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## ABSTRACT

### NATIONALITY POLITICS IN THE SOVIET UNION: AT LAST, A SUBJECT OF SERIOUS SCHOLARSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

This paper was written by Colonel Tiiu Kera, USAF, during her research associate tour as a Fellow at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, during the academic year 1990-91. The paper discusses the scholarship in the United States over the last 20 years regarding the manifestations of nationalism and prospects for self-determination of minority ethnic groups in the Soviet Union. Both quality and content of the scholarship are reviewed.

Colonel Kera shows how the scholarship on Soviet nationality politics, particularly with regard to the Baltic states, has vastly improved in the United States since the 1960s, growing from the exotic interest of a few to the study of a genetic disorder in the makeup of a declining superpower. Study of Soviet nationality issues was hampered in the 1960s by an emphasis in political science on one-size-fits-all scientific methodology that disregarded the historical and cultural context of political phenomena, the belief that nationalism was a dead issue in the Soviet Union, and a legacy of poor post-World War II scholarship, consisting to a great extent of emigre political tracts. In the 1970s, with the foundation of professional scholarly associations and journals dedicated to the study of Soviet nationality issues and the Baltic region, the scholarship began to improve. Writers were no longer describing diminishing manifestations of nationalism, but seeking to explain the endurance of the nationalism they observed among the non-Russian groups in the USSR. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a proliferation of books, professional journal articles, and popular press attention to nationality issues as a serious concern endemic to the Soviet system. US experts on the Soviet Union now understand nationality politics to be another problem with which the USSR has not dealt effectively and increasing independence of the periphery to be developing from the local initiative taken in the face of Moscow's failure to manage the federation's economic and political problems.

The paper concludes with a commentary, On Deserving Independence, that discusses of the doubts of those who do not support independence of the USSR's republics, particularly the Baltic states.

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NATIONALITY POLITICS IN THE SOVIET UNION:  
AT LAST, A SUBJECT OF SERIOUS SCHOLARSHIP IN THE US

by



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## INTRODUCTION

Nationality politics in the Soviet Union has been a topic of life-long interest to me. The Soviet treatment of the Baltic peoples during World War II drove my parents from Estonia. Their westward flight resulted in my being born in an refugee camp administered by American forces in Germany, and, ultimately, becoming a citizen of the United States, a country my parents may have hoped to visit but never dreamed of emigrating to while growing up in independent Estonia. Thus, Soviet nationality issues shaped my destiny. They also captured my enduring interest, leading me to study political science in both college and graduate school in the 1960s. Now, over 20 years later, I have had an opportunity once again to study Soviet nationality politics for an academic year as a Fellow at the Center for International Affairs (CFIA), Harvard University.

"Nationality politics" is, for the purposes of this paper, the short form of the longer term, "manifestations of nationalism and prospects for self-determination of minority ethnic groups in the Soviet Union." When I learned of my selection for the CFIA Fellowship, I initially thought of continuing the research I had started in graduate school on this topic. However, once I arrived at Harvard and began to review the material written in the last two decades, the realities of time and resource constraints became clear to me. In nine months, I barely could read the secondary sources, much less do original work based on primary sources, not all of which are available at Harvard, or in the United States, for that matter. At the same time, I was amazed to find that others had pursued the topic as I might have if I had continued in graduate school beyond a Master's degree, even to the extent of concentrating on Estonia as a case study.(ZZ) I also found fascinating in themselves the developments in the scholarship in the United States on Soviet nationality politics. Accordingly, I abandoned the unrealistic hopes of a substantive analysis of the "manifestations of

nationalism . . ." to concentrate on a review of the trends in the scholarship, as pertains to the Baltic republics, particularly Estonia.

This paper, then, will review the changing perceptions in the United States over the last 20 years of Soviet nationality politics in the Baltic republics as a subject worthy of serious scholastic endeavor. It will also reflect on the content of the scholarship over the years. This paper does not pretend to be a comprehensive or academically rigorous dissertation. It is, rather, the observations of an interested user of the scholarly work done in the area of Soviet nationality politics.

## CHAPTER I

### US SCHOLARSHIP IN MID-CENTURY

This chapter reviews US scholarship on Soviet nationality politics, emphasizing the Baltic republics, as I encountered it as a graduate student in the late 1960s. A discussion of the academic situation is followed by a look at what was being said at the time about the prospects for nationalism and self-determination for Soviet minority ethnic groups.

#### A. THREE IMPEDIMENTS

My first effort to study nationality politics of the Soviet Union, concentrating on the Baltic states, was in graduate school in the late 1960s. Armed with a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and the confidence of a new college graduate, I entered the PhD program in the Department of Government at Indiana University. Nowhere else could my political science studies be complemented with not only a fine Russian and East European Institute, but also a Department of Uralic-Altaic Studies in which I could study my native language. I soon experienced three major impediments to my planned course of study.

#### *The Science of Politics*

The first difficulty I encountered was related to the direction political science itself was taking in the 1960s. At that time, America had been swept by the post-Sputnik infatuation with science and engineering. Shocked by Soviet achievements in ballistic missile technology, the United States made the "space race" a national priority and glorified the study of physical sciences. High school Latin teachers were having to justify their existence; chemistry, mathematics, and physics teachers were the new heroes. Meanwhile, at the university level, disciplines of the study of human behavior were scrambling to prove they were as rigorous as the physical sciences. Psychologists seemed to have it easiest. After all, they could torture undergraduates and other

animals under laboratory conditions and systematically record the results. The scientists of politics could not likewise manipulate human political behavior. The challenge to political scientists was to find scientifically credible ways to examine, record, analyze, and hypothesize on political phenomena. I entered graduate school just as such techniques were being instituted in the Department of Government.

First-year doctoral students were required to enroll in a two-semester course on research methodology of political science. The course was intended to teach how scientific methodology (e.g., variables, hypotheses, sampling, control groups, and statistical analysis) could be applied in political science. By the end of the course, each student was to have developed a preliminary research design to guide his or her doctoral research project. While sounding reasonable enough, the approach, in fact, discouraged the study of political phenomenon which did not readily yield data that could be punched on cards to be sorted on an "IBM machine" and plotted on a curve. When I presented a hypothesis on the interplay of the variables "nationalism" and "level of development" in the Soviet republics, the professor could not understand why I planned to use the complex method of content analysis of the Soviet Estonian press to measure "degree of nationalism." She recommended that I use instead the much simpler method of counting the number of national flags purchased in the Estonian SSR. To her, the political or cultural context in which the measurement would be applied was irrelevant; to me, it was incredible that a political scientist would not recognize that one could not measure variables in the same way in all contexts. It was, however, clear to me that the primacy of method would lead either to foolish results or to the judgment that my subject was not worthy of study.

