

American Policy towards the Baltic States

Some recommendations for the policy-makers

By Stephen Blank



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Summary

Since the Baltic States regained their independence in 1991 they have consistently looked to the West, and particularly the United States, to be the main champion of their security. This policy orientation has also been successful, as the Baltic States have become members of NATO and the European Union. Thus, the U.S. "wager on the Baltic" has been an eminently successful. But that wager must still be upheld for the Russian threat to the Baltic States continues. This essay duly examines U.S. efforts to uphold Baltic security within a Europe whole and free with special emphasis on defensive measures taking place through U.S. leadership in NATO and through programs to further the integration of Central and Eastern Europe, e.g. the Three Seas Initiative, particularly with regard to energy.

Keywords

Baltic States, U.S., Three Seas Initiative, NATO, Defense, Energy

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Introduction

Since the Baltic States regained their independence in 1991 they have consistently looked to the West, and particularly the United States, to be the main champion of their security. This perspective continues to the present as Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė told U.S. President Donald Trump that the U.S. role in NATO is essential since it has a “vital voice” in that alliance. Moreover, she also claimed “we expect together with the United States to go ahead with deep reforms of NATO, especially on decision-making, on decisiveness, on the denial which we expect to see from Russia in case of aggression.” And without the U.S. none of this would be possible.¹

This policy orientation has also been successful, as the Baltic States have become members of NATO and the European Union. Moreover, they show no signs of the backsliding towards the Populism that now disfigures the Central and East European landscape in countries like Hungary and Poland. This hardly means that the Baltic States are without flaws. But it does mean that these are vibrant and developing if not consolidated democracies who are moving forward both on political and economic grounds to claim their share of the vision of a Europe whole and free –the watchword of U.S. policy – and also of a Europe that is wholly democratic. Thus, the security of the Baltic States has become a key part of the American approach to Europe. Indeed, the Obama Administration went to considerable lengths to see to it that the Baltic States were treated exactly as the U.S.’ more venerable allies in Western Europe are treated when it came to providing security and defense.²

Thus, the U.S. “wager on the Baltic” has been an eminently successful. But that wager must still be upheld for the Russian threat to the Baltic States continues. For example, “Russia privately warned US Secretary of Defense James Mattis that if there were a war in the Baltics, Russia would not hesitate to use small tactical nuclear weapons against NATO, U.S. journalist Bob Woodward writes in his new book.”³ Similarly German Prime Minister Angela Merkel recently declared that virtually every post-Soviet republic, including the Baltic States, and the German troops stationed there as part of NATO’s defense plan, faces Russian hybrid war “which includes internal conflicts triggered by Russia.”⁴

Russian Strategy

Indeed, that threat is part of Moscow’s broader strategy of multi-domain coercion that employs all the instruments of state power to transform the status quo in Europe and beyond.⁵ It also is part of what Russia’s Ambassador to Lithuania in 2014, Aleksandr’ Udalt’sov called a clear and well thought out policy for all the Baltic States and each one individually⁶. Here we must understand that from Moscow’s standpoint it has been under attack by the West since about 2003-2004 and thus envisions itself as being at war with the West, albeit a non-kinetic war (except for Ukraine and Syria). Thus Vladimir Putin has been at war with the U.S. and the West for over a decade.⁷ Already on January 18, 2005 Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told the Academy of Military Sciences, that,

*Let us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people and organizations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation.*⁸

More recently, Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Moscow office of the Carnegie Endowment, observed that, for some time, “the Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode.”⁹ One sign of this war is that by 2007-2008, i.e. a decade ago, European Security services were reporting across the board an enormous expansion in Russian espionage, both traditional and economic, across Europe.¹⁰ And it was at that time that one of the first probes in this war, namely the cyber-strikes orchestrated by Moscow against Estonia, aimed to take down most, if not all of Estonia’s socio-economic-political institutions through cyber attacks.¹¹ Similarly the French analyst Julien Nocetti observes that, Russian activities in the “information domain” which are only part of the overall ensemble of its national security policies “would indicate that Russia already considers itself to be in a state of war” with the West.¹² And at least some writers argue that Moscow sees its Baltic exclave, Kaliningrad as being the target of a NATO threat to detach it from Russia. And as a result Moscow has converted Kaliningrad into a heavily fortified bastion replete with nuclear-capable Iskander missiles.¹³ At the same time it appears that Moscow has essentially written off any attempt to improve ties with at least some of the Baltic States. Indeed, Udalt’sov recently stated that Vilnius had driven bilateral relations into a dead end and that there was no hope for improving things as long as Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius continued in office.¹⁴

