

The Baltic States from 1914 to 1923: The First World War and the Wars of Independence

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the First World War five new states were created out of what had been Tsarist Russia on the shores of the Baltic Sea. In the north the Republic of Finland emerged as an independent state after just over a century as the Grand Duchy of Finland. South of the Gulf of Finland the northern parts of the Governorate of Livonia and the Governorate of Estonia became the Republic of Estonia. Combining former Swedish, Polish and Russian

lands the Republic of Latvia was created from the southern parts of the Governorate of Livonia, the Governorate of Kurland and the western parts of the Governorate of Vitebsk. Further south the Republic of Lithuania, formed from the Governorates of Vilnius, Kaunas and Suwalki, recreated a separate Lithuanian state for the first time in over five hundred years. The Republic of Poland also came into being at this time, more than a century after its earlier final division between Russia, Prussia and Austria. Poland, though, is not considered further here other than in the context of

relations with Lithuania. This article aims to describe the events of the First World War in the Baltic region and the Wars of Independence in each of the Baltic states.

The routes to independence for the four Baltic states that will be considered here were all similar to the extent that the same factors were involved for each state. Where their routes to independence differ is in the relative importance of the various factors. The first factor is the impact of Russian political control. At the start of the period in question all of the Baltic states were part of Tsarist Russia and the "His-

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torical Background” section below relates how that came to be. The second factor is the impact of the First World War and German influences in the Baltic area. The “First World War” section examines the political and military impact of that war. A section entitled “The Treaties” looks at the treaties that concluded the First World War and notes how the Baltic states were excluded from consideration in these various treaties. The third factor is Baltic nationalism and identity and sections for each of the Baltic states consider the struggle for national independence. There is a general pattern of cultural nationalism centred on language, giving way to a more assertive political nationalism in each state, but the details of the development of national identity vary from state to state. Finally the impact of other actors, notably those allied against Germany in the First World War, must be considered and this is done in the section entitled “Intervention”.

That the Baltic states were able to assert their national identities and achieve statehood is a product of the overall balance of the factors described above. Fundamentally Russia was weak. The collapse of the

Tsarist regime and the rise of the Bolsheviks provided a narrow window of opportunity for those wishing to escape from Russian domination. In the context of Eastern Europe at the time Russia was weak but Germany was militarily strong. In a wider context though Germany was politically, militarily and economically weak and the Allies were strong. At the end of the First World War the Allies had no wish to allow the Germans, defeated in the west, to profit from their success in the east. Again German weakness offered opportunities to the Baltic states. The growth of national identity in the Baltic states might be seen not so much as a strength but as a source of determination for exploiting the weaknesses and opportunities that arose. There is no doubt that the intervention of the Allies gave strength to the Baltic states but this was essentially a by-product of other concerns. The Allies concerns in respect of Germany have already been mentioned but the Allies had no wish either to see the Russian Bolsheviks prosper. Generally it can be said that, exhausted after the First World War, the Allies had no wish to fight the Bolsheviks. They did however support the

White Russians and others opposed to the Bolsheviks and in this circuitous way gave strength to the Baltic states.

Background

Throughout history the lands of the Baltic states have been much fought over. Until the twentieth century the Finns, Estonians and Latvians were never masters in their own lands. Previously the Russians, Swedes, Danes, Poles and Germans had continuously contested control of the area. The situation for the Lithuanians was somewhat different. Lithuania had previously been an independent state and then a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Union.

The power of Sweden waned during the Great Northern War after 1700 and in 1721 peace was made between Russia and Sweden at the Treaty of Nystad. This treaty incorporated the former Swedish possessions on the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea into the Russian Empire as the provinces of Estonia and Livonia. Estonia, with its capital at Tallinn, consisted of what is now the northern half of Estonia and the island of Hiiumaa. Livonia, with its capital

at Riga, consisted of what is now the southern half of Estonia and the island of Saaremaa and southeastern Latvia.

The Polish-Lithuanian Union was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria in three stages starting in 1772. At the first division Latgale, now eastern Latvia, was absorbed into Russia, ultimately as part of the Vitebsk province. The second division in 1793 did not affect lands now part of the Baltic states but at the third and final division in 1795 what is now southern and western Latvia and nearly all of modern Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire. The parts that are now Latvia were incorporated into the province of Kurland with its capital at Jelgava. The parts that are now Lithuania were divided between the provinces of Vilnius and Kaunas with their capitals in the cities of the same name.

Russia was defeated by Napoleon in 1807 but then at the Treaty of Tilsit entered into an alliance with France. Russia recognised French supremacy in western and central Europe but was given a free hand in the Baltic area and it was the Treaty of Tilsit that caused the pre-emptive strike by the British Navy on Copenhagen in

order to seize the Danish fleet. Tsar Alexander I also agreed to attempt to mediate a peace with Britain but when these attempts failed Russia, seeking to exclude the British Navy from the Baltic Sea demanded of Sweden the closure of Swedish ports to the British Navy. The Swedes refused to comply with the Russian demands and this led to the invasion by Russia of Finland, then part of Sweden, in February 1808. By November 1808 Russia had occupied Finland and in return for certain assurances the Finns agreed to annexation by Russia at Porvoo in March 1809. At the Treaty of Hamina in September 1809 Swedish sovereignty over Finland was surrendered, and the Grand Duchy of Finland, with the Russian Tsar as Grand Duke, was established. In 1812 the Tsar restored to Finland certain Finnish territories that had been ceded by Sweden to Russia at the Treaty of Nystad in 1721 and the Treaty of Turku in 1743.

On 24 June 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia capturing Vilnius before the end of June. Moscow was occupied on 14 September but abandoned on 19 October at the start of the long retreat. By early De-

cember what remained of the French Army was back in Vilnius and here Napoleon left his army to return to Paris. Mass graves recently discovered in Vilnius emphasise the total defeat of the French Army on this ill-fated Russian campaign.

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, following the Napoleonic Wars, certain parts of Prussia, which are now in modern Lithuania, were awarded to Russia.¹ These areas became part of the province of Suwalki. At this point, with one exception, all the lands that now make up the Baltic states had become a part of the Russian Empire. The one exception is the Klaipeda area of Lithuania, which remained part of Prussia, as the better-known Memel Territory², and only became part of Lithuania at the very end of the period being discussed in 1923.

The provisions of the Treaty of Nystad ensured that, even though they were incorporated into the Russian Empire, the provinces of Estonia and Livonia retained distinctive systems of local administration, related to those of the previous Swedish administration and different from those in other parts of the Russian Empire.

When Kurland became a part of the Russian Empire this province, too, obtained essentially the same status as Estonia and Livonia. The provinces of Vilnius and Kaunas also initially retained distinct systems of local government related to those of the former Polish-Lithuanian Union. The highest representative of Tsarist power was the Governor-General. The Governor-General of the Baltic area comprising Estonia, Livonia and Kurland resided in Riga. The Governor-General of Lithuania, including Vilnius and Kaunas, was based in Vilnius. Suwalki was subordinate to the Governor-General in Warsaw in the Russian controlled Kingdom of Poland. The area that was subject to the most Russification was the Latgale area of Latvia that was incorporated into Vitebsk province as a part of Russia with no distinct local status. As a Grand Duchy and not part of Russia proper, Finland enjoyed considerable autonomy, including the maintenance of its own military units, although as Finnish nationalism developed the Tsar sought to increasingly weaken Finnish autonomy and assert Russian control.

The First World War

As the First World War progressed the Baltic area was by degrees involved in the conflict between Russian and German forces. As the Russian position weakened, so the Germans came to occupy and dominate the entire Baltic area. In the first year of the war the Germans occupied all of Lithuania and half of Latvia. For the next two years the situation in the Baltic area was almost static, but then in the last six months of the war in the east the Germans completed their occupation of Latvia and Estonia before the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The fighting in the Baltic area was rarely if at all central to events on the Eastern Front. The description that follows aims to put events in the Baltic area into the context of military operations on the Eastern Front and the development of the political situation in Russia more generally. Understanding the development of the situation on the Eastern Front will hopefully aid an understanding of the events in Lithuania,

Latvia, Estonia and Finland that are described later.

Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914 but then, in accordance with the Schlieffen plan, declared war on France two days later and commenced the invasion of that country via neutral Belgium. The German declaration of war on Russia was the result of the Russian mobilisation designed to discourage the Austro-Hungarian Empire from taking action against Serbia. In Sarajevo on 28 Jun 1914, Serbian-backed Bosnian nationalists opposed to Habsburg rule had murdered the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife.