#### *A Dead Issue*

The second major impediment to study of nationalism and the prospects for self-determination within the Soviet Union was the prevailing assumption that those were dying, if not dead, issues in the Soviet Union. As nationalism swept the Third World and Europe's colonies were becoming independent states, the Soviet Union supported the independence movements of the 1960s, while at the same time denying the problems of empire in their own multiethnic society. The USSR's denial of its



nationality problems over the years has been rooted in the ideological construct of that country. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, the debate about national self-consciousness raged in all camps of the social democratic movement. To Marxists, nationalism was a narrow-minded, bourgeois anachronism at a time when the class struggle should have been the main issue on an international scale. Yet Lenin was a pragmatist and used national fervor in the pre-World War I period to his own ends. His ethnically-based federal scheme for the socialist state both recognized the strength of pre-World War I national movements and robbed his rivals of the championship of self-determination. He felt he risked little, believing the unifying forces of economics and international socialism would prevail and any separatist urges would diminish. Moreover, the right of national self-determination in the Soviet Union would be secondary to the higher rights of the proletariat, and the unitary Communist Party system would enforce the priorities.(E21-23)

Soviet leaders up to and including Gorbachev have each proclaimed the solution of nationality problems in the Soviet socialist state. Lenin admitted he made tactical compromises in establishing a "transitional form to complete union of the toilers of different nations"(E22), and Stalin used forced collectivization and terror to impose his will over every aspect of Soviet life(J14). In his 20th Party Congress speech in 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's excesses in treatment of nationalities, opening up discussions about possible increased power to the republics.(E24-25) However, once he was firmly in power, he told the 22nd Party Congress in 1961 that "the Party has solved one of the most complex of problems, which has plagued mankind for ages and remains acute in the world of capitalism to this day — the problem of relations between nations."(N15) Likewise, under Brezhnev the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU) Central Committee resolution on the 50th anniversary of the USSR proclaimed that "a new historical community, the Soviet people" had emerged.(N16) As late as March 1986, a year after Gorbachev had assumed power, the CPSU program declared that "the national question, which as remained from the past, has been solved successfully in the Soviet Union."(E19-20) Thus, if only the official proclamations were heeded, both US scholars and Soviets themselves could well have believed that

nationality problems were no longer relevant matters on the Soviet scene.(UU219, JJ37) Whether Soviet experts in the United States accepted these pronouncements on face value or did not take notice of manifestations of nationalism, I was met with incredulity when I presented nationality politics as my preferred subject of study in graduate school.

### *Poor Precedents*

The third difficulty in studying nationalism in the Soviet Union in the 1960s was the quality of the scholarship that had been published to date. Unfortunately, my annotated bibliography of existing work on the subject, along with other research material saved from my graduate school days, disappeared during one of the dozen moves I have since made with the Air Force. In sampling the work from the period available at the Harvard libraries, I recalled my impressions.

Many of the books on the Baltic states published from 1945 through the 1960s in the United States were too flawed to be considered serious works of scholarship. Some carried titles such as *Total Terror: An Expose of Genocide in the Baltics*, *The Tragedy of the Baltic States*, *The Forgotten Republics*, *Estonia: Nation on the Anvil*, and *Soviet Russian Imperialism*.(V,WW,BB,EE,U) The authors included Western scholars as well as Baltic refugee academics and former government officials. These historians, participants, and eyewitnesses had important stories to tell and valuable information to preserve for posterity. However, the tone, language, and inadequate documentation gave these works the appearance of political tracts and propaganda, detracting from their credibility and academic usefulness. The following quote is an example of the polemic style of these works:

They were the victims of the alliance of the two totalitarian systems of the Nazis and the Russian Communists. They vanished again because the free world sought totalitarian help and the free world can show its recovery in no better way than by restoring them their liberty and granting them their proper role in the advancing of peace and civilization.(V255)

Another shortcoming of even the more scholarly works also discouraged consideration of Soviet nationality issues in the Baltic region as a matter of

contemporary interest. This was the impulse of the writers of this period to relate the histories of the Baltic peoples from the prehistoric tribal migrations through World War II. This made it appear as if the Baltic peoples had to be marked on the map or placed in human history lest they not be remembered; ending with the 1945 left the impression that Baltic history terminated with World War II.(CCC,EE) It also resulted in dull, shallow chronologies and cursory treatment of important events and issues.\*

Finally, the sponsorship of the work in the post-World War II era often detracted from its credibility. Into the 1960s, most of the articles written in the United States on the Baltic issues appeared in journals published by emigre organizations. Examples are *The Baltic Review*, published by the Committees for a Free Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, from December 1953 through August 1971, and *Lituanus*, published since 1954, first, by the Lithuanian Students Association and, then, the Lituanus Foundation.(KK10-11) Other organizations having political agendas also sponsored periodicals in which articles on nationality politics and the Baltic republics appeared; these included the International Information Administration, now the United States Information Agency, which has published *Problems of Communism*\*\* since 1952, and Radio Free Europe which has published *News from Behind the Iron Curtain*, now *East Europe*, also since 1952. A few articles appeared in professional journals specializing in Slavic area studies, such as the *Slavonic and East European Review* and *Russian Review*. For all of the 1960s, the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* carried only 16 citations for articles related to Soviet nationality issues (11 were in the popular press, such as *Time* and *Saturday Evening Post*, five in professional journals such as *Foreign Affairs*).

Given this state of the scholarship on Soviet nationality politics in the Baltic region, there was certainly a need for original academic work by the late 1960s.

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\*A notable exception is Tarulis, Albert N., *American-Baltic Relations 1918-1922: The Struggle Over Recognition* (Wash, DC: Catholic Univ Press, 1963), a thorough analysis of a diplomatic event, well documented with primary sources.

\*\*Nevertheless, its articles on Baltic affairs reviewed for this paper were consistently non-polemic and well documented.

However, to engage in serious work on the subject, those interested had to overcome the lack of credibility in the value of research in that area and a shortage of support for the effort.

## B. COMMENTS ON THE CONTENTS

If the academic context for studying Soviet nationality politics was discouraging, so too was the content of the work that was done in this period. Through the 1960s, nationalism and prospects for self-determination of the Soviet minority ethnic groups, including the Baltics, were treated in three ways: as past historical phenomena, as curiosities, and as a negligible factors in Soviet politics.

