³⁸ Thus, as is typical of many candidates seeking political office anywhere, his programme, drafted by a wide group of "experts", according to one local newspaper report, contained something to appeal to as broad a group of potential supporters as possible.³⁹ The "military" electorate in Kaliningrad is estimated to consist of 200,000 people.⁴⁰ As the size of the electorate is around 725,000, it is clear that Yegorov would have wide electoral appeal.⁴¹ The age profile of the electorate should be borne in mind: according to one locally-based researcher, the over-50s make up 35% of the electoral register, but thanks to their turnout (usually about 75-80%), comprise 50% of those who vote.⁴² Such an electorate would be attracted by someone like Yegorov:

*"The only force that has not completely discredited itself in the eyes of society is the men in uniform. That is why the choice of the Baltic Fleet Commander Yegorov is a wise one."*⁴³

Moscow-St Petersburg-Kaliningrad

Having secured a solid mandate from the electorate and enjoying the support of the country's president, Yegorov's political position was firmly based. However, within his first year as governor-admiral both his own position and that of Kaliningrad had undergone a significant change, as Moscow seemed determined to play a much greater role in the affairs of the region. The federal centre, directly and through the apparatus of the North-Western Federal District (based in St Petersburg and headed by V Cherkesov, Putin's presidential plenipotentiary to the Federal District) took a number of steps to exert greater control over Yegorov's regional economic and political apparatus. A deputy presidential plenipotentiary representative would be created specifically for the region (though the actual appointment was not made immediately), attached to Cherkesov's office, and Moscow announced that the 2002 regional budget would be controlled directly by the state chancery and not locally by the oblast' дума. This increase in the external control of the oblast's affairs was accelerated by the session of the Security Council held in July 2001, but had been on the cards for some time.

In October 2000, for instance, in an interview to one of the main local newspapers in Kaliningrad, S Ivanov, then Secretary to the Security Council, reasserted the importance of the region to Russia:

*"The strategic position of Kaliningrad oblast' in the system of maintaining security and the political and economic interests of Russia in the western direction has assumed an exceptionally important significance."*⁴⁴

In February 2001, in a TV interview Ivanov once again stressed that, despite rumours that Russia was on the verge of doing a deal with Germany in terms of granting that country economic privileges in the region in return for dropping part of the debt between the two countries, not only would Russia not grant any special privileges to any country attempting to work within the Federation, but that "Kaliningrad oblast' was, is and will be a component part of Russia."⁴⁵

In an article in one of the local St Petersburg papers, the significance of the region on a more localised military level was emphasised:

"For Moscow Kaliningrad is not only an economic, but also a military, "outpost" of Russia in the western direction. That is why, as was recently

commented upon by the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Sergey Ivanov, the significance of the Kaliningrad military group in maintaining the defence of the western oblasts of the country 'is difficult to overestimate.'"⁴⁶

During his official visit to the oblast early in March 2001, the country's Foreign Minister, I Ivanov, not only reasserted Moscow's determination to hold onto the region, but also that the region itself should be careful not to challenge the country's "vertical of power":

*"For us, Kaliningrad oblast' is an integral part of the Russian Federation and its internal market, our leading outpost on the country's western borders. Already today the region is gradually becoming a unique laboratory for working out new, improved forms of co-operation with foreign countries, including the EU ... At the same time, it is necessary with all our efforts to suppress careless attempts - and, unfortunately, they do exist - at conducting the affairs of Kaliningrad by avoiding the federal centre. We cannot allow, in questions of developing the region's foreign ties, anyone to succeed in breaking the Russian power vertical, dividing and setting us against one another."*⁴⁷

But the so-called "power vertical" had begun to be re-created much earlier. In May 2000, the federal centre had taken an important step in regaining the power lost during the Yel'tsin years when Putin decided to create the system of presidential plenipotentiary representatives and, effectively, carved the Russian Federation up into 7 federal districts (FD). Kaliningrad oblast' fell to the lot of the North-Western Federal District: in appointing V Cherkesov to the post of presidential plenipotentiary to the North-Western FD (a man who had served in the KGB from 1975 till 1998), Putin was appointing a man whom he not only personally knew (they had earlier worked together in the KGB in Leningrad/St Petersburg), but also one that could be counted on to ensure that the power relationship would swing back in favour of the centre.⁴⁸

Others may have had their doubts as to what the position of plenipotentiary actually meant, but in an early interview, Cherkesov had no doubt about Putin's priorities:

*"The problem of strengthening Russian statehood was viewed as one of the most important. In recent years, the state had become ineffective."*⁴⁹

A month later, again examining the rights and duties of the plenipotentiaries, Cherkesov stated that "objectively speaking" they were created in order to stop the decentralisation of the Russia state and were not simply concerned with easing its administration.⁵⁰ By April 2001, Cherkesov reported to Putin that, at least in his federal district, "The collapse in the system of state power, in the unity of the country in Russia had been halted. In the North-Western Federal District, the regional laws, virtually all of them, had been brought into line with the Constitution and laws of the Russian Federation."⁵¹