The idea of the German Schlieffen plan was to avoid fighting on two fronts by achieving a rapid victory against France before turning against Russia, where it was thought mobilisation would be slow and ponderous. In fact Russian mobilisation allowed the Russians, responding to French pleas for assistance, to invade East Prussia on 12 August 1914. However initial Russian success against both the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians was not followed

up. Against the Germans in East Prussia, Russian success at the Battle of Gumbinnen on 20 August 1914 was quickly followed by defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg, ending on 31 August 1914. The Germans followed up their victory at Tannenberg with victory at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes some two weeks later. Against the Austro-Hungarians the Russians achieved somewhat greater success in Galicia in September 1914. After their victory in East Prussia though, the Germans were able to come to the assistance of their Austro-Hungarian allies, and in fighting around Warsaw and Lodz in October and November 1914 the Russians were stopped. The Russians, when it comes to tactical victories, successfully defended both Warsaw and Lodz but strategically victory belonged to the Germans. In December the Russians resumed their offensive against Krakow but were outflanked by the Austro-Hungarians attacking from the Carpathian Mountains in the south, and forced to give up much of the ground gained earlier in the autumn. The Russians planned to renew the offensive against the Germans in East Prussia with an attack scheduled for 20 February 1915,

but were pre-empted by the Germans who attacked in the area of the Masurian Lakes on 7 February 1915. The Germans achieved considerable tactical success but two things denied them strategic success. Firstly considerable Russian forces preparing for their offensive in East Prussia were able to act as reserves, and secondly simultaneous Austro-Hungarian attacks in the south, designed to relieve the garrison of Przemysl besieged since the Russian offensive of September 1914, failed. Przemysl surrendered on 22 March 1915.

By the end of the first seven months of the war on the Eastern Front, therefore, the Russians were very firmly on the defensive. Interestingly, poor Russian radio security is known to have given the Central Powers advance notice of Russian plans and intentions on a number of occasions. The German High Command's priority for 1915 became the provision of such assistance to the Austro-Hungarians as was needed to knock Russia out of the war, before Italy entered the war against the Austro-Hungarians, while containing the situation in the west. To divert attention from preparations for the forthcoming

offensive in Galicia the Germans launched a successful diversionary operation with twelve divisions towards Riga on 26 April 1915. By the start of May 1915 in the Baltic area the German front line ran from the sea between Liepāja and Ventspils east to the line of the River Venta. The line then ran southeast along the line of the River Venta and the River Dubysa to the confluence of the River Dubysa with the River Nemunas. South of here the Russians retained a frontline on the west bank of the River Nemunas to the west of Kaunas, Alytus and Grodno. In these first few months of the war in the east the Baltic area was very much on the periphery with the focus of events further to the south and west.

On the night of 1 May 1915 a joint German – Austro-Hungarian offensive was launched in Galicia between Tarnow and Gorlice and fourteen days later the attack had reached the line of the River San over 130 kilometres (80 miles) from the start line. The Italians entered the war on 25 May 1915 and, although some of the Austro-Hungarian forces had to be redeployed to meet the new threat, further gains

were made against the Russians. On 4 June 1915 the fortress of Przemyśl was recaptured from the Russians. On 17 June 1915 the Russian High Command ordered a general retreat, which became known as the "Great Retreat", and in the south the fortress of Lviv (Lemberg), abandoned by the Austro-Hungarians in September 1914, was retaken on 22 June 1915.

Further north the Germans resumed the offensive on 13 July 1915 in the Battle of the River Narev and the Russians abandoned Warsaw on 4 August 1915. The important Russian fortress of Novogeorgievsk on the River Vistula 30 kilometres (20 miles) northwest of Warsaw was surrounded by the Germans in early August 1915, and surrendered on 19 August 1915. Kaunas, heavily fortified and considered the key to Russian defences on the northern sector of the front, was first attacked on 8 August 1915. The Russians repelled a major infantry attack the next day but after their own artillery, some thirteen hundred guns in all, inadvertently destroyed some of the outer defences the garrison surrendered on 17 August 1915 giving up huge stocks of ammunition and

all the guns. The Germans captured Brest Litovsk on 25 August 1915, and continuing their advance they took Grodno on 2 September 1915 and Vilnius on 19 September 1915. Now, however, the German offensive ran out of steam, and Russian counterattacks in the vicinity of Švenčionėliai midway between Vilnius and Daugavpils helped to restore the Russian position. By 26 September 1915, when the German offensive halted, the German front line in the Baltic area ran from Riga, where the Russians still retained positions on the west bank of the River Daugava, along the line of the River Daugava to Daugavpils and then roughly due south to Pinsk.

Whereas in the spring of 1915 the Germans had occupied only a small corner of southwest Latvia and parts of western Lithuania, by the end of September they had taken control of all of Lithuania and about half of Latvia. Vilnius, the focus of Lithuanian nationalism, was in German hands and Riga, a similar focus for the Latvians, was in the front line with the Russian forward positions in the western suburbs of the city. The front lines in the

Baltic area were now to remain almost static until January 1917.

On 22 October 1915, the Russians mounted an amphibious attack involving over 500 troops behind German lines west of the Bay of Riga at Pitrags. The raid was a success causing German withdrawal in the area but the landing force was withdrawn later the same day in the absence of reinforcements to support the landing. The raid caused the Germans to devote additional troops to coastal defence and perhaps influenced their thinking for Operation Albion in October 1917.

While the scale of the Russian defeat in 1915 was huge with over one million casualties, the Russian command performed well in keeping their armies from disintegrating, and through the winter of 1915 and spring of 1916 the Russian forces staged a remarkable recovery. A Russian attack to coincide with British and French summer offensives in the west was being planned, when the Germans struck at Verdun on 21 February 1916. Coming to the aid of the French an ill conceived, hastily prepared, and poorly executed attack was launched by the Russians in the area of Lake Naroch,

some 100 kilometres (60 miles) north east of Vilnius, on 18 March 1916. Attacking on a narrow front, and after an ineffective artillery preparation the Russians suffered 15,000 casualties in the first few hours. Further assaults in the Lake Naroch area were made on 19 and 21 March 1916, in the mud of the spring thaw, and supporting attacks in the area of Riga were abandoned after 10,000 casualties on the first day.

These attacks achieved very little success and certainly did not divert German forces from the west. The Russians suffered 100,000 casualties, and within a month the Germans had recaptured the little ground they had given up. Despite its unfamiliarity in the west, it has been suggested that this was one of the decisive battles of the First World War. Their failure in an area where they had built up a considerable superiority over the Germans convinced many in the Russian high command of their inability to defeat the Germans.

Once again the Russians began planning a summer offensive but once again felt obliged to bring their plans forward to come to the aid of western allies, this time

the Italians. On 15 May 1916 the Austro-Hungarians launched their Trentino offensive. On 4 June 1916 the commander of the Russian South Western Front, Brusilov, launched the offensive that now normally bears his name. Attacking, after a short but intense artillery bombardment of selected points, with all four of his armies simultaneously on a 480 kilometres (300 miles) long front Brusilov made considerable gains during June. The Austro-Hungarians were driven back some 100 kilometres (60 miles) all along the front, a number of strategically important towns were captured and the Russians took some 350,000 prisoners and 400 artillery pieces.

The Russians were as surprised by their success as the Central Powers were dismayed. Russian plans to renew the offensive in the Lake Naroch area towards Vilnius were dropped, and instead reinforcements were directed towards Brusilov, but the Russians were hampered in their efforts by the inadequacy of the railway and road systems. To stabilise the situation the Austro-Hungarians had no option but to halt their offensive against the Italians and return troops to the Eastern Front. The

Germans too brought reinforcements from the west but the Central Powers benefited from a better railway network than was available to the Russians, and by mid-July the balance of forces had shifted in favour of the Central Powers. Urged on by the high command Brusilov persisted with his offensive until the end of August 1916, by which time further Russian progress had become impossible.

The Brusilov offensive achieved a considerable measure of success, but it was bought at a very high price, a price that the Russians could not afford. By the time the offensive was over the Russians had suffered over one million casualties to add to the five million they had already suffered during the war. These losses seriously damaged the morale of the Russian Army, and in the absence of a strategic breakthrough it can be argued, that while the Brusilov offensive did not cause the Russian Revolution it did much to make it possible.