Most of the post-World War II works dealt with the issues of nationalism and self-determination in a historical context. To a large extent, as explained above, they were chronologies that ended in 1945, and, as such, they offered little, if any, analysis of current nationality politics in the Soviet Union.

The rare articles on the Baltic republics in the popular media would most often treat the Baltic region as a curiosity. When one would occasionally appear, it caused quite a stir among my friends who would send me copies from all over the United States. Typically, it would be a syndicated newspaper article(AA) written by an American journalist who happened onto the Helsinki-to-Tallinn ferry and "discovered" a West European enclave; the journalist would recount how the Estonian shopkeepers would resist his efforts to communicate in phrasebook Russian, informing him that, if he did not know Estonian, they could conduct his business in English or German, thank you.

A few more serious articles on Soviet nationality issues did appear in the popular media and mainstream political science journals. They revealed evidence of the survival of nationalism in the Baltic republics into the 1960s, but were were consistent with the prevailing attitude in the United States that nationalism was not a politically significant factor in Soviet politics. One such example was the October 1959 *Saturday Evening Post* account of an American visiting the Baltics two years after correspondence with the outside world was allowed and the Baltic capitals were opened to foreign visitors. The article described the "indomitable inhabitants of the Baltic

states [who had] partly won their battle to preserve their racial and cultural identity, even under Soviet dictatorship." The author cited two significant examples of such achievements: (a) raising living standards to near-prewar levels ("above the Soviet average") as a result of increasingly local supervision of Baltic affairs ("because they are efficient organizers") and (b) successful resistance of Russian-style collectivization into central villages by retaining individual farmsteads. She reported, however, that neither the Baltics who remained in the region nor those who had emigrated expected liberation in the near future. The consensus was that independence "apparently can now be accomplished only through another all-out war." She concluded that the Baltics placed their greatest hopes on "wider education making the Russian people increasingly tolerant and therefore willing to permit racial minorities in the Soviet Union greater freedom."(C68-70).

A decade later, a *Foreign Affairs* article was similarly pessimistic. It argued that Soviet economic and demographic policies had increasingly integrated the Baltics into the Soviet Union. The emigration and deportation of Baltic natives, combined with the immigration of Slavs, had diluted the indigenous populations. New factories had been built that were dependent on raw material and unskilled labor imported from outside the Baltic region. Communists who were ethnically Baltic, but who had spent the independence years in the Soviet Union, had been appointed to Party leadership positions in the republics, only to be chastized later by Moscow for "nationalist deviations." The impact of local leaders was seen to be limited, in any case, because of their own ideological commitment and their Russian "doubles" in party and government offices. Moreover, central policymaking afforded them no real autonomy.(EEE512-515) Moscow was firmly in control:

The Baltic future, then cannot be determined by the actions of Baltic Communists, but will depend on the results of the broader Soviet nationality policy in the area.(EEE516)

Thus, while the writers of the 1960s saw hints of nationalist feelings and evidence of pro-national endeavors in the Baltic republics, the assessment remained that self-

determination and independence was not possible for the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.

As I left graduate school in January 1969, neither the academic situation nor the findings of the meager scholarship to date promoted the study of Soviet nationality politics in the Baltic region. Major changes were needed to make the subject a promising field of serious academic endeavor.

## CHAPTER II

### US SCHOLARSHIP IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

The previous chapter considered the trends and substance of the scholarship on Soviet nationality politics and the Baltic region as I encountered it in graduate school. This chapter comments on the developments since I last studied the topic in the 1960s. It covers the improvements of the 1970s and reviews the increasing interest in the topic as a mainstream concern up to the early 1990s. Again, the examination of the scholarship is followed by a survey of the content.

The end of the 1960s saw the beginnings of major changes in US scholarship on Soviet nationality politics and the Baltic region. By the early 1970s, apolitical foundations were established to promote the study of of nationality issues and of the Baltic republics, and the journals they sponsored have published continuously since. More scholarly research on nationality issues and the Baltic states began to be conducted and published as books or articles in leading journals. Work in this area greatly multiplied in the 1980s and 1990s, attracting the interest of mainstream journals, leading universities, and the popular press. In the course of 20 years, the study of Soviet nationality politics in the United States grew from the exotic interest of a few to the study of a genetic disorder in the makeup of a declining Superpower.

#### A. THE 1970s: DECADE OF TRANSITION

The study of Soviet nationality politics and the Baltic region received a major boost at the turn of the decade with the formation of two professional scholarly foundations without political agendas and the publication of journals they sponsored. The Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) was established in December 1968. In February 1970, it began publishing a periodical initially entitled *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, later *Journal of Baltic Studies*. The first three issues of the *Bulletin* discussed the purpose of the association and its plans for the future. In these

initial issues, the AABS tackled the credibility problem in Baltic research. It mentioned the isolation of individual scholars pursuing Baltic matters and the academic reception of their work as "somewhat exotic." (A3) It acknowledged the lingering impact of Baltic emigrants who, in their writings, continued to revisit events a quarter century past with emotional appeals for justice. (B35) Most importantly, it made a clear distinction between emigre organizations with political missions and itself as a "scholarly, scientific organization" determined "to gain a reputation as a purely scholarly agency among scholars and universities." (A4) Since AABS supported a wide variety of disciplines, its conferences and publications have continued to carry work on folklore, linguistics, and history as well as politics. However, its papers on politics reflected sound research and documentation and dealt more and more on contemporary events in the Baltic region. For example, as well as an article on the "Problems of the North Germans and of the Hansa in the Later Medieval Baltic," the *Bulletin's* Winter 1971 issue contained an analysis of the demographic trends in the newly available Latvian SSR census; by Summer 1989, the *Journal* would dedicate an entire issue to the timely topic of "Perestroika in Estonia," covering topics from private cooperatives to the ecological and political impacts of Soviet-sponsored phosphorite mining.

At approximately the same time, the Association for the Study of the Nationalities (USSR and Eastern Europe) was formed by North American and West European scholars to study the non-Russian nationalities of the USSR and national minorities in East European countries. Headquartered at University of Nebraska, it has, since 1972, published *Nationality Papers*, a semiannual journal containing articles on nationality politics, ethnic relations, and political developments throughout the Soviet Union and East Europe. It has also sponsored several books on the issues, such as the 1977 anthology, *Nationalism and Human Rights: Processes of Modernization in the USSR* (Ihor Kamenetsky, ed., Littleton CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.). The papers in this volume focused on the human rights aspects of national dissent, and vice versa, in the Soviet Union; one of the essays was a very creative comparison of the status of Native Americans and some of the ethnic groups in the USSR.