It would be interesting to acquire more detail about the exact nature of the relationship between the three men - Putin, Cherkesov and Yegorov - and compare and contrast it with other relationships between regional governors, the Kremlin and federal district heads. Unfortunately, what is presently available does not allow an in-depth examination. However, judging by the official list of business

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meetings undertaken by Yegorov (published on Kaliningrad oblast' administration's official web-site) from December 2000-July 2001, it would appear that Cherkesov and Yegorov have met to discuss matters on no more than four occasions, the last taking place on the eve of the important session of the Security Council held on 26th July 2001.⁵² Given the stated importance of the region to Russia, one meeting every 2-3 months between governor and plenipotentiary seems a bit on the slim side. It would be logical to assume that, following the appointment of a deputy presidential plenipotentiary representative, Cherkesov may have even less time for Kaliningrad oblast' than he had then.

And yet Kaliningrad had been the object of a great deal of attention from a number of the country's senior political figures over the same few months:

*"From the beginning of the year [2001], we have been visited by the Minister of Transport S Frank, the Minister of Foreign Affairs I Ivanov, the Minister for Economic Development and Trade G Gref, the presidential plenipotentiary to the North-Western FD V Cherkesov, S Ivanov - when he was still Secretary to the Security Council. With their own eyes, at least 40 deputies from the State Duma have seen the situation in the region ... and, in June, a trip is being planned to visit Kaliningrad oblast' by the Federal Assembly, headed by Ye Stroyev. Not all that long ago, we were visited by the Minister for Press, TV and Means of Mass Communication M Lesin, the Minister for Communications and Information L Reyman and the adviser to the President S Yastrzhembskiy."*⁵³

Part of the explanation behind the centre's reinvigorated interest in the region was not only that its geostrategic import was likely to increase over the next few years as a consequence of potential NATO expansion, but that in the very near future Lithuania and Poland will be invited to join the EU, thereby placing Russia's Kaliningrad oblast' in a worsening economic position. Their membership would impose a number of significant new negative factors on Kaliningrad's future development, not least being the introduction of a new visa regime between it and Poland and Lithuania, making it more difficult (and more expensive) for Russians in Kaliningrad to travel to and from the region to Russia. The movement of goods would also be affected and may result in an increase in the cost of goods in transit to and from the oblast'.⁵⁴

Of course, part of the solution to Kaliningrad's myriad economic and social problems may lie in Brussels, but Kaliningrad oblast' will have to rely on Moscow providing the bulk of the money and assistance in order to ensure its citizens a better life than the one they have experienced in the past 10 years. But this will come at a price, which can be expressed in very obvious terms: assuming that the EU does not step in with vast amounts of cash and given the distinct possibility that no new agreement is concluded to resolve the dilemma of a piece of Russia being totally surrounded by EU member states, then the only place that Kaliningrad can turn to in seeking any significant financial assistance is Moscow. Kaliningrad needs Moscow's financial muscle in order to develop its economy in the light of the imminent prospect of being surrounded by increasingly better-off states, whilst it grows markedly worse off, as its goods at a local level become too expensive to produce or to sell. For instance, according to Gref's Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Kaliningrad oblast' receives 80% of its energy requirements by transit through neighbouring states; the cost of energy is bound to increase, as Poland and Lithuania have to follow the strict EU regulations on this matter.⁵⁵ Increasing economic impoverishment will have obvious political consequences, both

for Kaliningrad and Moscow. However, Moscow needs Kaliningrad, because of the ice-free port complex; the excellent potential transport routes that Kaliningrad offers Russia to the Baltic region and Western Europe. Most importantly, abandonment of the region would be a recipe for a huge social and political disaster and a clear signal that Putin's Russia was not much different from its Soviet predecessor. The Russian government has a moral responsibility to the Russians in Kaliningrad and, as the only place in the Baltic region where the Russians actually constitute a majority of the population, it would not be in Russia's interests to throw away what could easily turn out to be a trump in the hand.

Hence the government's decision to hold a two-hour session on 22nd March 2001 to discuss the myriad of problems facing the region. According to Yegorov, the "whole complex of issues" facing the region was discussed. The main upshot of the meeting was that the government gave the green light for work to begin on drafting a new Federal programme for the long-term development of the oblast' to 2010. As Yegorov himself was keen to point out, only one other region in Russia has recently been accorded such an "honour", namely the Kurile Islands (given their strategic importance to Russia, surely this is not a coincidence?) Yegorov listed the main aims behind the development programme as:

*"Steady development, comparable with the level of development of the neighbouring states, bringing closer our [quality of] life to the quality of life of our neighbours."*⁵⁶

Yegorov had spent the previous few days in Moscow, no doubt going round the government ministries and departments. On the day of the session, an interview of him was published in the government's official newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, and his mood was optimistic that his time in Moscow had not been spent in vain. He repeated that Kaliningrad oblast's future could only be seen as part of Russia, but he also examined the wider issue of Kaliningrad oblast' in relation to Russia-EU relations:

*"Our region is an integral part of the Russian Federation. In this lies the key to examining both our present and our future ... At all levels, there is a clear understanding that the region becomes its own type of laboratory for working out new forms of co-operation in all areas between Russia and the EU and plays a particular role in maintaining the national interests of our country in the Baltic region and in Europe as a whole."*⁵⁷

Note the emphasis before the meeting on the possibilities of future co-operation between Russia and the EU involving the region. In many respects this reflected the official thinking that Kaliningrad region could become a key player in developing Russia's future relationship with Europe. For instance, at a session of the Security Council on 15th February 2001, the Secretary to the Security Council, S Ivanov, called on the region "to become Russia's pilot region for mutually advantageous co-operation between Russia and the EU in the 21st century."⁵⁸ After the meeting, *Interfax* quoted S Ivanov reiterating that 'after 2003' - ie post EU-membership for both Poland and Lithuania - Kaliningrad oblast' should not left to become "a besieged fortress", but developed to become "a natural part of the European space with free movement of people, goods and services."⁵⁹ Russia's Foreign Minister, I Ivanov, also spoke about the region developing "higher forms of co-operation with foreign countries, including the EU."⁶⁰

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When all is said and done, in the words of one Russian analyst of European affairs, "in principle, Kaliningrad is an area of responsibility for Russia."⁶¹ This is a view shared by many Kaliningraders themselves: two recent sociological surveys carried out in the region appear to show a clear preference for the local Russian population to remain part of the Federation: one survey concluded that "the overwhelming majority of the region's inhabitants reacted with alarm to any news about the possible separation of the region from Russia" and only "11% of the city's population thought it necessary that laws in Kaliningrad oblast' should be formulated in accordance with EU legislation."⁶² In a slightly later survey, of those polled about the future of the region, only 8% wanted out and out independence from Russia; 35% wanted "special status" for the region, but to remain within Russian Federation; a further 26% wanted the region to have greater economic control, but no change in its political status, and only 9% thought that no change was required at all.⁶³ Obviously, bad news for S Pas'ko's Baltic Republican Party and, on the surface, very little for the centre to fear in terms of a possible future separatist threat from the region. And yet there is a clear signal that the majority of those polled were not happy with the current situation and asked for change.

Thus, the session on 22nd March 2001 and, more importantly, the Security Council session on 26th July 2001, had to be careful to demonstrate that the federal centre was being proactive in its search for solutions to present and future concerns. The March session tasked the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade headed by G Gref, along with the region's Vice-Governor V Pirogov, and experts from the Institute of Economics of the Transition Period (headed by S Prikhod'ko) and the Centre for Strategic Plans (headed by V Mau), to draft a federal programme for the socio-economic development of the region to 2010.⁶⁴

According to one source, Gref's Ministry reasoned that Kaliningrad oblast' faced three main blocks of problems: "1) infrastructure - 80% of the region's energy resources come by transit through neighbouring states. After Lithuania's inclusion in the European energy system, supplying Kaliningrad with energy could be difficult." The Ministry's solution to this? Complete the construction of a new power station, TETs-2, as quickly as possible and instruct the private gas company "Gazprom" to supply more gas with the building of another gas pipeline to the region.⁶⁵

"The second block of problems for Kaliningrad oblast' lies in the area of competitiveness", ie the under-utilisation of certain assets, like the region's port system allied with instances of economically wasteful over-production, eg of amber. The Ministry's solution to both these issues is to create a single port authority for the entire region, thereby reducing duplication of effort, and a cutback in the production of amber in order to reduce supply, increase demand and, hopefully, price for what is produced.⁶⁶ But, given the extensive criminalisation of the industry, even if successful, such a policy will not mean a large sum of "new" money flowing into the regional coffers. The criminalisation of the industry has to be tackled first, before good economics can take over.

The third block of economic problems is in the area of customs and tax. Given the region's earlier vaunted Special Economic Zone status, earlier tax breaks had been clawed back by the tax authorities at the beginning of 2001, subsequently leading to a massive hike in prices of a number of goods. This status was eventually restored by the central authority in February 2001, but only after pleading by the regional governor - although, curiously enough, in one newspaper report on this issue, Cherkesov claims the credit for changing Putin's mind on the issue.⁶⁷ Gref's

proposal is to turn the region into what he has dubbed "a zone of export production", whereby it will be profitable to produce and export goods abroad. If such a strategy is a success, he postulates that it will encourage outside investors to come to the region and this, in turn, will help develop both the service and manufacturing sectors of the local economy. Then, as the analysis concludes, EU enlargement will turn out to be "a good thing" for Russia.⁶⁸

The programme is described as being "*konkretnaya*" (practical), as opposed to "*tezisnaya*" (theoretical). Thus, it envisaged allocating 100 billion rubles for the development of 132 "objects of state property" and a further 13 billion rubles for various commercial projects. These are vast sums of money and, if put into effect, the impact on the region would be enormous. However, if recent experience is anything to go by, then one would be right to express a degree of cynicism: the federal centre under-funded Kaliningrad's regional budget to the tune of 326 million rubles in 2000, and of 100 special federal projects due to receive funding in 2001 from the federal budget, only 3 actually received anything.⁶⁹

From March-July 2001, the discussion of Kaliningrad's future fell away. Yegorov was still actively promoting Kaliningrad's cause, as a look at his "*khronika*" clearly demonstrates, but the explosion of interest in the region which had occurred earlier had died down. However, there were two significant developments during this period worth examining here, one to do with Kaliningrad oblast' directly, the other having a potentially very significant impact on the nature of the relationship between the centre and the regions.