On 7 January 1917 the Russian Twelfth Army launched an offensive, known as the Battle of the River Aa, west from the vicinity of Riga. In a surprise attack, without a

preliminary bombardment, the Russians achieved some success and by 9 January 1917 both Jelgava and Tukums had been recaptured. German counterattacks from 22 January 1917 lasted until the end of the month, but the Russians retained the ground they had gained. Although this limited attack improved the Russian position in the vicinity of Riga it had and achieved no strategic objective.

In Russia a strike call on 22 January 1917 led to the events of the February Revolution. Troops refused orders to fire on demonstrators on 11 March 1917, and by 13 March 1917 most of the Petrograd garrison had joined forces with the rebel workers. The Imperial Government resigned en masse on 12 March 1917, and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia abdicated on 15 March 1917. The Russian monarchy ended the next day when his brother, Grand Duke Michael, declined the crown. A Provisional Government headed nominally by Prince Lvov, including Kerensky as Justice Minister, was formed, partly in response to the perceived challenge from the newly formed Petrograd Soviet. The government of Russia re-

mained unstable, and never in full control of the country, while still attempting to continue the war against the Central Powers, until the Bolshevik October Revolution.

Following the February Revolution the Central Powers ceased offensive action on the Eastern Front and took advantage of the turmoil in Russia to transfer troops to the west. Kerensky, though, sought to keep faith with Russia's western allies and having taken over the War Ministry on 16 May 1917, attempted to renew the offensive against the Central Powers. On 1 July 1917 Brusilov's South Western Front attacked, with two of its four armies, the Austro-Hungarian forces east of Lviv (Lemberg). Again considerable initial success was achieved and gains of 50 kilometres (30 miles) were made on a 160 kilometres (100 miles) front, but Russian resolve weakened as their supply lines broke down and enemy resistance stiffened. On 19 July 1917 the Germans launched a powerful counterattack that broke the Russians, and brought about their withdrawal in panic and disorder. By the start of September

the Central Powers had gained over 160 kilometres (100 miles) in the south, their advance halted more by supply difficulties than by Russian resistance. At the height of this offensive Kerensky formally replaced Prince Lvov as head of the Provisional Government in a move that underlined the instability of the Russian Government and its weakening position.

During the "July Days" in 1917 a Machine Gun Regiment based in Petrograd started an uprising on 16 July 1917 in protest at the failure of the Kerensky Offensive. The uprising attracted support from the Anti-War Bolsheviks, spread to sailors at the Kronstadt naval base, and to civilians in major cities and towns all over Russia. Although the Provisional Government was able to restore order within a few days, the incident improved the standing of the Bolsheviks with an increasingly pacifist population, and undermined the credibility of the Provisional Government and the moderate socialists in control of the Petrograd Soviet. Lenin fled to Finland where he remained until the October Revolution.

The Battle of Riga was the final full-scale battle between Russian and German forces on the Eastern Front. The German attack was launched on 1 September 1917 to clear the Russian salient west of Riga, and by suggesting a German drive towards Petrograd encouraged the collapse of the faltering Russian war effort. German forces quickly established a bridgehead over the River Daugava south of Riga on the first day of the operation, and quickly followed up the Russian retreat from the city on 2 September 1917. The Russian forces, though, were not pursued more than about 30 kilometres (20 miles) beyond the city.

On 11 October 1917 the Germans, following up the success of their Riga operation, launched Operation Albion. In an amphibious assault involving some 20,000 troops the Estonian islands of Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Muhu were attacked. The 13,000 Russian defenders put up little serious resistance, and by 20 Oct 1917 all three islands were in German hands. A simultaneous naval operation, led by ten battle-ships of the German High Seas Fleet, aimed

to force the Irben Straits and trap the Russian fleet in the Bay of Riga. Although the German fleet successfully forced its way into the Bay of Riga, the Russian fleet was able to escape through the Muhu Strait to the north and the Gulf of Finland, before the Germans completed their occupation of the islands to dominate the Muhu Strait.

Starting on 5 November 1917³ and over the next three days, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and Trotsky in what became known as the October Revolution, seized power in Petrograd from the Provisional Government of Kerensky. On 29 October 1917 the Petrograd Soviet had created a Military Revolutionary Committee, effectively headed by Trotsky. This rapidly gained the allegiance of the Petrograd garrison, workers militias, and naval personnel. Loyal troops, summoned by Kerensky to arrest leading Bolsheviks, were unable to dislodge the revolutionary forces that had occupied key strategic points. On 8 November 1917 members of the Provisional Government were arrested in the Tsar's Winter Palace. The Bolsheviks, seeking peace, eventually agreed terms with the Central Powers at

the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, but it was to be another three years before the end of the Russian Civil War and the consolidation of communist power in Russia.

Operation Faustschlag was launched on 18 February 1918 in response to the halting of the Brest-Litovsk peace talks, by the Russian Bolsheviks. Against minimal Russian opposition the Germans quickly occupied considerable areas of territory, and advanced 240 kilometres (150 miles) on some fronts. Tallinn was occupied on 25 February 1918, and by 3 March 1918 when the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed the Germans had taken control of all parts of Latvia and Estonia that they had not already occupied. The passage of the First World War in the east saw Russian political authority replaced by German military authority. The Baltic economies, damaged though they were, still remained largely in German hands but, still fighting in the west, the Germans faced a rising tide of Baltic nationalism. In all of the Baltic states a growing sense of national identity underpinned movements seeking independence.

The Treaties

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed on 3 March 1918 between the Central Powers and the Russian Bolshevik Government. After the October Revolution in 1917 the new Bolshevik Government in Russia had no wish to continue the war and the Central Powers were keen to transfer troops to the west. Armistice negotiations began on 3 December 1917 and a ceasefire was announced on 16 December 1917. The peace talks began in Brest-Litovsk on 22 December 1917. The Russian Bolshevik Foreign Minister, Trotsky, took charge of the Russian delegation on 9 January 1918 and, hoping for an early socialist revolution in Europe to strengthen his negotiating position, employed delaying tactics. Following a separate treaty, the "Brotfrieden" agreement signed between the Central Powers and Ukraine on 9 February 1918, the Russians halted talks the following day. The Germans responded with a rapid resumption of hostilities in Operation Faustschlag on 18 February 1918. The Bolsheviks ac-

cepted the original German terms on 19 February 1918 and new German terms on 24 February 1918 the day after they were presented. The Treaty extended German influence over Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The Russians also had to accept Turkish control over the Caucasus Provinces and undertook not to interfere in the internal affairs of the lost territories. The Treaty was denounced by the Allies, ignored at every opportunity by the Bolsheviks, and formally annulled as part of the 11 November 1918 Armistice agreement. Eager to maintain political and economic control in Eastern Europe, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty did not give the Germans the opportunity to withdraw as many troops from the east as they had hoped. In the "Brotfrieden" agreement, with the newly independent but German-supported Ukrainian government, the Germans were eager to secure supplies of Ukrainian grain and agreed readily to the inclusion of certain Polish areas under Ukrainian administration.

In late September 1918 the Central Powers approached President Wilson of the

USA seeking peace talks and made a formal request for a cease-fire on 4 October 1918. Cease-fires with Turkey and the Austro-Hungarian Empire came into effect on 30 October 1918 and 3 November 1918 respectively. The final cease-fire with Germany came into effect on 11 November 1918. Wilson insisted that his "Fourteen Points" serve as the basis for Armistice discussions, although Point Ten was modified to provide full independence for the subject peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Point One was interpreted to allow secret negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference. The "Fourteen Points" had originally been presented to Congress in the USA on 8 January 1918, as an outline statement of American war aims. The points were accepted by the Allies with certain accepted reservations on 4 November 1918, and finally agreed to by the Germans on 10 November 1918, although they still contained many ambiguities.⁴

The Paris Peace Conference opened on 12 January 1919 to formulate a peace settlement following the armistice. Although thirty-two allied countries took part, the

interests of the USA, United Kingdom, France, Italy and Japan dominated the proceedings. No representatives of the Central Powers were invited, and the Russian Bolshevik Government refused to attend. In March 1919 a Council of Four was established to enable the USA, British, French, and Italian leaders to deliberate in private. These deliberations saw confrontation between the liberal American President Wilson and the nationalist French Prime Minister Clemenceau with mediation attempted by the British Prime Minister Lloyd George, the Italian Prime Minister Orlando involving himself only in matters of direct Italian interest. Although five treaties, the Treaties of Versailles, St Germain, Trianon, Neuilly, and Sèvres, emerged from the Paris Peace Conference, the conference closed in an atmosphere of failure and the US Congress refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty in November 1919.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed between Germany and the Allies on 28 June 1919. In the west, Germany lost territory to France and Belgium, and the Saarland

and Rhineland were placed under allied control. In the north territory was ceded to Denmark, and in the east former German territory was given up to Poland, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia. The treaty became a focus for discontent in Germany that was fully exploited by the national socialists.