The new interest and support for serious study of Soviet nationality politics notwithstanding, the 1970s served as a bridge on the road to improving scholarship on Soviet nationality politics in the Baltic states. On one end of the quality spectrum were the political tracts that continued to be written. For example, in 1974, "on the occasion of the European Security and Cooperation Conference in Helsinki," the Lithuanian American Council published *The Forgotten Balts*, the work of a 78-year old Swiss immigrant to the Republic of Lithuania who, in 15 pages and four footnotes, covered Baltic history from prehistoric times through Soviet violations of international law in Lithuania.(L) At the other end of the quality spectrum, representing the improving scholarship of this period, was a 1978 book, *The Baltic States in Peace and War, 1917-1945*, (V. Stanley Vardys and Romuald J. Misiunas, eds., University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press). This anthology was, like so many of its predecessors, limited (but for one essay) to the lifespan of the independent republics, and its introduction included the self-conscious medieval-to-modern-times "historical perspective." Yet, all of the contributors were American and European academics who meticulously documented their pieces and who discussed heretofore politically sensitive issues such as the rise of authoritarianism in the Baltic states and interwar conspiracies between Lithuanian and German militaries regarding Lithuanian territorial claims against Poland. As a critique of "Soviet Historiography on World War II and the Baltic States, 1944-1974," the final essay reflected the newest research being done on the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics by virtue of both its topic and primary sources.

*The East European Quarterly*, published by the University of Colorado, has occasionally included articles on the Baltic republics because they would be considered East Central European states were they not in the Soviet Union. The growing awareness among US scholars in the late 1960s/early 1970s of the need to support the emerging scholarship in nationality politics in the region was evidenced in the journal's statement of purpose in its first issue:

*The East European Quarterly* is a child of necessity. The untimely disappearance of the *Journal of Central European Affairs* has deprived the scholarly world of a vehicle for the propagation of information and ideas related to East

Central Europe at a time of resumption of serious research  
and of meaningful dialogue among scholars of East and  
West.(M)

#### B. THE 1980s & 1990s: DECADES OF LEGITIMACY

In the 1980s, scholarship on Soviet nationality politics and the Baltic states approached mainstream respectability. By the end of the decade and into the 1990s, numerous excellent works on these matters were being written and used in courses at US universities. As the world witnessed the disintegration of the USSR's external empire and its growing internal difficulties, interest focused on the systemic problems of the Soviet Union. Soviet nationality issues were featured in news media and professional journals as one of the unresolved, endemic problems of the Soviet Union.

Publications proliferated in the 1980s and early 1990s on the Baltic republics as subjects unto themselves and as components of the Soviet nationality scheme. A thoroughly documented 1983 work, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1980* (Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, Berkeley: University of California Press), served as a sequel to the less scholarly *The Baltic States: the Years of Independence, 1917-1940*, written by a Baltic German, Georg von Rauch, in 1970 and published in English in 1974 (London, C. Hurst & Company). Von Rauch did not footnote and included mostly secondary sources in his bibliography, while Misiunas and Taagepera very carefully cited contemporary primary sources from the region as well as Western works. In 1987, Toivo Raun's study, *Estonia and the Estonians*, was published by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, in its series, "Studies of Nationalities in the USSR." It was a comprehensive political history of the Estonians from ancient times, but unlike its similarly ambitious antecedents, Raun's work was non-polemic and meticulously documented. Also, it addressed sensitive issues of the independent Republic's political turbulence, the difficulties and compromises of national survival during wartime, and postwar adjustment to the Soviet regime.

A number of excellent works of this period cited the Baltic republics as leading players in the overall dynamics of Soviet nationality politics. Renowned Western scholars, as well as immigrant and first generation academics, authored, edited, and

contributed to these volumes. Of particular note were *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future*, Robert Conquest, ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR*, Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda (New York: The Free Press, 1990); *The Soviet Multinational State: Readings and Documents*, Martha B. Olcott, ed. (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, Inc., 1990); and *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, Henry R. Huttenbach, ed. (NY: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990).

In this time period, an increasing number of articles on Soviet nationality politics and the Baltic republics also appeared in mainstream professional journals and the popular news magazines. The *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* cited only three or four articles per year from 1984 through 1987. In 1988, 12 articles appeared on the Baltic states or Soviet nationality issues in the popular news magazines and half a dozen in the more specialized, semi-professional periodicals (e.g., *World Press Review*). This rose to 30 in the popular news magazines and 20 in the more specialized periodicals in 1989, as well as pieces in professional political science journals such as in *Foreign Affairs*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *PS: Political Science and Politics*. In 1990, the professional and semi-professional figures remained at about the same level, while popular news magazine attention jumped to nearly 100 articles. The popular news media now reported that events in the Baltics reflected some of the toughest problems facing the Gorbachev regime at the turn of the decade.

Perhaps one of the most telling indicators of the credibility of Soviet nationality politics as a subject of academic interest was its inclusion in the academic curricula during the year of my CFIA Fellowship. For the 1990-91 academic year, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University offered courses on "Nationalism and Self-Determination," "History of the Turkic Peoples," and at least two others in which nationality politics of the Soviet Union would be featured. Harvard University offered specific courses on the subject, "Contemporary Ethnic Politics in the USSR" and "Politics and Nationality in the Soviet Union." Many of the books and journal articles cited in this paper appeared in the reading lists for these courses.

### C. COMMENTS ON THE CONTENTS

The growth in the volume and quality of the scholarship on Soviet nationality politics, in general, and on the Baltic states in particular, indicated its growing stature among US scholars. As academic interest grew, so did the seriousness with which nationality as a political factor in the Soviet Union and the possibilities of self-determination was considered. The remainder of this paper reviews the substance of the thinking on these matters since 1970. It concludes with reflections on some unsettling opinions being expressed in recent months about the "worthiness" of the Baltic states for independence.