In the middle of April 2001, in response to an earlier instruction issued by Putin, a meeting took place in Kaliningrad involving the Press and Communications ministers, M Lesin and L Reyman, and the presidential adviser S Yastrzhembskiy. The meeting also involved Yegorov and his regional media chiefs and was largely concerned with two main issues: getting the region back into Russia's "information space" and portraying the region in a more positive light than had been the case to date.

*"According to information from Mikhail Lesin, in the shortest possible time, a working group will be created which will work out a strategy and tactics for integrating Kaliningrad oblast' in the general information space of Russia, underlined by ... the necessity of the region 'to meet the European processes fully armed'."*⁷⁰

Remarking on the fact that the most commonly used term in relation to the region was "outpost", Yastrzhembskiy pointed out that this had too much of a military ring to it and emphasised the importance of the region changing its image:

*"Attention towards Kaliningrad oblast' is enormous, both from Russia and from the West. That is why it is important for the oblast' to have an attractive image in all aspects of its activity so that, on the one hand, it gains political dividends and, on the other, creates a good investment climate for self-development."*⁷¹

There are a number of points worth making here. First of all and, arguably the most obvious, the federal centre has realised that one way to combat the "psychological isolation" felt in the region is simply to make sure that, through the mass media, the region is kept regularly and "reliably" informed about developments in "big Russia". This can be done very cheaply and effectively - either

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by supplying more centrally-produced Russian newspapers and magazines, by ensuring that Russian TV and radio broadcasts are easily received by the oblast' and by ensuring that the centrally-carried TV weather reports feature Kaliningrad oblast' on the Russian TV weather map (something which they have only recently begun doing again!) Reducing the feeling of being cut off from the main stream of developments in Russian society will obviously have long-term political consequences both for Kaliningrad and Moscow. Moscow will be able to help prevent the growth in feelings of political separatism - if Moscow does not care about us, why should we care about Moscow? - and Kaliningrad will be able to feel that it does belong to Russia and that Moscow has not forgotten about it.

Secondly, there is also a hint that Moscow feels that Kaliningrad oblast' could soon, if it has not already become the target of an "information war" between the West and Russia, the West keen to increase dissent in Kaliningrad in an attempt to upset the balance of power between the centre and this important region of the Federation. There was a whiff of this in January 2001 when *The Times* published an article alleging secret talks between Germany and Russia concerning a debt-for-equity deal involving Kaliningrad oblast'.⁷² The report was heavily condemned both by the German Embassy in Russia and by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷³ In a recent move to get the region back into Russia's information space, the government's newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* has opened offices in the region and has begun sending back reports for publication.⁷⁴

These comments may also imply that the region should not become too attracted by the possibility of NATO/EU expansion in the region, that an ideological war will be waged to try to raise the region's "resistance" to the dangers, particularly of NATO expansion (hence the phrase "fully armed"). Remembering I Ivanov's pointed remark about Kaliningrad region not disrupting Russia's power vertical, the centre would once again seem to be hiding a threat behind its words: Kaliningrad must not cut deals with foreign countries without Moscow's blessing.

Yastrzhembskiy was correct in pointing out that, in overall terms, Kaliningrad's image is far from a positive one. "Information war" or not, articles written on the region tend to portray it in anything but a positive light, usually focussing on its social problems or general state of neglect (even Chris Patten, EU Commissioner, publicly called the region a "hell-hole"⁷⁵). This is an important point: the more positive the image of the region at home and abroad, the more likely it is to attract foreign investment (in 1999, according to official statistics, Kaliningrad region attracted a mere \$65 million worth of foreign investment).⁷⁶

Although it can only be touched on briefly here, the other significant development during this period concerns the creation of a presidential commission charged with examining the rights and duties of the regions and the centre. On 26th June 2001, the Kremlin's press service issued a statement to the effect that Putin had signed a decree concerning "the creation of a presidential commission to prepare proposals on the delimitation ... of power between the federal organs of state power, the organs of state power in the subjects of the Federation and organs of local administration." Appointed to chair the Commission was the deputy chief of the presidential administration, D Kozak. The Commission was created "with the aim of improving the legislative basis for federal relations."⁷⁷ It can only be guessed how its eventual proposals will affect the nature of the relationship between the centre and the regions, but there can be little doubt that the Commission will devise new ways in which even more power is clawed back to the centre at the expense of the

regions. This is a Commission whose proposals could have a very profound influence on how Russia is ruled in the medium-to long-term.