The Treaty of Neuilly was signed on 27 Nov 1919 between the Allied Powers and Bulgaria. Bulgaria lost territory to all of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Greece, as the price for siding with the Central Powers in the First World War.

The Treaty of Trianon was signed on 4 June 1920 between the Allied Powers and Hungary. This treaty confirmed the break up of the Hungarian parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and caused long-term resentment, which dominated the foreign policy of the new Hungarian republic.

The Treaty of Sèvres between Turkey and the Allies was signed on 10 August 1920. It placed the Bosphorus and Dardanelles under international control, placed Smyrna under Greek control, and confirmed the independence of former Otto-

man possessions in the Middle East. The treaty was rejected by republican Turks and substantially revised at the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The Treaty of St Germain was signed between the Allies and the new Austrian Republic on 10 September 1920. The treaty confirmed the break up of the Austrian parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and banned political union with Germany.

The various treaties dealt only with the Central Powers and their allies. Russia was an ally of the Western Allies, and the break away from Russia of the four Baltic states and Poland was essentially a matter for Russia, despite the opposition of the Western Allies to the Bolshevik regime, which came to power following the collapse of the Tsarist Russian Empire. All of the Baltic states achieved independence as a result of the turmoil of the First World War. It might be said, though, that the treaties that concluded the First World War not only ignored the Baltic states, but also gave rise to the stresses and strains that led to the Second World War. These treaties, therefore, set the scene for the loss of independ-

ence suffered by three of the Baltic states at the time of the Second World War.

Finland

The territory of the Grand Duchy of Finland was not directly involved in fighting during the First World War, and the impact of the war was mainly an economic one. Of course Finland had no option but to follow Russia into the war and while some areas of the economy suffered badly others prospered. The forestry industry with export markets in the United Kingdom and Western Europe was badly hit but the metalworking, chemical, and textile industries all prospered in satisfying the demands of the Russian war effort. Thousands of Finns too were in the Russian armies, involved in the defence of Finland as well as more distant operations.

The February 1917 revolution in Russia caused the collapse of the Russian war effort, leading to economic hardship for many in Finland, and fuelled the process of progress towards independence. The Russian Provisional Government believed

they assumed the Tsar's rights in respect of Finland, but a majority in Finland believed that with the abdication of the Tsar the Russian Provisional Government could make no claim to being the supreme authority in Finland.

On 20 March 1917 the Russian Provisional Government proclaimed the restoration of Finland's constitutional rights, rights that over a long period of years had been increasingly ignored by an ever more authoritarian Tsarist regime. The more liberal Mikhail Stakhovich replaced Von Seyn, the much-disliked Russian Governor General, and many political exiles were allowed to return. Elections for the Finnish parliament, the Eduskunta, had taken place in 1916, but parliament was not allowed to meet until March 1917, when a new Social Democrat government was formed and took office on 27 March 1917.

The new government was immediately confronted with both internal law and order problems and external problems regarding its relationship with the Russian Provisional Government. With regard to the internal problems in a number of towns

worker's militias had formed and these sometimes found themselves confronted by civil guards recruited from among the bourgeoisie and often supported from Germany. In 1914 some in Finland had looked to Germany for support in the struggle for independence and significant numbers of Finns had received military training in Germany during the course of the war.

On 18 July 1917 the Eduskunta approved an act making Finland independent in all respects except foreign affairs and defence. The Finnish cabinet was evenly divided on the issue but controversially Stakhovich on the instructions of Kerensky, head of the Russian Provisional Government, voted against the measure, dissolved the Eduskunta, and called new elections for October. The Social Democrats lost their overall majority in the October elections but did not accept the validity of the elections, regarding the Russian Provisional Government as having no right to dissolve the parliament. In the turmoil, exacerbated by the events of the October Revolution in Russia, a Central Revolutionary Council was

formed on 8 November 1917 and called a general strike for 14 November 1917.

The strike and the violence that accompanied this strike alienated many Social Democrats. In the absence of any clear lead from Russia, the Eduskunta voted in a government headed by the champion of Finnish rights P. Svinhufvud, who presented to the Eduskunta a declaration of Finnish independence on 6 December 1917. Svinhufvud met Lenin in Petrograd on 31 December, and was told that Russia would recognise Finnish independence and the right wing government in Helsinki.

Finland slid towards civil war in January 1919. On 18 January, General Mannerheim, charged by the government with establishing a military headquarters, left Helsinki for Vaasa to establish such a headquarters, since both Helsinki and Tampere were largely under the control of the Red Guards, as the worker's militias had become. On 19 January the Government asked Germany to return to Finland the Finnish Jaeger battalion that had been fighting for Germany. Five days later they demanded the removal of the 40,000 Rus-

sian troops on Finnish territory, and requested help from those countries that had recognised Finland. The next day the Government formally constituted the Civil Guards as the state force responsible for law and order. The civil war started on the night of 27 January when Red Guards formally took control of Helsinki and established a revolutionary government. By the beginning of February a front line ran north of Pori, Tampere, Lahti and Lappeenranta with the Red Guards in control of all the major urban centres. The "Whites", however, were better organised and equipped and more united. The Whites received significant reinforcement when the Finnish Jaeger battalion arrived back in Finland on 25 February 1918. The Germans also provided very significant assistance to the Whites. In March German naval units landed on and occupied the Aaland Islands. On 3 April a German expeditionary force commanded by General Count von der Goltz landed at Hanko on the southwest coast, and started to advance on Helsinki. A few days later another German force landed at Loviisa, and advanced

north towards Lahti to cut the railway line between Helsinki and Petrograd. At around the same time White forces advancing from the north captured Tampere. Helsinki fell to the German forces of General von der Goltz on 13 April 1918 and two weeks later prominent members of the Red Guards and leaders of the Revolutionary Government fled to Russia. On 16 May Mannerheim led a victory parade through Helsinki.

On 18 May the Eduskunta met and appointed Svinhufvud as Regent with the same powers as those previously vested in the Tsar. Still expecting a German victory, Svinhufvud sought to create a monarchy for Finland from within Germany. These plans came to nought with the collapse of Germany and the withdrawal of German troops from Finland, and Svinhufvud resigned being replaced by Mannerheim as Regent in late 1918. Mannerheim had resigned in May in protest at the degree of influence being allowed to the Germans, and on being appointed Regent had to be recalled from London where he had been engaged on an unofficial mission to im-

prove relations between Finland and the Western Allies.

New elections to the Eduskunta were held in March 1919 and the Eduskunta elected Professor K. Stahlberg as first president of the Republic of Finland on 25 July 1919. In July 1920 Finland started peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks, once it was clear that the White Russians, who were opposed to Finnish independence, had been defeated. Agreement was reached at the Treaty of Tartu signed on 14 October 1920, and by the terms of this treaty the Petsamo district, giving Finland access to the Arctic Ocean, was ceded to Finland. Tsar Alexander II had promised this area to Finland in 1864, in exchange for two districts in the Karelian Isthmus that Finland had ceded to Russia. The Tsar had not kept his word though and it was left to the Bolsheviks to honour the promise made by the Tsar over half a century later.

Estonia

While Estonian territory was not involved in the fighting of the First World

War until 1918, Estonia was obviously affected by the conflict from an early stage. While it was feared that German victory would involve a process of “Germanification”, there was no enthusiasm for fighting for the Tsar, if “Russification” was to be the result of Russian victory. The Estonian economy was disrupted, Estonia became a base area for operations in Latvia and many refugees from Latvia arrived in Estonia. About 100,000 Estonians were conscripted into the Tsarist Army and about 10,000 were killed. The Russians moved quickly to limit the influence of the Baltic Germans but as before, it was Russians that replaced Germans in the administration not Estonians. German ideas for a joint Estonian-German provincial council involving concessions to the Estonians were not widely supported. The Northern Baltic Committee based in Tartu, but with branches all over Estonia, was formed as a voluntary organisation. It sought to help refugees, support the Russian Army and help meet the economic needs of Estonia but it was also active in spreading Estonian nationalist ideas.