#### *Early Indicators*

As the scholarship on Soviet nationality issues multiplied and improved over the last 20 years, indications of enduring nationalism became increasingly evident. Nevertheless, many words were written, as recently as 1990, about how unexpected the manifestations of nationalism were to both Soviet leaders and Western observers.(E25,UU219,JJ37) Undoubtedly, Soviet leaders believed their own denials of enduring nationality problems partly due to their "uncompromising internationalist doctrine and its erosive implementation" (E25) and partly to the constraints on what could be openly discussed in the USSR.(O1) However, Soviet difficulties with nationality issues were, in fact, evident from the beginning.

A fundamental decision of the new Bolshevik government had been to impose its regime on the multi-ethnic remains of the Russian Empire. It then had to decide how to deal with the nationalities. It could have adopted a unitary state with a Russifying strategy, or it could have devised a genuine federal system. It chose a combination of the two, with the pendulum swinging between the extremes over the years.(Z109-110) The combination was a compromise in form, as explained in section IIA above, with the control being at the center and enforced by the unitary party hierarchy (E21-23) and with the commitment to a "unitary state with a homogeneous citizenry . . . at the heart of all Soviet nationality policies since Lenin."(S3) This "Leninist compromise" planted in the system the seeds for trouble, namely a centrifugal tension between the internationalist policy and ethno-territorial form.(Z101,O3)

Moreover, some scholars of Central Asia contend that the territorial arrangements not only reinforced national identities where there had been only weaker tribal affinities prior to the Soviet federation, but also accentuated ethnic rivalries by favoring some groups over others.(N19-20,Y96,TT,Q) Given these embedded tensions in the Soviet system, experts on the Soviet Union should have been alert to the potential for trouble rather than surprised when it emerged.

Indications of Soviet difficulties with nationalism in the Baltic republics have been available from Soviet sources since soon after World War II. In the early years, the reported reaction of Soviet leaders to unspecified events was the only evidence available. For example, in the mid-1950s, Western observers noted Soviet media reports on the dismissals of Baltic Communist Party officials for "nationalist deviations" and the restoration of Russian overseers in the republic structures.(EEE514-516) By the late 1960s, there were increasingly accounts of observable indications of Baltic nationalism, such as, a degree of emphasis on indigenous culture unseen since the 19th Century European nationalist movements, Estonian SSR trade agreements with Finland and the East Germany, and greater representation of natives in the Estonian Communist Party (ECP).(XX34, NN214-215) As the evidence mounted, scholars of the Baltic republics advocated study of nationality politics in the region as a possible predictor of the future of the Soviet Union. They agreed that, since the Baltics were the most urbanized and industrialized region of the Soviet Union, the Baltic experience could provide insight into what might happen in the rest of the Soviet Union as it modernized. The Baltics could also show whether nationalism would indeed disappear as Soviet society developed, as the Marxist-Leninists had predicted. (XX33) Nevertheless, through the 1960s, nationalism among Soviet non-Russians was considered by US scholars as a rare and fading phenomenon of little relevance to Soviet politics.

### *Explaining the Survival of Nationalism*

While the journalists of the postwar years reported signs of waning nationalism in the Baltic region, the writers of the following decade sought to understand the survival of the nationalism they continued to find. The accounts of this period included

several recurring themes. First, the reason most often cited for enduring nationalism was that the Baltics had a well developed national identity and experience with independence before they became part of the Soviet Union. Because of their Western orientation (Scandinavian and German for the Estonians and Latvians, and Polish and German for the Lithuanians), the national renaissance movements of the 19th Century had strongly influenced the native Baltics in improving their positions of power vis-a-vis the Baltic German landowners and Russian Imperial administrators. When the Russian Empire collapsed, the Baltics took advantage of the chaos to establish independent republics which lasted until World War II. Unlike the Central Asian peoples, whose national identity purportedly did not coalesce until they were organized under the Soviet Union, the Baltics experienced a national regression rather than progression in becoming part of the Soviet Union.(ZZ75,LL49-50,SS121)

A second recurring theme of the 1970s was the Baltics' pride in their non-Slavic heritages. Identifying with the West ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically rather than with Russia, the Baltic peoples held tenaciously to their unique cultures while in the Russian Empire and again under Soviet rule. Examples cited were the Estonian revival of the traditional national song festivals, attended by as many as 250,000 people, in which traditional songs and Finnish choruses were wildly applauded while Russian counterparts were virtually ignored; demands for the rehabilitation of independence era literature; and calls for retaining purity of the Estonian language, even in the official periodical *Eesti Kommunist*.(ZZ77,80).

Another recurring theme was the Baltic perception of demographic trends in the region as a threat to the native populations. Soviet census data showed that in Estonia, for example, the proportion of natives dropped from 75 per cent to 68 percent between 1959 and 1970.(SS123-4) This was due to the low native birthrate and the importation of others for the industry built under the Soviets.(SS119) Dissatisfaction grew as the Moscow planners forced industry dependent on outside resources and non-native workers on the Baltics, allowed the region's environment to be polluted, favored immigrants in increasingly scarce housing, and demanded that Baltics learn the language of the immigrants rather than vice versa.(SS124-5,ZZ80-81)

Important manifestations of nationalism also occurred in the economic realm. While Marxist-Leninists told the world that economic interests would bring the working classes of all nations together, in the Soviet Union, ironically, it was accentuating their differences. The importation of industry and workers foreign to the Baltics, and at the expense of the living standard that had been reached under independence, made the indigenous populations ever more resentful.(SS119-121) ECP leaders even dared to argue that local officials would do a better job with the economy than the distant planners in Moscow, thereby lessening the resentment by the native populations.(ZZ77,79)

The adoption of ultra-Marxism was the fifth reported manifestation of nationalism. This was the phenomenon of Estonians accepting Soviet-imposed Marxist ideology with fundamentalist fervor.(ZZ76) In earlier years, joining the ECP was considered collaboration; by the 1970s, it took on an air of "if you can't beat them, join them — and outdo them."(ZZ81) Whether the zealousness was due to the self-righteousness of converts or was an attempt to negotiate a better deal under the Soviet system is open to debate. In any case, these initial steps into the political realm were at times quite bold, harkening back to Marxist fundamentals or attempting to correct Russian interpretations of the ideology. For example, on the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union, the ECP First Secretary stressed the "unity of Soviet nationalities" while Brezhnev paid homage to the Russians as the "first among equals."(OO106) Estonian Communists openly wrote that the greater threat to the system was not an excess of intellectual freewheeling, but rather, bureaucratic conservatism.(ZZ90)