The Baltic has long been a theater in this multi-dimensional war it not only confronts the threat of a direct military attack but also of an attack based on active measures and information warfare directed from Moscow among

Russian minorities aiming to discredit and delegitimize the Baltic States and create either real or simulated domestic insurgencies that could generate a pretext for military intervention, as in Ukraine, on behalf of an allegedly threatened Russian minority. Although those particular threats are apparently not imminently likely; there are clearly ample grounds for concern among Baltic governments given Russia's steady employment of the ethnic issue card against them along with the ongoing Russian military buildup along their frontier that gives Moscow an undisputed conventional superiority in that theater.¹⁵

Past experience also justifies this concern. Western analysts have long known that from Moscow's standpoint the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Baltic States as well as those attributes of all the post-Soviet republics and the former Warsaw Pact countries are merely a matter of expedience not law.¹⁶ Thus James Sherr has written that,

*While Russia formally respects the sovereignty of its erstwhile republics; it also reserves the right to define the content of that sovereignty and their territorial integrity. Essentially Putin's Russia has revived the Tsarist and Soviet view that sovereignty is a contingent factor depending on power, culture, and historical norms, not an absolute and unconditional principle of world politics.*¹⁷

Indeed, signifying that Russia does not believe these are truly sovereign states Moscow threatened sanctions on Latvia for making Latvian language compulsory in all secondary schools.¹⁸ More recently it has conducted missile tests in and around the Baltic that forced commercial flights to avoid Sweden and Latvia and closed off Latvia's exclusive economic maritime zone.¹⁹

Similarly internal or external tension in and around a state suits Russia perfectly because these tensions help generate a pro-Russian party within that country or incline it towards Russia if it confronts U.S. pressure. Likewise, Susan Stewart of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik recently wrote about the CIS,

*Russia is more than willing to tolerate instability and economic weakness in the neighboring countries, assuming they are accompanied by an increase in Russian influence. In fact, Russia consciously contributes to the rising instability and deterioration of the economic situation in some, if not all, of these countries.*²⁰

Examples of the use of these tactics abound. In 2007 Moscow launched an unprovoked cyber-strike against the entire Estonian state for moving the grave of the Soviet unknown soldier out of the center of Tallinn.²¹ In addition, Moscow has regularly used energy wars and directed against the Baltic States to "bring them into line", i.e. a form of economic war.²² Thus a 2011 assessment of Russian policy in Latvia concluded,

*We see several, interrelated short-term [Russian] strategies focusing on exercising ever-increasing influence in the politics of the target states. What we do not see is a policy of military conquest but, rather, a gradual but unswerving drive to eventually regain dominance over the social, economic, and political affairs of what are to become entirely dependent client states.*²³

Neither has this changed in the period since 2011. Apart from the continuing agitation against Baltic ethnic policies, military buildups, and both overt and covert information warfare and active measures Russian writers continue to insist that without Russian support and participation the Baltic States' economies would collapse.²⁴ Likewise high-ranking Russian officials, regularly inveigh against Baltic minority policies and the so-called "heroization" of Nazism, a self-created Russian fabrication.²⁵ Therefore we should hardly be surprised that Lithuania and Poland have each moved to build their own LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminals and exit from dependence on Russian gas apart from intensifying their defense preparations against Russia.