In February 1917 revolution in Russia resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the formation of the Provisional Government. The unrest in Russia was mirrored by unrest in Estonia particularly amongst the Russian population. The Provisional Government appointed Jaan Poska, an Estonian lawyer and Mayor of Tallinn, as their Governor General in Tallinn. Demands for Estonian autonomy within Russia reached a climax with a demonstration by 40,000 Estonians, 12,000 of them armed soldiers, in Petrograd on 26 March 1917. At the end of March the Provisional Government granted autonomy within a new Estonian province, including Estonian speaking northern Livonia but excluding both the Narva and Setu areas. Elections to a new provincial council were held in May 1917, and the council assembled for the first time in July when a government was elected. Tensions between Tallinn and Petrograd grew. The replacement of Russians and the Russian language by Estonians and the Estonian language in the new administration was much resented by the previous office-holders. The attempts of the

new administration to limit the influence of the Bolshevik Soviets that had formed in Estonia were opposed by many workers. Finally the formation of all Estonian military units, amidst the turmoil of the collapse of the Tsarist Russian Army, although supported by the Provisional Government, was opposed within the Army itself. Essentially the Provisional Government in Petrograd was powerless to control events, and the main opposition to the new Estonian provincial government came from the Estonian Bolsheviks.

In Tallinn the Bolsheviks seized power on 27 October 1917 as soon as they had news of the success of the revolution in Petrograd. Viktor Kingisepp, the Vice-Chairman of the Bolshevik Estonian Revolutionary War Committee, replaced Jaan Poska. The ousted Provincial Government continued to meet illegally and at the end of 1917 decided to seek independence for Estonia and recognition from western countries. Bolshevik elections, planned for January 1918, were cancelled when it became clear that the Bolsheviks would not achieve an absolute majority, and Bolshe-

vik rule became increasingly dictatorial. The Estonian national army units posed a problem for the Bolsheviks. They were combined into an Estonian Division, commanded by Johan Laidoner, after the October Revolution, but it was not until January 1918 that their replacement by Estonian Red Guards began.

After the Bolshevik revolution the Baltic Germans sought assistance from Germany. The Bolsheviks, in response, began to deport the Baltic Germans. This programme of deportations lent weight to the German decision to resume their offensive against Russia following the breakdown of the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. As has already been related the Germans occupied Estonia during Operation Faustschlag from 18 February 1918 to 4 March 1918. The Germans occupied Tallinn on 25 Feb 1918 but on the previous day the Provisional Government had declared Estonia independent. In the days before with the help of national armed units the Provisional Government had taken power from the Bolsheviks. The United Kingdom, France and Italy gave de facto recognition

to Estonia in May 1918. In accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk while the Bolsheviks ceded sovereignty of the Estonian islands they retained jurisdiction in Livonia and Estonia although German troops were to be stationed here for security.

The Germans had no wish to encourage independence in the form desired by the Estonians. Konstantin Päts, who had been declared Prime Minister, was imprisoned, Germans were reinstated in all positions of high office, political parties were banned, and strict censorship was instituted. On 5 November 1918 the Baltic Dukedom was proclaimed in Riga. Formally independent the Baltic Dukedom included both Estonia and Latvia, and was intended to perpetuate German economic domination of the area in a close political relationship with Germany.

On 11 November 1918 the Armistice brought the First World War to an end in the west, at the same time as economic collapse and social turmoil swept Germany. The Provisional Government of Estonia resumed its activities on the same day. On

13 November 1918 Soviet Russia annulled the Treaty of Brest Litovsk and prepared for offensive action in the Baltic region. On 22 November 1918 Soviet forces attacked Narva but met stiff German resistance and withdrew. However on 25 November 1918 the Germans withdrew from Pskov, and the Soviet forces followed in their wake quickly capturing Võru, Valga and Tartu, and most of southern Estonia. 28 November 1918 is formally regarded as the start of the Estonian War of Independence when Soviet forces resumed their attack on Narva, this time against Estonian opposition. The Bolshevik Estonian Worker's Commune was declared in Narva on 29 November 1918. By the end of December Tapa had fallen to the Soviets, whose forces were only twenty miles east of Tallinn. To the southeast and south Paide, Viljandi, and Pärnu were all threatened with capture.

On 6 January 1919 the Estonians counterattacked, reinforced by a British naval presence and Finnish volunteers. In the north on 12 January 1919 Rakvere was recaptured, and on 19 January 1919 Narva

fell to forces that had been landed on the coast. In the southeast Tartu was recaptured on 14 January 1919, Valga and Võru were both retaken on 1 February 1919, and three days later Petseri was secured, leaving Estonia free of Soviet forces. Throughout this period the Estonian Bolsheviks continued to make trouble. An attempted uprising in Tallinn in December 1918 was successfully countered, and a rebellion on the island of Saaremaa in February 1919 was put down. From February to May 1919 the situation on the Narva front remained static although Soviet artillery fire destroyed much of Narva. To the southeast the Soviets launched a major counterattack and recaptured Petseri on 11 March 1919. The Estonians, however, fought successful defensive battles south and east of Võru in the second half of March, and Petseri fell again to the Estonians on 29 March 1919. By mid-May the Estonians had completely regained the initiative.

In May 1919 the Estonian army command decided to advance into Russia to secure the frontiers of Estonia. This move required an uneasy alliance with the local

White Russian forces, the North-Western Army. While the White Russians were opposed to the Soviets, they were also opposed to Estonian independence. Initially the offensive fared well. Pskov in the south was captured, as were Jamburg, Gdov, and Luga to the north. The White Russian forces, supported by small British detachments, advanced to within a few miles of Petrograd.

To the south in Latvia, Estonian forces secured Alūksne on 28 May 1919, and Jekabpils on the River Daugava in early June. Cēsis on the road to Riga was taken on 31 May 1919, but retaken by the Baltic German Landeswehr on 6 June 1919. In April 1919 the Latvian Provisional Government had been ousted in a coup d'état by a pro-German Government, backed by the Landeswehr that preferred to turn north against the Estonians rather than east against the Soviet forces. In a fierce battle lasting four days the Estonians defeated the Landeswehr, and the date on which Cēsis was recaptured, 23 June 1919, has since been celebrated in Estonia as Victory Day. Once again in October 1919 the Latvians sought

Estonian help for the defence of Riga.

In late August the Estonians were offered peace talks by the Soviets and these took place in September in Pskov, which had been retaken by the Soviets at the end of August. No agreement was reached, partly as a result of Allied pressure to continue fighting the Soviets, but the talks did demonstrate that the Russians no longer regarded the conflict as a civil war, but as one between two sovereign states. In October the White Russian North Western Army launched an attack on Petrograd. This failed and the North Western Army collapsed. By mid-November Soviet forces were once again threatening Narva. The Estonians disarmed the North Western Army as it retreated into Estonia, but many of its members joined the Estonian forces defending Narva.

At the start of December peace talks recommenced in Tartu. To strengthen their negotiating position, the Soviets mounted heavy attacks on Narva. In the middle of the month the Soviet forces managed to create a bridgehead over the Narva River to the southwest of Narva at Krivasoo and

Vääska, and threatened to surround Narva. In very heavy fighting the Estonians managed to restore the situation. With the defeat of the attack on Petrograd the Allies had lost hope of defeating the Soviets and no longer opposed peace talks. On 31 December 1919 an armistice was agreed which came into effect on 3 January 1920. During January 1920 talks agreed the border between Russia and Estonia, and the Treaty of Tartu was signed on 2 February 1920.

Latvia

The First World War had a very severe impact on Latvia, as the front line between German and Russian forces bisected Latvia for most of the duration of the war. By May 1915 the Germans had captured the southwestern corner of Latvia, including the port of Liepāja. By September 1915 the Germans had advanced to the line of the River Daugava, occupying all of Latvia south and west of the river, except for a Russian held salient on the west bank of the river at Riga. In January 1917 a Russian offensive from this salient ended with

the recapture of the towns of Tukums and Jelgava, which were held by the Russians through the summer of 1917. On 1 September 1917 the Germans launched an offensive against Riga, very quickly capturing the city and a considerable salient to the east of the city on the east bank of the River Daugava. The front line then remained static, until in February 1918 the Germans advanced against minimal opposition to occupy all of the rest of Latvia. The presence of the German front line in Latvia, and the perceived unwillingness of Russian soldiers to defend what many of them considered a German province, led to the creation of local Latvian Regiments authorised by the Russian government. By November 1915 eight Latvian battalions had been formed, and during the course of the war a total of over 130,000 men joined these local Latvian forces. In May 1917 the Latvian Regiments transferred their loyalty to the Bolsheviks, partly through a sense of having been betrayed by the Tsarist forces in the fight against the Germans.