Following the Security Council session of 26th July 2001, the relationship between the centre and Kaliningrad had already undergone a fundamental change. If, before, there was a triangular relationship, involving Kaliningrad-St Petersburg-Moscow, the decision to appoint a deputy plenipotentiary specifically for Kaliningrad oblast', but attached to and appointed by Cherkesov, replaces this with something as yet unknown.⁷⁸ Earlier on, the Russian press had speculated that the Security Council would do no more than debate Gref's socio-economic programme for the development of the region. However, one paper reminded its readership that for the first time in the history of the Security Council, the problems of one peaceful region were to be examined at the highest level: only one other region had received this accolade before, namely Chechnya. The media speculated that 3 possible solutions to the region's problems had been discussed in advance of the session:

"First variant - to introduce direct presidential rule ... second variant, to create the eighth federal district, appoint an extraordinary governor-general in the role of presidential plenipotentiary ... third variant - to strengthen the position of the governor."

According to this source, the last point was not taken too seriously, as Yegorov is seen in the Kremlin as a "fairly weak politician and economic manager."⁷⁹ At the session, Putin called for a rethinking of the region's possibilities, especially in the light of future EU expansion:

*"It is time to rethink the concept of the region's development in the light of the new European realities and the new potential of the Russian economy ... Kaliningrad region may serve as a testing ground for interaction between Russia and Europe."*⁸⁰

It would appear that Putin restricted his remarks to discussing the region's economic future, rather than its political status. However, the decision to create a deputy plenipotentiary could spell the beginning of the end of the effectiveness of the present incumbent of the governor's mansion. Some time after the session, Yegorov admitted that it was not his personal idea, "it was a commonly worked out decision, examined on the eve of the session by the presidential administration ... Viktor Cherkesov, and myself."⁸¹ However, in an interview immediately after the session, he stated that "I myself suggested to Vladimir Putin to put into practice the variant of introducing the post of deputy representative to Cherkesov in Kaliningrad."⁸²

Whether he did or not is not as important as the new "x" factor. According to an initial statement by Cherkesov, the deputy envoy "will be in charge of co-ordinating the activities of the federal bodies directly in Kaliningrad region and exercising control over these activities ... this would enable the federal centre to have a greater influence over the situation in Kaliningrad region."⁸³ In discussing the powers of the new post, Yegorov stated that:

"I think that there will be no particular complications in the distribution of functions between the head of the administration and the deputy presidential plenipotentiary representative. Strictly speaking, we had such a situation in the oblast' earlier, when the representative of the president, Aleksandr Orlov, worked here. The present deputy presidential

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*plenipotentiary representative will have approximately these same powers.*⁸⁴

Yet despite his protestations that he still enjoys the trust of the centre, the decision to create such a post - the first of its kind in the Federation - must be a clear sign that not only is the centre not happy with the performance of the governor, but that it thinks that it does not have control over the operation of the federal structures in the region. Given the changes that will occur in the next few years in this part of the world, the Kremlin is strengthening its hold. The election of another "man in uniform" was obviously not enough; the lack of meetings between governor and plenipotentiary has also had an impact on the way the Kremlin is thinking about Kaliningrad oblast'. Yegorov may be correct in his argument that such a step was more a belated reaction to the activities of the previous governor, than any reflection on him personally or his team, but it does not alter the fact that the centre has now gained a very strong hold both over Kaliningrad's political machine and its regional economy.

The Geo-Strategic Importance of Kaliningrad Oblast' to the Russian Federation

As we have seen, a number of reasons - historical, geographic, economic, military - can be ascertained which, either individually or collectively, help to explain why the federal centre is determined to keep a tight hold on the region's affairs. Whilst it is true that Moscow has not paid enough attention to solving the region's problems over the years, Moscow is determined that Russia should maintain its presence in the Baltic region and that, if nothing else, should ensure that Kaliningrad oblast' will receive more attention from Moscow than has been the case in the recent past. Putin's assertion that Kaliningrad oblast' could become a "pilot region" for the development of the future relationship between the EU and Russia would again imply that the region could play a very important role in determining Russia's future relationship with the other European states. Moscow needs Kaliningrad for the simple fact that without Kaliningrad, its presence in the Baltic Sea area would be severely diminished, thereby decreasing Moscow's standing in one of the world's most important trading regions (in 1997, 10% of the world's shipping trade passed through the 250 ports of the Baltic Sea).⁸⁵ Kaliningrad's share of the traffic has declined in recent years; nevertheless, with proper investment and a more competitive pricing policy, Kaliningrad's ports could yet have an important role in the further economic revitalisation of Russia, both locally and nationally.⁸⁶

Of course, on a more fundamental level, the region's economic development can only be assured if the central power has the wherewithal to defend the region. In this particular context, Russia's military presence is seen as vital, hence the importance attached to the Baltic Fleet. In an interview published when he was still Baltic Fleet Commander, Yegorov pointed out the importance of the Fleet in ensuring Russia's economic interests in the region are protected:

"Defenceless at sea, according to P A Stolypin⁸⁷ is as hazardous as [being] defenceless on land...this logic is traditional for all countries which have access to the sea and boils down to a battle for trade routes and fields of raw materials on the continental shelf. Moreover, a state's ability to use these resources in its own national interests is also traditionally determined by sea power...throughout these three centuries, the Baltic Fleet has been the main factor of stability in the Western maritime

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*direction. Russia's vital interests in the Baltic Sea have currently not diminished, but just the opposite, have expanded.*⁸⁸

As detailed earlier, the region boasts a well-developed road and rail network. According to one analyst, the rail network makes Kaliningrad oblast' unique in one other vital respect:

*"The oblast' has one important economic and strategic advantage, unique in the entire Baltic Maritime Zone: it is the only place where the port's infrastructure meets all the standard European railway gauges. The military-strategic significance of this is much more important than the economic, in as much as it increases the possibilities for Russia to protect the Russian Fleet in the Baltic."*⁸⁹

The tie-in between the region's economic and military infrastructure should not be underestimated and, indeed, is not accidental. However, bordering both Lithuania and Poland, with relatively easy road access to the German markets, as well as a number of the Scandinavian countries, Kaliningrad is in a very good position to work its geographical location to its local advantage, as well as that of the Russian economy. This has been explained in statements by a number of senior political and military figures in Russia. For instance, the then Russian Foreign Minister A Kozyrev stated in 1993, addressing a session of the Council of Baltic Sea States:

*"There is no need to explain the exceptional significance of the Kaliningrad oblast' in being an important link in Russia's military-strategic and economic interests in the Baltic region. Especially now, when every metre of Baltic shoreline, for us, is literally worth its weight in gold."*⁹⁰

The last sentence in particular was highly pertinent at the time, given the loss to Russia of the port facilities of Liepaja, Paldiski, Tallinn, etc, as a result of the political upheaval during 1990-1991.

In what is still one of the most significant articles concerning the geostrategic importance of Kaliningrad to the Russian Federation, the then C-in-C of the Russian Navy Admiral F N Gromov stated:

*"On account of its geographical position, Kaliningrad oblast' has a special significance in both Russia's internal and external policy. Here intersect many economic and political interests of the surrounding European countries ... thanks to this, Kaliningrad oblast' ... has an important economic and military-significance for Russia in the Western region."*⁹¹

The Baltic Fleet, the Russian Navy's oldest Fleet, is due to commemorate its 300th anniversary shortly. As Baltic Fleet Commanders are keen to point out and the historical record testifies, Russia/USSR has shed much blood in order to gain and maintain a Russian presence in the Baltic Sea region, away from the frozen ports of St Petersburg and Kronstadt, where Russia has always had a military presence. The Baltic Fleet is simply an obvious manifestation of Russia's military power, but a power that was not created overnight, or in response to the political upheaval of the early 1990s. As Admiral Gromov put it in his 1995 article:

"It is not superfluous to remind [readers] that the appearance of a regular Russian military fleet was brought about by a historic mission - to gain entry to the community of European nations. Having secured Russia's

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*entry to the Baltic Sea and having created a military fleet, Peter the First made us a great European power. Since then, Russia has not been a guest in a wider Europe, but an equal partner.*⁹²

The last sentence seems to echo an old saying of Peter the Great's, namely that "without mastery of the Baltic Sea, Russia will not be a great European power."⁹³

The long history of the Baltic Fleet was outlined in a 1994 article by V G Yegorov, its commander, now governor-admiral:

*"In the autumn of 1996, the Russian Navy will mark its 300th anniversary. The Baltic Fleet is its oldest component, tracing its origins to January 29, 1702, when Tsar Peter the First ordered the construction of six 18-cannon vessels on the Syas river. In the Northern War with Sweden, the newly-built fleet scored brilliant victories at the battles of Hango Head (1714), Esel (1719) and Greengam (1720) ... the Russian-Swedish War of 1788-1790 saw the successful rebuff by the Baltic Fleet of attempts to seize Kronstadt and St Petersburg and its triumph in the battle of Gotland, Rokjensalm, Revel, Krasnogorsk and Vyborg ... In World War One, the Baltic Fleet inflicted major losses on the German Fleet, preventing its breakthrough to the Gulfs of Finland and Riga and provided the seaborne defence of the Aland Islands and Petrograd ... in the course of the [Second World] War Baltic seamen participated in two defensive and seven offensive operations, their submarines were active all across the sea basin. Wartime losses amounted to 267 vessels and 1,619 planes but ... the fleet preserved its fighting capacity.*⁹⁴

In short, Russia has earned its Baltic Sea coastline and the Baltic Fleet guarantees Russia's presence in the region. Admiral Gromov was very explicit in his understanding of the role of the Fleet:

*"It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Baltic Fleet in the defence of the national interests of Russia in the Baltic Sea - an objective and historically justified necessity, confirmed by almost 300 years of history, one of the indispensable conditions [guaranteeing] the security of the country, its economic development and international authority. The deployment of the Fleet's main forces to Kaliningrad oblast' ensures Russia's status as a Baltic power and its ability to defend its interests at sea.*⁹⁵

This tie in between Russia's presence in the Baltic Sea and the importance of Russian military power in maintaining that presence is made clear time and time again. The then Security Council Secretary, I Rybkin, on a visit to the region in May 1997, openly stated that "the Russian military presence in Kaliningrad oblast' has two aspects: it is important both as a symbol of Russian sovereignty on this territory and as a sign of Russia's firm intention to preserve its position in the Baltic Sea. In light of NATO enlargement, Kaliningrad oblast' is one of the key elements in ensuring the security of Russia and its ally-state, Belarus'."⁹⁶

Expanding on the military importance of the oblast' to the wider defence interests of the Russian Federation, the then Commander of North-Western Group of Forces, L S Mayorov, stated during a visit to Kaliningrad:

*"The role of the region and the military here - and I am not scared by accusations of excessive exaggeration - is very great. Look, if earlier in the direction of Moscow there was the Western Group of Forces, the Northern Group of Forces and the Belarussian Military District, now from Smolensk, the capital is within easy reach. That is why, from a military point of view, the military force here is vital. There is no doubt about it."*⁹⁷

As a direct result of the collapse of the USSR and the re-found independence of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the importance of Kaliningrad oblast' increased significantly, not least from the point of view of the military. But the main component of Russia's military force in Kaliningrad oblast' cannot be interpreted as a response to the fact that one of its constituent parts (Kaliningrad oblast') was now cut off physically from "Mother Russia". Although the size of the force fluctuated wildly throughout the 1990s (as a result of the break up of the Warsaw Pact and the necessity of bringing units home or as a consequence of Yel'tsin's 1997 force reductions), giving the other states in the region real cause for concern at times, nevertheless this was only a temporary phenomenon as units made their way back to "Mother Russia".

Russia's position in the Baltic Sea area is likely to change, and change very soon, as Russia copes with further EU and NATO expansion in the Baltic Sea area. As yet, Russia has little problem with the idea of EU expansion in the area; however, the same cannot be said about the prospect of further NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, especially in the Baltic. Russia's military presence in the area has been bought at a high price (the storming of the city of Koenigsberg, an operation that lasted only 2 weeks, cost the lives of 100,000 Soviet soldiers⁹⁸) and many in the West have still to realise the impact of this on Russia's attitudes. As NATO has increased its military presence in the area - with the accession, for instance, of Poland to NATO in April 1999 - the Russians have become increasingly concerned that NATO's increasing influence comes at the expense of Russia's. Thus, in one of his last published interviews as Fleet Commander, Yegorov discussed the "growing strengthening of the position of NATO in the strategically important for Russia Baltic Sea coastline and ... [around] Kaliningrad oblast' - Russia's vital bulwark in the western region."⁹⁹

The commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral V Kuroyedov, has also expressed his deep misgivings about further NATO expansion in the Baltic region, especially if this includes former republics of the USSR:

*"Russia must view as a direct threat to its national security [any] increase in the military presence of states bordering our territorial waters, even more so **the possible use of territory of former Soviet republics by the armed forces of third countries or military blocs.**"*¹⁰⁰

There is no room here for any misunderstanding: if NATO expands to include Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia, Russia will take steps to enhance its military presence in the region. What this could mean is that its proposal to cut further the number of military personnel in the region - announced in February 2001¹⁰¹ - will be frozen, if not suspended completely. It may also increase the number of men and/or improve their military equipment. However, although it is an option according to one expert, it is unlikely that the Russian authorities would re-deploy tactical nuclear weapons to the region: "there is nothing to be gained by keeping them at the border."¹⁰²

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That there will be some sort of military response to the inclusion of any of the former republics of the USSR in NATO cannot be in much doubt. Attending an exercise of the Baltic Fleet, held in July 2001, Chief of the General Staff General A Kvashnin was reported as saying: "Under conditions of NATO expansion in the East, the structure and composition of the [military] grouping in Kaliningrad oblast' would depend on the position of the NATO countries."¹⁰³ Less than a week later, the Baltic News Service quoted the chairman of the duma's international affairs committee, D Rogozin, as saying at a meeting in Kaliningrad oblast' that Russia's military presence in the region may be increased as a result of NATO action in the area.¹⁰⁴ In an interview to the local newspaper, *Kaliningradskaya Pravda*, the Baltic Fleet Commander Vice-Admiral Valuyev also pointed out the direct connection between NATO membership for the Baltic states and Russia's military presence in the region:

*"The naval grouping created in our region in conjunction with neighbouring districts, according to the assessment of specialists from the General Staff is self-sufficient in every respect. In the future, everything will depend on the situation taking shape in the region in connection with the entry of the Baltic countries in NATO. Their [military] potential will be increased - correspondingly, so must ours. These will be natural steps which, under these circumstances, any state would adopt to defend the security of its citizens, rights and freedoms."*¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