U.S. Policy

Accordingly U.S. Baltic policy pertains to the hard and soft security dimensions of the Baltic States, to include military, cyber, diplomatic, and economic support of the Baltic States against Russia. But the hard security dimension was late in coming. NATO went beyond the Paris summit agreement that NATO had "no intention no plan and no reason" to deploy or store nuclear weapons on the territory of new members and in the immediate post-Cold War environment would renounce "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces there."²⁶ But NATO went further, it made no contingency plan for defending Poland and the Baltic States and Washington, supported by Berlin explicitly barred MC-161 the secret NATO committee that composes threat assessments from considering any military dangers from Russia until 2009-2010 after the Russian cyber-strikes on Estonia and war with Georgia in 2008. But even those plans only stipulated reinforcements in a crisis and were not true defense plans. As a result

they were hardly credible or viable. Only in 2013 with operation Steadfast Jazz did NATO begin to consider the possibility of a Russian threat. But in 2014 the combination of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a vast increase in Russian overflights and naval probes of NATO, the evidence of the success of Russia's earlier military reform, and of its Zapad-2013 exercise did NATO begin to address itself seriously to the question of Baltic defense, including Sweden and Finland as well as Poland and the Baltic States.²⁷ And NATO did so under U.S. leadership that was expressed in visits by President Obama and Vice-President Biden to the region and the reaffirmation by them of the U.S.' ironclad commitment to their security and NATO.²⁸ Those events have galvanized both the U.S. and NATO to the point where the U.S. now participates in substantial fashion, even in Swedish exercises and Sweden and Finland take part in NATO exercises.²⁹

This transformation of U.S. and NATO defense policy in the Baltic is most clearly manifest in the NATO summit communiqués from Newport, Wales in 2014, Warsaw in 2016, and Brussels in 2018. And it is clear that Washington was the driving force in changing NATO policy. At Wales NATO created a new Readiness Action Plan that contained assurance measures for the Baltic States and the more concrete Very High Readiness Joint Action Task Force (VJTF). The VJTF is a 4000-man sized brigades that has subsequently been reconfigured as four battalions of 1000 men each from many NATO members that can respond within a matter of days to any action anywhere. NATO Standing Naval Forces were also given greater emphasis while air policing in the Baltic was continued and the multinational corps HQ in Poland was strengthened.³⁰

By 2015 Washington was providing, not just troops for the VJTF, it agreed to preposition tanks and artillery in the Baltic bit also many "enabling capabilities", e.g. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and inter-theater lift, command and control, special operations capabilities, logistical expertise, and assets, and precision-joint-fire capabilities.³¹ And NATO added to this package by upgrading its training and exercises with notable exercises taking place in Poland by 2015 to defend NATO's Eastern Flank.³²

Since then the Baltic States have all significantly upgrade their defense spending, preparation, and readiness.³³ They and some like-minded U.S. observers have also raised the idea of a permanent U.S./NATO force deployment in the Baltic States.³⁴ Although this has not yet happened contingency planning for the possibility of this outcome is clearly taking place. Thus the U.S. Air Force (USAF) has "ramped up" investments that would allow it to deploy to allied bases in Eastern Europe close to the Baltic. Indeed the Trump Administration has authorized \$828 million in fiscal year 2019 out of the overall Pentagon budget of \$714 trillion to rebuild military infrastructure across Europe to deter Russia and reinforce the allies thereby doubling military construction funding under another post-2014 U.S. initiative, the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). And these plans exist alongside of existing programs to logistics; build ammunition storage, staging areas, and improvements, bulk fuel facilities and improvements to ports and airfields.³⁵

Since the Wales summit not only has the quality of U.S. forces apparently improved thanks to investments in the Baltic States, but NATO has greatly expanded its military footprint there as well.³⁶ Apart from using Amari air base in Estonia for air policing and prepositioning tanks and other equipment the U.S. by 2015 was regularly rotating A-10 fighters to Europe, increasing training with the Baltic States and other NATO allies, rotating combat teams and prepositioning equipment for a second brigade combat team in Central and Eastern Europe, continually deploying U.S. troops in the region, establishing force integration units for rapid command and control centers to facilitate deployment of troops, and creating pre-positioned European activity set to include tanks, infantry, combat vehicles and self-propelled artillery across Eastern Europe.³⁷

And at the NATO Brussels Summit in 2018 NATO signed off on an American plan called the Readiness Initiative where allies have committed by 2020 to have 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 naval combat vessels ready for deployment within 30 days. At present, thanks to previous initiatives the NATO Response Force (NRF) consists of 3 multinational brigade (one of 5000 soldiers as part of the VJTF) and two as part of the Initial Follow on Forces Group (IFFG) reinforced with army, navy, and air components totaling 40,000 troops. They can be deployed from 2 to 45 days in any conflict region.³⁸ Beyond these decisions Estonia, Denmark, and Latvia signed into life the new Northern Multinational Divisions Command with Canada, Great Britain and Lithuania as contributing countries. This organization will provide continuous operational overview of the Baltic manage the 2-4 brigades under its command and coordinate regional exercises and operations.³⁹