In March 1917 the Provisional Livonian Council was formed at Valmiera with au-

thority over the Latvian parts of Livonia, the Estonian parts having been absorbed into the new autonomous Estonia. In May 1917 a provisional council for Latgale was formed at Rezekne. In the same month a provisional council was formed for Kurland in Tartu, as at that time the Germans occupied Kurland. On 5 July 1917 the Provisional Livonian Council was declared the regional government by the Provisional Government of Russia, which at the same time strongly opposed the unification of Latgale with the other regions of Latvia. On 12 August the Latvian authorities demanded total self-determination, and those closest to power decided that if the Germans occupied Riga independence from Russia would be sought.

The first democratic elections to the Livonian Council were held in August 1917, when the Bolsheviks gained a majority. After the October revolution in Russia the position of the Bolsheviks was much strengthened, and the Executive Committee of Latvian Soviets wielded absolute power. In the areas not occupied by Germany, essentially northern and eastern

Latvia excluding Riga after early September 1917, banks and businesses were nationalised, land was confiscated, civil rights and press freedom were restricted, political activity was banned, nationalists were arrested, and religious freedom was not respected. The Bolshevik policies soon caused unrest amongst the majority of the population and brought about renewed support for independence. In Valka on 16 November 1917 nationalist Latvian politicians formed a Provisional National Council, which began to make preparations for forming a constituent assembly and sending representatives to gather support in the west. A second sitting of the council in January 1918 confirmed the intention of separating Latvia from Russia and creating an independent state but, at this time, the council had no power to act.

By the end of February 1918 the Germans occupied all of Latvia. In accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk while the Bolsheviks ceded sovereignty of Kurland they retained jurisdiction in Livonia, although German troops were to be stationed here for security. Regardless

of the treaty the Germans continued to occupy adjacent parts of Russia in the Governorates of Pskov and Vitebsk. As has been related in the section on Estonia the Germans had no desire to see the creation of genuinely independent Baltic states and instead created a Baltic Dukedom, dominated by the Baltic Germans, incorporating Estonia and Latvia whose "independence" was proclaimed in Riga on 5 November 1918. Acting illegally during the German occupation the Provisional National Council united with the Democratic Bloc functioning in Riga to form the Latvian People's Council.

The armistice signed by Germany on 11 November 1918 at Compiègne in France annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and on 13 November the Bolsheviks started preparations for an offensive against the Germans in the east. The United Kingdom gave de facto recognition to Latvia on 11 November 1918 but it was not until 17 November 1918 that the first sitting of the Latvian People's Council, presided over by J. Cakste, took place. The People's Council appointed the Latvian Provisional Gov-

ernment headed by K. Ulmanis and the declaration of independence of the Republic of Latvia was made in Riga Theatre on 18 November 1918.

The Latvian Provisional Government had no armed forces at its disposal with which to defend Latvia, and as the German forces withdrew the Bolsheviks occupied Latvia. The Germans were willing to give up Latvia east of a line from Riga to Bauska, and the Bolsheviks progressively occupied eastern Latvia without opposition. In the north Alūksne was taken on 7 December, Valka on 18 December, and Cēsis on 23 December 1918. In the south Daugavpils was taken on 9 December, Plavinas on 17 December, and Skrīveri on 27 December 1918. Riga fell to the Bolsheviks on 3 January 1919, and the Latvian Provisional Government moved to Liepāja. The Bolsheviks now engaged the Germans on the line they had chosen for their defence. On 7 January Bauska fell to the Bolsheviks followed by Tukums and Jelgava on 10 January 1919. The Bolshevik advance was only halted at the end of January 1919 on the line of the River Venta from the

sea at Ventspils to the Lithuanian border. With the advance of the Bolshevik forces came the restoration of Bolshevik government, with the Latvian Soviet Republic being declared in Valka shortly after its capture. The situation was complicated by the fact that the Bolshevik forces included amongst their numbers the Latvian Regiments, who now found themselves fighting for the Bolsheviks against not just German forces, but also the forces of the Latvian Provisional Government.

In January 1919 the Landeswehr, formed from the local Baltic Germans and the Iron Division, formed from German volunteers, were placed under the command of the German General Count von der Goltz. In January also the Latvian Provisional Government was able to form the South Latvian Brigade commanded by Colonel Balodis, and by agreement with the Estonians was able to start forming the North Latvian Brigade, commanded by Colonel Zemītais in southern Estonia. Estonian forces recaptured Valka and Rūjiena from the Bolsheviks on 1 February 1919, gaining a foothold in northern Latvia. At the beginning

of March 1919 the German forces of Count von der Goltz with the South Latvian Brigade were able to resume the offensive from the line of the River Venta. Tukums was recaptured from the Bolsheviks on 15 March, and Jelgava on 18 March 1919 and by 26 March 1919 the German and Latvian forces had closed on Riga, which remained, though, for the time being in Bolshevik hands.

Count von der Goltz, however, harboured aspirations still for the restoration of Baltic German dominance in the Baltic area. On 16 April 1919 a coup backed by German units ousted the Latvian Provisional Government and the regime of K. Ulmanis in Liepāja. While the Germans were able to arrest some ministers the majority and the leadership, including Ulmanis, found refuge on the Latvian freighter "Saratov" under British protection in Liepāja harbour. On 10 May a puppet German-Latvian regime under the leadership of A. Niedra was formed, but this regime was recognised neither by the Western Allies nor by the majority of the people of Latvia. In the areas under their

control the Landeswehr and the Iron Division took part in repressive measures to force acceptance of the new regime. The South Latvian Brigade did not accept the new regime either but continued to cooperate with the German forces, in opposing the Bolshevik forces and continuing the liberation of Latvia from the Bolsheviks.

On 22 May Riga was liberated from the Bolsheviks by the German forces of Count von der Goltz, which then continued their advance northeast towards Cēsis. The South Latvian Brigade was denied a major role in the recapture of Riga, and was then directed to the southeast to pursue the Bolsheviks along the banks of the River Daugava. By ensuring that the German forces recaptured Riga Count von der Goltz was able to ensure the re-establishment of German authority in Riga. By his subsequent dispositions he was able to ensure that the German forces were so positioned that they were able to engage the Estonian backed Latvian forces to the north.

In the north of Latvia Limbaži was captured by forces advancing from Estonia

on 27 May 1919, further east Alūksne was retaken by forces advancing from Valka on 29 May 1919, and on 31 May 1919 Cēsis was retaken by forces advancing from Rūjiena. In a very rapid advance south, forces from Alūksne reached Jekabpils on 5 June 1919, linking up shortly afterwards with the South Latvian Brigade advancing from Riga. By the middle of June the Bolsheviks retained control only of Latgale east of a line from Subate on the Lithuanian border to Alūksne in the north. However, there remained to be resolved the conflict between the largely German forces of Count von der Goltz loyal to the puppet Niedra regime and the Latvian and Estonian forces loyal to and supporting the legitimate Ulmanis regime.

On 19 June 1919 the German Landeswehr and Iron Division opened the attack on the Latvian and Estonian forces around Cēsis. By 21 June 1919 the Germans had achieved considerable success, but the timely arrival of reinforcements enabled the Latvians and Estonians to counter-attack and regain the initiative on 22 June 1919. Shortly afterwards the German

forces began to retreat and were pursued to Riga where they prepared to defend the city on 26 June. Under pressure though from the Allies an armistice was agreed at Strazdumuiža on 3 July 1919. By its terms the legitimate government of Ulmanis was to be restored, the Baltic German Landeswehr was to be placed under the command of the British officer, Lt Col Alexander (later Field Marshal Lord Alexander of Tunis), and the Volunteer German Iron Division was to leave Latvia. The government of K. Ulmanis returned to Riga on 8 July 1919 and the Landeswehr, under British command, became a component of the Latvian National Army. The Iron Division, however, did not leave Latvia, despite a meeting between General Gough of the Allied Military Mission and Count von der Goltz on 19 July, remaining instead at Jelgava. Allied pressure however did ensure that Count von der Goltz was recalled to Germany by the German government on 3 October 1919.

