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Department of State, Memorandum, 'Problems of Compatibility of Collective Security Negotiations with the USSR and Present US Policy Towards the Baltic States'

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Summary:

History of US relations with the Baltic states and the current policy of non-recognition of Soviet control.

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**PROBLEMS OF COMPATIBILITY OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY
 NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE USSR AND PRESENT US POLICY
 TOWARDS THE BALTIC STATES**

The US has not recognized the incorporation of the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the USSR. We continue to recognize and to deal with the Baltic diplomatic and consular representatives in this country who served the last independent governments of those States prior to Soviet occupation in June 1940. The Government of the USSR, on the other hand, considers the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian so-called Soviet Socialist Republics to be 3 of the 16 constituent Republics which make up the USSR.

The position of the US with respect to Soviet incorporation was first enunciated on July 23, 1940 (see Annex B) and has been repeatedly stated thereafter. A recent statement was that of the Secretary on November 30, 1953 (see Annex C) before the Select House Committee to Investigate and Study the Seizure of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia by the USSR, in which he said that:

"The captive peoples should know that they are not forgotten, that we are not reconciled to their fate, and, above all, that we are not prepared to seek illusory safety for ourselves by a bargain with their masters which would confirm their captivity."

This statement made in anticipation of the Bermuda meeting of December 1953 and the Berlin Conference of February 1954 also included the declaration that:

"We do not look upon the conference table as a place where we surrender our principles, but rather as a place for making our principles prevail."

Particular American principles to which reference was made earlier in the Secretary's statement were those expressed in the Atlantic Charter relating to our wish "to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have forcibly been deprived of them."

In gauging the probable impact on the Baltic peoples of possible "collective security" negotiations between the Soviet bloc and NATO powers, the following considerations are pertinent:

1. More than some of the other captive peoples, the Baltic peoples have a deeply-rooted experience with Russian expansionism as a predecessor

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-2-

of Soviet expansionism.

2. During the period 1920-1940, the Baltic peoples looked to membership in the League of Nations for protection of a "collective security" nature, sought to remain neutral as between the USSR to the East and Germany and Poland to the west, and in their relations with the USSR, followed circumspect, relatively friendly policies bearing most of the characteristics generally associated with the concept of "peaceful co-existence."

3. The destruction of the national independence and personal freedom of the Baltic peoples after June 1940 involved the open violation by the USSR of some 16 different bilateral and multilateral treaties of peace, non-aggression, conciliation, and mutual assistance.

In further exposition of these considerations, it is noted that the imposition of Russian rule over Estonia and Latvia began with the victories of Peter the Great over Swedish forces between 1700 and 1725. By the time Catherine the Great died in 1796, Russian victories over Polish and Lithuanian forces had brought Lithuania also under Russian rule. Throughout the 19th century the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians clung to their ethnic identities in the face of an imposed Russification. With the collapse of the Tsarist Empire after 1917, and encouraged morally by President Wilson's support for the principle of self-determination, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians established themselves as independent and viable nation-states in 1918, won universal recognition as such, and thereafter successfully maintained the internal economic and political stability of the new Republics.

In 1920 Soviet Russia made peace treaties with the Baltic Republics, recognizing without reservation their independence. It declared in these treaties that it voluntarily and forever renounced all sovereign rights over the Baltic peoples and the territories of the Baltic States.

On July 28, 1922 the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the Baltic Governments, having found them entitled to recognition by virtue of their internal stability and good practice internationally. Throughout their period of independence the Baltic Governments maintained friendly relations with the United States, and at the same time, with the USSR also. The conduct of the Baltic Governments toward the USSR was extremely circumspect, even cordial and accommodating, in comparison with the attitudes towards the USSR of most other governments.

Between 1920 and 1940 the Baltic States and the USSR came to be bound by some 16 different treaties of peace, non-aggression, conciliation, and

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DECLASSIFIED
 Authority NND 32884

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-3-

mutual assistance. (See Annex A). Nevertheless, in open violation of these agreements, the USSR forcibly occupied the Baltic States in June 14, 1940, dissolved the legitimate governments, installed puppet administrations, staged the by now familiar rigged, single-list elections, and caused the new Communist regimes to request "incorporation" into the USSR as constituent Republics. This process was carried out at a brisk pace on a time-table of some three months duration, functioning contemporaneously in each country.

For appearances sake, the USSR has argued that incorporation was an expression of the free will of the Baltic peoples and that the Baltic Governments were conspiring among themselves or in concert with either Germany or Great Britain against the USSR. Neither assertion has any basis in fact.

In franker moments the USSR has indicated that possession of the Baltic States was deemed advantageous to the Soviet power position vis-a-vis Germany and other Western powers. Incorporation was a direct consequence of the Nazi-Soviet accords of August 23 and September 28, 1939, in a secret supplement to which Germany agreed to the inclusion of the Baltic Republics in the Soviet sphere of influence in return for a free hand against Poland and Poland's allies.

The Baltic peoples of course do not consider that supposed strategic advantages justify Soviet incorporation of their countries, and destruction of their national independence and personal freedoms. They are acutely conscious of having tried "peaceful coexistence" with the USSR, of having depended upon treaties of various sorts with the USSR, only to have the USSR break the treaties as soon as expedient.

These generally well-recognized Baltic attitudes of distrust of negotiating security pledges with the USSR appear to result more from fear of Soviet bad faith than from any deep-seated preference for alternative policies. Baltic foreign policy from 1920 to 1940 demonstrated that by virtue of their size and location the Baltic peoples were strongly attracted to policies of bilateral and multilateral pledges of non-aggression and of "peaceful coexistence" with their Russian neighbor.

It appears, on balance, that considerations of impact on the Baltic peoples and on our Baltic policy need not be taken to exclude the possibility of negotiation with the USSR in the field of collective security, provided that such negotiations are carried out in the spirit of making our principles prevail and that this emphasis is made sufficiently clear to convince the Baltic peoples that encouraging words do not conceal discouraging deeds. Such negotiations would presumably have to be directed openly toward achieving some favorable change in the present status of Eastern and Central Europe, which the signatory powers would pledge to respect, i.e., not apply force or the threat of force, and so on, to change.

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