As a result of these innovations in NATO and U.S. policy the alliance with the U.S. and the wager on the Baltics seems to be stronger than ever. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius says he has no doubt whatsoever about the U.S. commitment to NATO and their commitment to the Baltic States.⁴⁰ Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas similarly observed that due to the aforementioned defense innovations Estonia's security is now on a firmer footing particularly with the return of Canadian forces to Europe and the participation of the USA. Therefore the

enhanced international cooperation increases security for everyone.⁴¹

The Energy Dimension

However, the strong U.S. support for the Baltic States does not end with military policy but rather extends into energy issues that are among the most important issues on the European security agenda. President Trump's strong opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea is already a matter of record.⁴² In this context we must remember that not only is energy one of Moscow's most fundamental weapons for securing economic and political footholds in neighboring states, but also in then using that foothold to subvert and corrupt their governments, media, and public institutions.⁴³ And throughout this period Moscow has steadfastly tried to use that weapon against the Baltic States to alter their policies and influence their politics.⁴⁴

To avoid Russia's use of energy as a weapon of economic-political blackmail both Lithuania and Poland have built their own LNG terminals at Klaipeda and Swinoujscie respectively. While both terminals have already received shipments of U.S. LNG and the Trump and Obama Administrations has long advocated exporting gas abroad; the opportunities for doing something concrete about it have only recently come into view.⁴⁵ However, due to the higher U.S. prices in fact very little gas has been exported to Poland Lithuania until now. So in 2017 the U.S. only exported 3440 TCF of gas (thousand cubic feet) to Poland and 6,844 to Lithuania.⁴⁶ So much more can and should be done here. Undoubtedly Russia's rush to build the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline even before obtaining all the necessary licenses has made this a matter of some urgency as well as tension in U.S.-German relations.⁴⁷ At the same time, the recent EU-U.S. agreement on talks to reduce all tariffs and trade barriers on all non-automotive industrial goods the EU also expressed its desire to import more U.S. LNG.⁴⁸ That desire fully comports with the Trump Administration's ambitions to export more gas to Europe, an ambition that on both sides of the Atlantic was first expressed in 2014 and has apparently grown since then.⁴⁹ Indeed, according to Obama Administration officials they had already succeeded in lowering Ukraine's dependence on Russian gas by 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea and the Donbass.⁵⁰ Moreover, the policy of aggressively championing U.S. LNG exports to Europe also entailed helping U.S. oil companies help countries develop their own resources as Exxon is now doing with Romania.⁵¹

So clearly the will to support the Baltic States in the energy field is discernible. But there are obstacles that must first be overcome. Many, if not most of the members of the initiative are landlocked so U.S. exports cannot reach them directly. This highlights the need for interconnectors to link them up to terminals such as the ones in Poland, Lithuania, and Croatia or for building pipelines like the BRUA (Bulgaria-Romania- Hungary-Austria) that will connect countries to non-European suppliers. Second, U.S. prices are still higher than Russian prices. So, for example, Lithuania in 2017 was negotiating with Gazprom to increase gas imports because the price of those imports fell. But it has also signed a deal with Norway's Statoil to buy over 1 bcm (Billion cubic meters) since 2016 out of a total demand of 2bcm annually. In other words, the deal with Statoil will reduce Gazprom's monopoly power in Lithuania by 50 percent.⁵² Nevertheless such exports from the U.S. Norway, or others, even where they do not displace Russian supplies, force other suppliers like Russia to slash prices as Gazprom did by 20 percent for Lithuania due to the *credible threat* offered by U.S. competition.⁵³ And reportedly other prices on European contracts also went down as a result of America's presence in the European gas market so tangible economic benefits from that presence have already made themselves felt.⁵⁴

U.S. and other suppliers' mere presence in the market clearly exercises a downward pressure on prices, so even if they still buy Russian gas their terms are better, prices are cheaper, and economic leverage vis-à-vis Moscow is enhanced. Those trends free up more resources for investments relating to energy infrastructure, including power generation, which is an overlooked sector but where multilateral collaboration can probably lower prices and improve supplies without relying on Moscow's tender mercies. Therefore,