Allied support for the Baltic states was not motivated by any particular wish to see the Baltic states gain independence.

Instead allied support was motivated more by a wish to see that the Germans did not win territory in the east, having lost in the west, and a wish to see the Russian Bolsheviks defeated and the Tsarist regime, their ally in the war, restored to power. For this reason the Allies supported the raising of the White Russian Western Army under the command of Colonel Bermond-Avalov at Jelgava in late summer and early autumn 1919, for operations against the Bolsheviks. The White Russians, however, were no supporters of the idea of independence for the Baltic states, and Germans who had previously served in the Iron Division of German volunteers made more than three-quarters of Bermond-Avalov's force up. It should perhaps then have come as no surprise when on 8 October 1919 the Russian Western Army commenced operations against the Republic of Latvia.

Bermond-Avalov's forces marched on Riga from Jelgava but the Latvian National Army, helped by volunteers from the population of Riga, was able to prevent the White Russians from crossing the River

Daugava. In fighting between 16 and 19 October at Jaunjelgava the Latvian National Army defeated White Russian forces moving east along the line of the River Daugava. Only in Kurland did the White Russians achieve any great success. The Latvians were able only to hold the ports of Liepaja and Ventspils and a narrow strip of the coastline east of Ventspils. The counter-attack of the Latvian National Army started on 11 October, and on 15 October the fortress of Daugagriva at the mouth of the River Daugava was captured. With Allied naval gunfire support, the Latvians started to clear the parts of Riga on the west bank of the River Daugava on 3 November, and the whole of the city was back in Latvian hands by 10 November 1919. On the night of 19 November Colonel Bermond-Avalov placed his forces under the protection of General Eberhardt, the successor to Count von der Goltz, who sought an early truce. On 21 November the Latvians recaptured Jelgava. On the orders of the Allied Military Commission the whole of Latvia was cleared of Bermond-Avalov's forces by 29 November 1919.

With the threat posed by the White Russian forces extinguished and the departure of the last German forces on Latvian territory, the Latvians could now look to the liberation of Latgale where the situation had remained largely static since the summer. Plans were made in co-operation with the Lithuanians and the Poles and an offensive was launched on 3 January 1920, the same day as the Estonians agreed an armistice with the Bolsheviks. The Lithuanians and the Poles advanced on Daugavpils from the south, and after the capture of the city the Poles advanced east to and beyond Krāslava. To the north the Latvians advanced east on a broad front. Rezekne was captured on 21 January 1920 and on 1 February 1920 an armistice was agreed with the Bolsheviks. By this time, with the exception of one small area in the north-east, all Latvian speaking areas had been freed from Bolshevik control and, although sporadic fighting took place for some time after the agreement of the armistice the war of independence was over. A Peace Treaty was finally agreed with Moscow on 11 August 1920.

Lithuania

The Germans occupied the area of modern Lithuania in three stages during World War One. Some seven months after the start of the war the Germans had regained the initiative on their eastern front and, advancing from Prussia, had occupied the border regions of the Russian Empire to a maximum depth of some thirty miles in the areas west of Kaunas and Alytus.

In April 1915 the Germans launched an offensive in Lithuania to draw attention away from their offensive being planned in Galicia. By the end of April 1915 all of western Lithuania had been occupied, and the front line ran from north-west to south-east along the line of the Venta and Dubysa rivers, and then south just to the west of Kaunas, Alytus, and Grodno. In August 1915 the Germans resumed their offensive in Lithuania following up the success they had achieved further to the south. Kaunas was attacked on 8 August 1915 and was captured nine days later. Vilnius fell to the Germans on 19 September 1915.

By the end of September the German front line had stabilised along the line of the River Daugava in Latvia and south from Daugavpils to Pinsk. All of modern Lithuania was now in German hands and would remain so for the rest of World War One. In spring 1916 the Russians mounted an offensive northeast of Vilnius in the vicinity of Lake Naroch but achieved no success, and thereafter the German occupation of Lithuania went unchallenged.

As early as 1915 the political leadership in Vilnius began to discuss the restoration of Lithuanian independence. In Switzerland in 1916 the idea was first openly discussed, and the desire for independence was stressed in an appeal to the American President Wilson. Lithuanians were encouraged during the spring of 1916 after the declaration of the formation of a Polish Republic under German and Austro-Hungarian protection, although there were fears that the Poles might lay claim to Lithuanian territory. The Germans postponed any decision on the status of Lithuania until after the end of the war.

Entirely occupied by Germany the February and October revolutions in Rus-

sia in 1917 did not directly affect Lithuania although as a result the Germans reviewed their policy with regard to Lithuania forming a Lithuanian council with limited powers. On 18 September 1917 a Lithuanian conference assembled in Vilnius with J. Basanavičius as its elected Chairman. This conference stated the determination of the Lithuanian people to achieve independence, and elected a 20 member Taryba or council chaired by A. Smetona to draw up a constitution. Germany proposed a conference of Lithuanian politicians and this took place in Bern in November 1917, where agreement was reached on an independent Lithuanian state under German protection. The Taryba presented a document to the Germans on 11 December 1917 proclaiming the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state, but Germany did not react to this document.

The Taryba, losing popularity, decided to act decisively, and on 16 February 1918 the Independence Manifesto was signed and Lithuania was declared independent. This time the Germans did react and recognised the Independence Manifesto on 23 March

1918, but only on the basis of the document of 11 December 1917. On 13 July 1918 the Taryba elected the German Duke Wilhelm von Urach as the King of Lithuania, in accordance with wishes expressed in Berlin to link Lithuania to Germany as closely as possible.

Following the German armistice with the Allies on 11 November 1918 and the annulling of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks resumed their offensive against the Germans in the east. The Germans fell back from the forward positions they had occupied in February 1918, but were determined to hold positions in Lithuania to the east of their frontiers. The Lithuanian government started to organise a Lithuanian Army on 23 November 1918, but in early December 1918 the Bolsheviks invaded Lithuania. On 8 December the Provisional Lithuanian Government of Workers and Peasants was proclaimed. On 16 January 1919 it was decided in Moscow to abolish the Belarussian Soviet Republic, absorb most of it into Russia, and amalgamate the rest with Lithuania as the Lithuanian-Belarussian Soviet Republic.

The Bolsheviks captured Vilnius on 6 January 1919, and by the end of the same month only western Lithuania remained in Lithuanian and German hands. The front line ran west and south of Telšiai, south of Šiauliai and curved south east of Kaunas and just east of Alytus. On 5 March 1919 the Lithuanian government resorted to compulsory conscription to sustain their army. In April 1919 Polish forces liberated Vilnius from the Bolsheviks, and Lithuanian and German forces went onto the offensive against the Bolsheviks elsewhere in Lithuania, soon liberating Panevėžys and Ukmergė. By the end of June 1919 all of Lithuania had been cleared of Bolshevik forces, and in August 1919 a ceasefire with the Bolsheviks took effect although this had not been formally agreed and much of eastern Lithuania remained in Polish hands. A Polish backed coup to unite Lithuania with Poland was discovered and foiled in Kaunas in August 1919. A demarcation line had been established with the Poles in July 1919 but border clashes continued for the next year.

At the same time as the White Russian forces of Colonel Bermont-Avalov marched on Riga in October 1919, they invaded northwestern Lithuania and marched towards Vilnius. The Lithuanians decisively defeated the Bermont-Avalov forces at Radviliškis on 21 November 1919. Many of Bermont-Avalov's forces were German volunteers, and as a result of his actions the Western Allies demanded the withdrawal of all remaining German forces from the Baltic States and the last German troops left Lithuania on 15 December 1919.

During July 1920 the Bolsheviks mounted a major offensive during which the Poles were driven from eastern Lithuania, and Vilnius was captured on 14 July 1920. The Lithuanians concluded a peace treaty with the Bolsheviks on 12 July 1920 that established eastern and southern borders for Lithuania. (These borders were further east and further south than those given to the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1944 and accepted today.) Vilnius was handed back to the Lithuanians by the Bolsheviks on 27 August 1920.