An emigre writer in 1978 remarked that "Estonian interpretations of Soviet nationality policy are conceived in a more rational, if not more liberal, vein than is commonplace elsewhere in the Soviet Union."(OO105) If not more "rational," they certainly were creative in protecting indigenous nationality interests. Such interpretations claimed that the "denationalization" efforts of the Soviet government did not advance "internationalization;" instead, they were based on a "methodological error in simplifying mutual dependence of class and national relations."(OO110) Others suggested that national revivals, such as in the Baltics, should not be interpreted

as reactionary but as vital to the formation of a distinctive, modern culture that would emerge from the blending the old and the new.(SS121) When the ECP failed to achieve more local control despite appeals to Lenin's federal compromise, the discussion went as far as to suggest a communist Estonia outside the Soviet Union in the form of a Soviet satellite People's Democracy.(ZZ81-82, SS132-133)

Finally, Baltic residents were also reported to have taken part in the Soviet-wide human rights movement, during which political factions such as the Estonian Democratic Movement and Estonian National Front emerged.(FFF,W,ZZ82-84). These efforts generated volumes of underground publications, appeals to international organizations, and, ultimately, a wave of repression.(ZZ82-84)

While Baltic nationalism was manifested in such a wide variety of ways in the 1970s, the earlier optimism that carried over from Khrushchev was dampened by increasing centralization and renewed repressions under Brezhnev. Thus many Western scholars continued to be pessimistic about long-term prospects for the Baltics. The opinion prevailed that the Soviet government remained firmly in power and the non-Russian nationalities would gradually disappear. (ZZ75,100;SS121)

The treatment of Soviet nationality policy by US scholars remained rather cautious into the mid-1980s. They reported continued Soviet denials of severe ethnic conflict.(X555-6) The constraints on nationalism were highlighted, ranging from repression; to co-option of individuals, elites, and ethnic groups; to control of vital resources.(X577) At the same time, the endurance of ethnic identity was recognized, and the accentuation of the issue as a result of economic deterioration in the USSR was acknowledged.(Z105,X555-6) Nevertheless, respected US academics held to the opinion that, despite the state of affairs in the Soviet Union, there generally needed to be no conflict between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the nation (X565), and that expectations of the USSR breaking up were exaggerated.(Z109,S26)

#### *Nationalism as a Factor of Consequence*

By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, US scholars began to consider ethnic activism in the Soviet Union to be of much greater consequence. Events in the Baltic republics were reportedly regularly in the popular media and received increasingly



serious treatment in professional business and political science journals. In addition to its courses on Soviet nationality politics, Harvard University featured Baltic leaders at its Russian Research Center seminars. Perhaps it took the Soviet leadership's acknowledgement of the impact of ethnic issues on the Soviet affairs for US scholars to see them in a new light.

Mikhail Gorbachev was in office as General Secretary approximately three years before he focused on nationality politics as a major concern. He came to power ill prepared by personal experience to deal with the nationalities issues, being among the few Soviet leaders who had had no career experience outside the Russian republic. He focused on the economic and political system with little understanding of the nationalities dimension to the Soviet system.(Y98,P327-8) In Gorbachev's first year as party general secretary, the CPSU declared that "the national question . . . has been solved successfully in the Soviet Union."(E19-20) Surprised that his campaign for "new thinking" in the interests of restructuring within the context of openness would unleash such public and republic elite activism(O2,Y92,E21), Gorbachev thought conciliatory measures and co-option of the elites would quiet the non-Russian voices.(F359,K34) Yet, at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPSU in February 1988, he recognized ethnic issues as a "crucially important vital question in [Soviet] society [needing] a very thorough review . . . . And along all lines — both in theory and in practice."(P325) Then, just a few months later, at the 19th Party Congress in June 1988, he waived, calling for resolution of nationality problems through "objective" research and analysis and renewed efforts to instill patriotism and internationalism through education, propaganda, military service, and other traditionally Soviet methods of socialization.(F341) By 1989 Gorbachev seemed to have recognized that economics, politics, and ethnic issues were intertwined in the Soviet Union.(P352) In July 1989, in a nationwide broadcast, he spoke of the dangers to his program from ethnic conflict and promised increased government attention to the nationalities demands and aspirations.(F341)

As the 1980s came to a close, US scholars observed that Gorbachev's reform platform and frustrations among the nationalities came together to create an

unprecedented dynamism among the non-Russians, especially the Baltics. Gorbachev's ideas of reform were encouraging in themselves, but when coupled with his calls for local initiative and experimentation(CC149), they became the opening for the Baltic republics to forge ahead with a variety of measures. (F360;E25;O4,8) As reported in *Problems of Communism*, the success of the Spring 1987 protests of the ecologically damaging mining of phosphates in northeast Estonia set an important precedent:

This success prepared the ground for further protest actions because it bolstered the confidence of the protesters and showed those who had remained quiescent that a significant number of people were no longer afraid to speak out. The attitude that "They'll never permit us to do that" changed into "We'll do it anyway." Valuable organizing experience also had been obtained, and the regime's grip on the mass media was broken. History had begun to move.(YY15-16)

Thus emboldened, the Baltics began a concerted effort to restore their histories that had been hidden or distorted under Soviet historiography. Among the events reported in the West were the annual demonstrations from 1987 onward on the anniversaries of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; the celebration of national holidays dating from independence and earlier; open celebration of religious holidays; demonstrations on the anniversaries of the 1920 Soviet recognition of the independent republics; articles on the Stalin terror and demonstrations on the anniversaries of the Soviet occupation of the region in 1940 and major deportations thereafter; unveiling of monuments to heroes of the independence; and use of the national flags in place of the SSR flags.(YY16-18)

These efforts had significance beyond commemoration of important events. As Revimi Velliste, the Chairman of the Estonian Heritage Society, founded in December 1988 for the express purpose of "winning back" Estonia's history, told *History Today*, "For historians, such work is not just symbolic: it is a step toward restoring independence."(BBB9) One of the arguments of the Baltic states is that they are not seeking an initial recognition of their independence, but a restoration of independence taken illegally under the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The Soviet admission of the existence of the secret protocols and their illegality under

international law was an extremely significant success in the history restoration effort.(BBB10)

Major steps were also reported to have been taken on the economic and political fronts. In September 1987, a "Four-Man" proposal on economic autonomy was published by Estonian leaders, calling for constituent republic jurisdiction over its own economy, introduction of complete self-financing throughout the republic, establishment of convertible republic currencies, and enterprise autonomy in trade relations with other countries. In April 1988, both Popular Front and Green Movements were formed in the Estonian SSR. In June of the same year, the conservative ECP First Secretary was replaced with a Gorbachev protege who supported the Popular Front platform. The first calls for independence were made at an April 1988 meeting of creative unions by the editor of *Vikerkaar*, Rein Veidemann, who declared:

If self-management cannot be implemented within the framework of the existing legislation of the federal state, then the constitutional right of self-determination must be exerted so as to shift to self-management through these means.(YY18)

In August of the same year, the Estonian National Independence Party was formed, and in early 1989 the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies resulted in the Popular Front winning 27 of 36 seats. Native Estonians won 29 seats in the Congress and 11 of 12 additional seats through all-Union organizations.(YY18)

The recurring theme of Soviet failure to recognize the importance nationalism surfaced once again in the reports. This time, however, Soviet deprecations of ethnic discontent took a very interesting twist in that national activism was belittled as having solely an economic basis. In March 1990, a leading Soviet economist, Pavel Bunich, was quoted to say:

In America you have 50 states; none are trying to leave, because your economy is strong. We have republics thinking about running away only because our economy is in trouble.(K34)

He went on to maintain that after 10 years or so of perestroika, the Soviet economy would be so attractive no one would prefer independence.

Without a doubt, economic motivations are strong. The inequities in development and damage caused by alien industries forced on the republics have resulted in a deep-seated resentment.(S6) The exploitation of the republics by central planners in terms of monocultures in Central Asia and the failure to return the benefits of Baltic productivity to the region has made the periphery increasingly impatient with the ineptness of the Soviet system.(CC149) With the Soviet economy in collapse, some Soviet citizens have turned to emigration, corruption, alcoholism and other antisocial behavior, and the unofficial market.(H21) Others, such as the Baltic republics, initiated republic-based market economies in the face of the failure of centrally planned command economy.(CC149,JJ44) In November 1989, the Soviet Supreme Soviet confirmed these efforts by passing legislation permitting economic autonomy based on market principles (R287). Both Soviet leaders and Western observers recognized that that this

singled the Baltics out as a 'laboratory' for liberalized economic relations, both because of persistent and vocal demands for greater autonomy by the citizenry and a widespread perception that the region, among all those of the USSR, is the best prepared to function under reduced centralized control.(D1)

The Soviet attempt to dismiss ethnic activism and initiative as "merely" economically motivated is a dangerous position for them to take. First, if over 70 years of Communist central control has led to such utter failure as is being reported, why should Soviet citizens, Russian and non-Russian alike, believe Moscow would do better in the next 10 years? More importantly, economic manifestations of nationalism have heretofore been forbidden territory. Social and cultural activism has been tolerated over the years, but even that has led to repression. It would be easy to shrug the economic explanation off as a typically Marxist interpretation, economics being the basic human motivation in Marxist-Leninist ideology. But, if economics is the single most important and legitimate impulse, then economic nationalism among the republics is the most dangerous to the union — and in an ideology in which economics is everything, economic autonomy is tantamount to political autonomy.

The evidence abounded in the late 1980s and early 1990s of the growing economic autonomy and its political consequences. US and Baltic scholars writing in US journals (JJ,HH,DD,G), lecturing at conferences in the United States(II), and speaking to seminars at Harvard University(PP,T) related how the Baltics, in particular, organized their own activities. The Baltic republics did so, first, because Moscow offered no alternatives, much less better ones, in the face of pressing, immediate needs, and, second, because they wished to fend for themselves, for better or for worse. The educated native elites were in place, there was living memory of having done better under independence, and the pace of democratization was accelerating (YY12,F361,CC153). The trends in economic reform in the Baltics included actions that would only increase economic autonomy, such as local ownership of the republic's natural resources, separate currencies, independent budgets, and inter-republic and foreign trade and cooperation. Given this sort of progress at local initiative, the republics had less and less tolerance for the absurd contradictions in the Soviet system, such as having the theoretical constitutional right to secede from the union but not being allowed to set the price of a local theater ticket.(JJ42) Their tolerance was further tested by Moscow's minimal reforms, halfway measures, and failure to pass enabling legislation.(VV). It was felt that these economic mechanisms and the democratic institutions and processes being put in place by the republics themselves would, at the minimum, result a Soviet federation quite different from the present in four or five years.(JJ38,45) Such decentralized decisionmaking, having been established at local initiative, would necessarily result in a redistribution of power to republics.(R286-7,MMvii-viii) Such observations of self-empowerment at the republic level and the prospects for change were extraordinary; less than a decade ago, US scholars were saying that that ethnic discontent was both manageable and inconsequential.

## CONCLUSION

Today, then, US scholars are no longer saying that nationality issues are irrelevant in the USSR. Instead, they are saying that nationality problems are endemic to the Soviet system, aggravated by Soviet attempts at social engineering and by economic and political difficulties. Ethnic discontent has been worsened by the fact that the Marxist ideology denied the central authorities the tools with which to deal with nationalism. Denial of the persistence of nationalism, failure to appreciate the differences among the various ethnic groups, and the failure to recognize nationality issues as embedded in the system has resulted in the Soviet Union not dealing with its nationality problems effectively. Accordingly, nationalism is now recognized as a significant political factor in the Soviet Union for the foreseeable future.

No longer dismissing the prospects of independence, some scholars publishing in US journals are even suggesting that the steps the republics are taking on their own initiative will inevitably lead to independent statehood. Others suggest that, just as the Baltics took advantage of the breakups of the German and Russian empires to declare their independence in 1918, the current chaos in the Soviet Union will enable them to restore their independence in the late 20th Century. Among the Soviet nationalities, the Baltics are considered to have the best prospects because of their geographical position on the coastal periphery, well organized local movements, education levels, productivity, and living standards. In any event, the study of Soviet nationality politics and its manifestations in the Baltic republics has, at last, come into its own in the United States as a field of serious academic endeavor.