For Eastern European nations to strengthen energy security — and thus, national security — traditional tools are most likely to be successful — diversification of energy sources, building of gas storage, dual-fuel capacity of power plants and more. For this reason, the U.S. should not allow exuberance over increased gas exports to distract from the critical need to continue partnering with Europe in strengthening traditional energy security efforts.⁵⁵

Thus in light of the U.S. ambition to supply Europe with more gas exports and the already visible advantages of European integration in the energy sphere opportunities for linking Baltic demand with U.S. supply in ways that make economic as well as political sense are gradually emerging. Specifically the 3 Seas Initiative originally sponsored by Poland and Croatia seems to offer a way out, as it is particularly oriented to collaboration on key

infrastructural projects notably in the energy field.⁵⁶ Thus if the two aforementioned terminals and the Croatian terminal on KRK Island could be connected through interconnectors that cross all of Eastern Europe this would make the issue of getting American and other countries' LNG to the Baltic and Eastern Europe much more manageable and feasible.

That solution entails a substantial leap forward in European integration and appears to be available through the 3 Seas Initiative sponsored by Poland, Croatia, and Romania. This initiative, strongly supported by the White House and the President, includes almost every country in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic States, and represents their concerted commitment to multilateral commitment to boosting connectivity among Member States, with special focus on infrastructure, energy and digital interconnectivity.⁵⁷ The recent Bucharest summit of the initiative underscores not just their commitment to integration projects in these fields, e.g. interconnectors that could tie together the terminals in Poland, Lithuania, and on the Croatia Krk island but also the opportunity to bring LNG from other suppliers including the U.S. who has already sent some gas to Lithuania and Poland in an effort to strengthen and diversify European gas supplies thereby reducing Russia's ability to use energy as a political weapon throughout Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ Thus the members in Bucharest have created an investment fund and seek to attract EU financing as well since German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas attended the Bucharest meeting. At the same time the members also formed a business council to create a forum for practical development of commercially viable projects and the evaluation of their feasibility based on sound financial and other commercial criteria.⁵⁹

In this respect they are following President Trump's advice, given at the 2017 conference in Warsaw to build practical and commercially viable projects rather than simply state their solidarity.

In his speech to the summit in Warsaw in 2017 President Trump singled out several crucial infrastructural projects across this area. Specifically he listed the floating LNG terminal on the Croatian island of Krk, the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector, and the Bulgaria-Romania, Hungary-Austria (BRUA) pipeline bringing gas from the Black Sea to Central Europe.⁶⁰ But these are only some of the existing and potential energy and infrastructure projects that could promote economic-political integration from the Ukraine to Austria and the Baltic to the Black Sea. Other such projects could include the Via Baltica highway from Warsaw to Tallinn, and the possibility of linking it with other north-south or east-west highways across Europe, the Lithuanian and Polish gas terminals at Klaipeda and Swinoujscie respectively, the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline TAP, that is about to take Azeri gas from Turkey along the Adriatic coast to Italy, and other existing and new projects.

At the same time, the Business Forum

Will facilitate the gathering of representatives of companies from the 12 participating states in the Initiative, the US, other EU Member States, the Western Balkans, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Turkey. It will represent the occasion for direct contact between diverse business representatives from the region, with relevant Government officials from these countries and other economic stakeholders such as international financial institutions, in order to find new business and investment opportunities.⁶¹

Thus the Forum will devise economic criteria to assess the compatibility of projects with the EU's policies decide which projects should be pursued that could attract other states who are not members of the initiative (e.g. Germany and the U.S. whose support is crucial) and focus on projects that integrate economic actors from multiple countries making them truly multilateral cooperative projects, and prioritizing projects that are already included in different EU programs and project priority lists; as well as projects that involve innovative safe and sustainable new technologies and/or are seeking to upgrade the existing infrastructure.⁶² Lastly the Forum will create a network of Chambers of Commerce from the participating states to bring together key economic actors to support the Forum's activities and coordinate multilateral projects.⁶³ Although Poland originated the initiative, the emphasis on securing real project financing and tangible outcomes that can credibly stimulate large investors appears to have been largely a Romanian initiative.⁶⁴ Therefore the clear purpose of the summit in Bucharest is to move from declaratory actions to the establishment of concrete, economically credible, and financially supported programs that can have maximum visibility and economic-political payoffs for all concerned. Obviously for that goal to be achieved both Washington and Berlin need to support this initiative and these specific projects.