That Russia will take military counter-measures in the light of further NATO expansion in the Baltic region should come as no great surprise: Russia has been a Baltic power for centuries and will not be intimidated out of the region. The circumstances in which it acquired the territory now known as Kaliningrad may not have been ideal, but it is populated overwhelmingly by Russians and is very much seen in Moscow as a sovereign part of the Russian Federation. The territory may not rate much in terms of economic wealth, but its main asset is in its geographical position: with the correct level of investment, it could be developed into a transport-freight conduit between Eastern and Western Europe. But even if this does not happen, Kaliningrad is very important to the Russian Federation both in that it allows Russia to be a power in a very important part of the world and in that it affords Moscow, literally, some degree of physical protection should the political and military situation deteriorate drastically in the future. Although it may not quite be Russia's unsinkable aircraft carrier, nevertheless it affords Moscow a useful platform to keep a close eye on events in the Baltic Sea region and respond accordingly.

The relationship between Moscow and Kaliningrad has developed along a number of interesting avenues, particularly recently: the nature of the future relationship is, as yet, not quite clear. Will Kaliningrad oblast' be used as a model for the development of the new open relationship between the EU and Russia or will NATO's further expansion into the Baltic Sea region compel Moscow to turn Kaliningrad back into the role of "fortress"? Curiously enough, the answer to that question may lie just as much in Brussels as in Moscow or even Kaliningrad itself. Kaliningrad oblast's fate rarely lies in its own hands and, as long as it remains an integral part of the Russian Federation, it is unlikely that this situation will change much in the future.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The then governor, L Gorbenko, declared a "state of emergency" in the light of the August 1998 ruble crisis. As a "state of emergency", within the terms of the Constitution, can only be declared by the President of the Russian Federation (at that time B N Yel'tsin), this put Gorbenko on a direct collision course with Yel'tsin. The matter was eventually resolved within 24 hours, following Gorbenko's admission that he had not declared a "state of emergency", but simply an "emergency situation". For more on this see: "State of emergency declared in Kaliningrad region", *Interfax-BNS*, Kaliningrad, 8 September 1998; P Akopov, "V Kaliningrade - chrezvychnaya situatsia", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 September 1998; S Uvarov, "Kaliningradszkaya oblast' zhivet v rezhime chrezvychnoy situatsii", *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 23 September 1998; A Chesnakov, "Mify i pravda o Kaliningradskom separatizme", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 September 1998.
- ² For a "taster" of how complex the history of this area is, consult the article written by Raymond A Smith, "The Status of the Kaliningrad Oblast' Under International Law", *Lituanus: Baltic Studies quarterly journal of arts and science*, Vol 38, No 1, 1992, 7-52.
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- ¹² "Regiony Rossii", M. 2000, 599.
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- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 600.
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- ¹⁹ Bil'chak, *ibid*, 116.
- ²⁰ Ye B Alayev, T S Gracheva, Ye Sh Kachalova, "Entsiklopediya SNG Vypusk. Regiony Rossii." M. 2001. 65.
- ²¹ *Ibid*.
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- ²⁴ *Ibid*, 105.
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- ²⁶ <http://www.gov.kaliningrad.ru/etrans.php3>
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- ²⁹ A Khlopetskiy, "Kaliningrad kak 'Zona Svobody': Vzglyad Iznutri", Kaliningrad, 2000, 100.
- ³⁰ A Vorontsov, "Admirala NATO ne Pugaet", *Chas*, No 45 (1071), 22 February 2001.
- ³¹ *Ibid*.
- ³² "Navy Commander Elected Kaliningrad Regional Governor", BBC SWB, 20 November 2000.
- ³³ Gorbenko's vice-governor, Mikhail Karetniy, has been the object of a number of criminal investigations by the local authorities since 1998. An international arrest warrant was due to be issued, in connection with allegations of inappropriate use of state property

and money laundering, when Karetniy was in charge of the region's Development Fund (V Zhukov, A Igorev, "Kaliningradskiy Chinovnik Otmyl \$15 Million", *Kommersant*, 18 January 2001).

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³⁵ P Akopov, "General'naya Liniya", *Izvestiya*, 8 February 2001.

³⁶ In 2000, the Baltic Fleet was awarded the title of Best Fleet of the Russian Navy, on the basis that it won 7/13 annual prizes for combat readiness, ("Baltiyskiy Flot Nazvan Lushchim v VMF Rossii po Itogam Boyevoy Podgotovki", <http://www.strana.ru/print/974379369.html>); apparently, a common remark heard in the navy's officer's club when Yegorov was Fleet Commander was: "I will serve as long as Yegorov commands the Fleet. When he goes, I'll sign out", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 19 September 2000).

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ISBN 1-903584-44-2

Published By:

**The Conflict Studies Research
Centre**

Directorate General Development and Doctrine
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone : (44) 1276 412346
Or 412375

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ISBN 1-903584-44-2