## POSTSCRIPT

### *On Deserving Independence*

In doing the research for this paper, I came across something I had not anticipated in the courses and seminars at Harvard and in the popular media. This unexpected phenomenon was the questioning of whether the non-Russian Soviet nationalities "deserve" independence. The following three examples were particularly poignant. In the first instance, the Harvard instructor for "Politics and Nationality in the Soviet Union" closed the semester with a commentary on the prospects for independence for the Soviet minorities. He concluded independence was not likely because the republics were bound to remain politically and economically dependent on the Soviet Union. He also suggested it might be best if they did not become independent because interethnic violence would surely occur if the non-Russian nationalities did not remain under the control of the Soviet Union; because during the period of independence the Baltic republics did not manage their parliamentary democracies well, having multiple changes of government; and because autocratic regimes prevailed in the Baltics for part of the interwar years. Furthermore, he doubted the depths of nationalism, which, in terms of the post-Enlightenment movement, did not reach the Baltics until the 19th Century or Central Asia until 1924 with the imposition of socialism. In the second instance, during a Russian Research Center Seminar featuring the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of Latvia, the moderator similarly asked the speaker if the Baltics could truly be economically and politically independent of the Soviet Union. Finally, the March 1991 issue of the *National Geographic* printed letters to the editor regarding a November 1990 article on the Baltics. Three of the five writers reacted quite negatively to the national aspirations of the Baltics. The letters criticized the practice of democracy in the independent Baltics, the current Baltic measures to curb the impact of alien industry and workers,

and indigenous collaboration during the German occupation. One letter ended with a particularly hostile, "I have little sympathy for the Baltics' fight for independence."

I will take the leeway I gave myself in disclaiming the academic rigidity of this paper to comment on the above. In doing so, I will not mention the international law foundations for the claims of Baltic independence. Those matters have been more than adequately discussed and documented elsewhere, both in the works written in the post-World War II era and in recent discussions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

I will not deny that geographical neighbors often have close economic relationships, especially when one is a source of raw materials and the other of finished products and professional expertise. I also will not deny that neighbors are always mindful of one another's politics. However, it should be remembered that even the smallest of the Baltic states, Estonia, was agriculturally self-sufficient and had a favorable foreign trade balance during independence, despite having Russian markets largely closed to it. Even the most powerful states today have their sovereignty limited by economic interdependence and international political arrangements, but that does not make them less "qualified" for independence.

I also will not deny the interethnic violence in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus region and the political violence in the Baltics. However, an argument could be made that the Soviet ethno-territorial structure exacerbates rivalries in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus and that violence elsewhere has been an instrument of Soviet repression, not of rebellion; therefore, the Soviet regime may be causing violence, not preventing it.

In addition, I will not deny that there were political difficulties in the struggling young democracies of the independent Baltic States. Democracy was not born in 1918 fully formed and mature, like Venus rising from the sea. It was largely self taught in the three Baltics states during final years of the Russian Empire and the early years of independence, despite the resistance of the Imperial governors and the German landowners who had held privileged positions under the Tsar. Nor will I deny that, should the Baltics states regain their independence, they will experience diversities of opinion and the turbulence of transition. As the Fletcher professor lecturing on



"Reform and Change in East Central Europe" commented, it is unfair and unrealistic of the Western world to hold the struggling new democracies to a pass/fail standard of political perfection. Peoples living under communist rule have been told for decades what opinions to hold, what party to belong to, when and how to vote, when to demonstrate, and when to celebrate. The diversities of opinion, proliferation of political parties, and lower voter turnout are in themselves celebrations of democracy, the same choices exercised in long standing democracies.

I will not deny that the political philosophies sweeping the Western world also influenced the Baltic states. Just as nationalism expressed in the terms of the post-Enlightenment movement reached the Baltics in the 19th Century and socialism made its impact early in the 20th Century, there were advocates of national-socialist doctrines a generation later. It takes a very Eurocentric narrowness, however, to question the validity of nationalism among Soviet nationalities because their ethnic identities may not have been expressed in precisely the same way at precisely the same time as nationalism emerged in England and France or because it was organized differently in the Central Asian cultural and historical context. This viewpoint reflects the same mindset that labelled Western Civilization courses as "World History" in the 1950s/60s, that permits one civilization to call another "barbarian," and that allows explorers to "discover" sites in already inhabited continents.

I will not deny that some non-indigenous residents of the Baltic region are fearful of changes in the republics. However, the Baltics states have experience with accommodating minorities, as they did in accordance with the post-1919 minorities treaties under the League of Nations. It can be argued the Baltics did so much more successfully than multi-ethnic states and empires then and since, as evidenced by the fact that most of the Baltic German landowners did not leave the region (where their ancestors had arrived with the Teutonic Crusades) upon independence despite extensive land reform, but in the 1940s when the return of the Soviets was feared. It can also be argued that much of the fear of the non-Baltics is based in possible loss of privilege. For example, the much criticized law recognizing Estonian as an official language does not, as reported, require all non-Estonian-speakers to learn Estonian in four years, but

enables Estonian speakers to receive state services in Estonian, just as Russian speakers may now demand.

Finally, I will not deny that there was indigenous collaboration in the Baltics during World War II. Regrettably, there was terrible human suffering in the belligerent and occupied countries and plenty of blame to be shared. The critics, however, who try to judge from the early 1940s "whose side the Baltics were on" should understand that the Baltics had no viable position to take. The Baltic governments felt that, given their geostrategic position and the international context of the times, only neutrality would avoid giving the Third Reich and the Soviet Union pretext for occupying the Baltics. Yet, the protection of neutrality was denied them. The Baltics were ground between the two warring powers, occupied by the Soviets, then the Germans, and again by the Soviets, and terrorized through it all by the occupiers and the resistance movements. Both occupiers imprisoned, deported, and conscripted\* Baltic citizens, and then persecuted those that had been mobilized by the other. To blame the Baltics for not resisting one occupation or the other more effectively is to blame the victim. Estonia, for example, had barely over 1.5 million people before the first Soviet occupation, during which they lost over 60,000 in 1940 alone to the Soviet terror. It is one thing to judge individual war criminals. It is another to judge entire nations, themselves suffering enslavement and possible extinction, on whether they sufficiently challenged forces that threatened to defeat far more powerful countries.

It appears that, for decades, US scholars accepted at face value Soviet claims that they had solved the USSR's nationality problems. Now it seems they may have acquiesced in Soviet interpretations of the interwar and wartime histories of the Baltic states. As the Baltic peoples continue the effort to regain their histories and as the scholarship in the United States continues to improve, a more balanced account of 20th century Baltic history will come to light. In the meantime, to judge the worthiness of nations for independence is a tricky business. It is, at worst, hypocritical, and at best, useless, to hold nations selectively to vague and changing qualification standards for

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\*Article 51 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War now prohibits such conscription.

independence. Decisions of recognition are, first and foremost, made in the context of the political interest of the countries affording the recognition of independence, not on some universal standards of worthiness. To judge whether nations deserve independence from the comfort of one's own freedom is unseemly.

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