This initiative and associated for a like the Business Council, could, given US and potentially German support, facilitate integrative processes like the Latvian gas storage facility at Inčukalns, the Baltic States and Polish Gas Interconnector (GIPL) pipeline between Poland and Lithuania and the projected Finnish-Estonian underground gas pipeline.⁶⁵ Or the initiative and associated for a could help complete the integration of Baltic and Nordic and East European electricity networks to deprive Russia of leverage here.⁶⁶ Washington already supports linking Krk island's terminal with the BRUA pipeline so supporting a network to bring gas all the way from the Black Sea or alternatively from the Mediterranean to the Baltic is not inconceivable if the parties can get the politics and economics right (admittedly a difficult but not an insuperable challenge).⁶⁷

These actual and potential projects all reflect the considerable U.S. investment in Baltic and European security and in European integration. For Europe, probably the single most important player in this emerging new landscape is the U.S. For example, in the recent EU-U.S. agreement on talks to reduce all tariffs and trade barriers on all non-automotive industrial goods the EU also expressed its desire to import more U.S. LNG.⁶⁸ And the EU continues to urge the U.S. to cut red tape on LNG exports.⁶⁹ That desire fully comports with the Trump Administration's ambitions to export more gas to Europe, an ambition that on both sides of the Atlantic was first expressed in 2014 and has apparently grown since then.⁷⁰ Indeed, according to Obama Administration officials they had already succeeded in lowering Ukraine's dependence on Russian gas by 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea and the Donbass.⁷¹ More recently National Security Advisor John Bolton urged Ukraine to seek alternatives to Russian gas.⁷² So enhancing exports and reducing reliance on Russia are policies that preceded and now continue under the Trump Administration. Moreover, the policy of aggressively championing U.S. LNG exports to Europe also entailed helping U.S. oil companies help countries develop their own capabilities. Certainly Baltic governments have requested this U.S. presence. In 2014 Lithuanian energy minister Jaroslav Neverovic called on Washington to expedite the liberalization of its LNG export market.⁷³

Conclusions

As we have noted above Eastern European countries, including the Baltic States, need to foster sounder energy policies and enhance cooperation in order to maximize their ability to utilize U.S. energy exports and do so at an economically rational price. As stated above,

For Eastern European nations to strengthen energy security — and thus, national security — traditional tools are most likely to be successful — diversification of energy sources, building of gas storage, dual-fuel capacity of power plants and more. For this reason, the U.S. should not allow exuberance over increased gas exports to distract from the critical need to continue partnering with Europe in strengthening traditional energy security efforts.⁷⁴

And Washington needs to build greater export capacity in the United States and stimulate global gas production from other countries and sources whether those sources are in Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. In other words we need to move to link all of Eastern Europe through interconnectors and pipelines as President Trump and U.S. officials have suggested to the Baltic States and other members of the Three Seas Initiative since 2017. And the EU must also support investments in economically viable and financially credible energy infrastructure projects. Enhanced energy efficiency and movement towards renewables will also help create a global gas market where gas will be traded as a commodity and not as a political football. In other words, dubious projects like Nord Stream 2 that serve no discernible economic purpose must be abandoned in favor of a truly global gas market based on sound economic as well as political criteria.

Clearly the U.S. wager on the Baltic States has not only succeeded, but is expanding in scope and depth. In energy, and defense, not to mention the overall promotion of European integration Washington has advanced the cause of the Baltic States and put them on a par with its other and older allies in Europe. Given the unrelenting aggressiveness of Russian policy this integrationist imperative is likely to continue although it obviously faces problems, e.g. lingering European resistance to accept the scope of Moscow's military threat and the economic and political difficulties of diversifying energy supplies and achieving even greater integration along the lines of the 3 Seas initiatives. Nevertheless the Baltic States' confidence in Washington and its reliability despite the turmoil engulfing U.S. Domestic politics and Russian pressure has been amply justified and is likely to stand the test of time for the foreseeable future.

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