At the gates of Warsaw, with Warsaw already reported as having fallen to the Bolsheviks in some newspapers, the Poles inflicted a massive defeat on the Bolsheviks, who started to retreat in disorder with the Poles advancing close behind them. On 7 October 1920, with the Western Allies participating in the negotiations, an agreement was signed between Lithuania and Poland that, although it left certain issues unresolved, left Vilnius in Lithuanian hands. Two days later Polish forces led by General Zeligowski re-occupied Vilnius and the surrounding areas. The Polish government accepted no responsibility for the actions of General Zeligowski who, they claimed, was leading a force of local inhabitants. In November 1920 the Lithuanians inflicted a defeat on the forces of General Zeligowski at Širvintos north of Vilnius and started to advance towards Vilnius, but agreed to a League of Nations brokered ceasefire before having retaken Vilnius. A neutral zone was established between Lithuania and Poland on 29 November 1920. After a plebiscite Vilnius and the surrounding area was incorporated into

Poland on 8 April 1922 and remained in Polish hands until 1939, causing continuing ill feeling between Lithuania and Poland.

Settling the borders of Germany following the end of the First World War the territory of Memel (Klaipėda), that part of Prussia north of the River Nemunas, was detached from Germany as a Free City. French forces occupied the area but civil administration remained in German hands. The local German population, just under half of the total, aimed for reunion with Germany and the Poles also made claims to the territory. In January 1923 Lithuanian troops occupied Klaipėda in support of an uprising by the local Lithuanian inhabitants. At first the French occupation forces resisted the Lithuanian occupation but soon gave way and were returned to France. On 8 May 1924 the League of Nations in Paris formally agreed to the incorporation of Klaipėda into Lithuania. The status of Klaipėda soured Lithuania's relations with Germany, and on 22 March 1939 Lithuania gave in to German demands that Memel be returned to them.

Intervention

The intervention of the Western Allies in the Baltic area at the end of the First World War was not motivated by any particular policy to assist the Baltic states achieve independence. Instead the allies did not wish to see the Germans profit in the east when they had lost in the west, and sought to support the White Russians in the Russian Civil War. The Russian Tsarist Regime had been a good ally and the western powers had no wish to see the Bolsheviks become established in Russia. However following the losses of the First World War the western allies had no wish to become involved in an expensive conflict in Russia. Support for the White Russians went as far as the provision of materiel support and volunteers, and the securing of base areas for them but not as far, except on isolated occasions, as actually taking part in fighting against the Bolshevik forces.

Allied forces supported the White Russians from all points of the compass. In

the north, from the Arctic Ocean, British, American, Italian, and Serbian forces operated from Moermansk and Archangel. In the south, in the Black Sea area, French and Rumanian forces operated from Odessa, and British forces operated from Batumi. In the east American, British, Czech, and Japanese forces were present in Siberia. These land forces numbered in excess of 100,000 men. In the west mainly naval forces lent assistance to the anti-Bolshevik forces, including the forces of the emerging Baltic nations. In the first half of 1919 the British Royal Navy had an average of just fewer than thirty ships committed to operations in the Baltic Sea, in the second half of the year this figure increased threefold. The French Navy, which worked in close co-operation with the Royal Navy, had twenty-six ships involved in Baltic operations. The Americans had fourteen ships present, and the Italians contributed two ships. Direct assistance, both in terms of volunteer personnel and materiel, was also given to the Baltic states in limited amounts by a number of other states, in particular the Scandinavians.

Although the task of the British and French naval forces was essentially to blockade the Bolshevik forces they maintained an offensive posture and provided considerable support to the authorities and forces of the Baltic states. (By contrast the allied land forces committed in other parts of Russia maintained an essentially defensive posture.) The British Royal Navy, commanded by Rear-Admiral Sinclair arrived in Estonian waters in the early days of December 1918. One early act of support involved the bombardment of the only bridge across the Narva River, destroying it and creating severe difficulties for the Bolshevik forces to the west of it in Estonia. The Royal Navy also acted as a covering force to a small Estonian amphibious assault to the rear of the Bolshevik front line, and provided over 5,000 rifles and other stores to the Estonian forces. Before the end of December 1918 the Royal Navy had captured two Bolshevik destroyers, which were handed over to the Estonian Navy and assisted in the transport of over 500 Finnish volunteers from Helsinki to Tallinn. Early in January 1919 the Royal

Navy supported the Estonians, who had gone over to the offensive, with naval gunfire against the Bolshevik forces.

Vessels of the Royal Navy arrived in Riga on 19 December 1918. Stores were landed, training was provided to Latvian volunteers, and naval gunfire was provided in support of the forces of the Ulmanis government. However the Royal Navy could not by itself prevent the fall of Riga to the Bolsheviks, it withdrew carrying refugees on 3 January 1919 and Sinclair's force withdrew from the Baltic Sea.

Sinclair was replaced by a force under the command of Rear-Admiral Cowan. This force, in February 1919, was able to provide additional materiel support to the Latvians at Liepaja, and with the use of naval gunfire support the Latvians in the defence of Ventspils. In April additional support in the shape of artillery guns and transport was provided to the Latvians at Liepaja, and the Royal Navy played an active part in preventing the capture of Ulmanis and the Latvian Government at the time of the German backed coup.

May 1919 found the Royal Navy in Estonian waters where cover was once again provided for Estonian amphibious operations and a close watch was kept on the Bolshevik fleet at Kronstadt. Operations against Kronstadt involved elements of the recently formed Royal Air Force. May 1919 also saw the establishment of a British Military Mission in the Baltic Region headquartered at Helsinki.

Following the defeat of the German Landeswehr at Cēsis, the Royal Navy played an important role in the negotiations at Riga that led to the restoration in Latvia of the government of Ulmanis. It was at this time that an officer from the British Mission, Lt Col Alexander, was appointed to command the Landeswehr in support of Latvian objectives. Later, at the start of 1920, the Landeswehr were to play a major role in the liberation of Latgale that concluded the Latvian War of Independence.

October 1919 saw the White Russian forces of Bermond-Avalov, with considerable German support, commence their operations against the Latvian government forces. Again the British Royal Navy and

the French Navy gave significant support to the Latvian forces. Both at Riga and at Liepaja naval gunfire supported the efforts of the Latvian government forces opposing the White Russian forces of Bermond-Avalov.

British operations in the Baltic Region were not carried out without losses. A total of 17 ships were sunk, with mines claiming a large number, and 37 aircraft were also lost. 123 Royal Navy and 5 Royal Air Force personnel were killed.

Conclusion

In the introduction four factors were identified as being relevant to the route to independence for all of the Baltic states, their relative importance being different for each of the four states.

In Finland the war of independence was more of a civil war than in the other states. The Russian Bolsheviks recognised Finnish independence at an early stage and did not openly play an active role in events in Finland. It was therefore left to Finnish Bolsheviks, who might or might not have

sought a renewal of union with Russia, to dispute the style of government of Finland with the “White” Finns. Without doubt the Germans contributed in large measure to the victory of the “White” Finns. Since the civil war in Finland took place before the end of the First World War the Western Allies played, essentially, no role in the independence of Finland.

In Estonia the decisive events leading to independence started some months later than in Finland. In essence the Germans played no military role in the independence of Estonia and left the field early. In large measure the Estonians achieved independence by themselves in opposition to the Bolsheviks. The Western Allies, mainly the British and in particular the Royal Navy, did play a role in the independence of Estonia. It is easy to overestimate that role if only because the assistance given was just enough at a crucial time, rather than sustained and substantial assistance over a period of time.

It is in Latvia that the situation is most complex. But for German assistance and resistance in the early stages Latvia might

have succumbed to the Bolsheviks. It was, though, allied intervention, without a doubt, that thereafter thwarted German intentions in favour of Latvian aspirations. Beyond that, allied intervention played a role in defeating Russian aspirations, both Bolshevik and White. The Estonians too played a part in Latvia, playing a considerable role in the defeat of the Bolsheviks in northern Latvia, a decisive role in the defeat of Baltic German aspirations, and giving assistance to the Latvians in the defeat of the White Russians.

As in Latvia, in Lithuania too the Germans played a role in keeping the Lithuanians in the field against the Bolsheviks in the early stages. The western allies played a minimal role in Lithuania, and indeed later, in the case of Memel (Klaipėda), the Lithuanians found themselves opposed to the French. Ultimately in Lithuania, where the struggle for independence lasted longest, the Lithuanians, having played their part in defeating the White Russian forces, found themselves sharing cause with the Russian Bolsheviks against a common enemy, the Poles.

And so for some twenty years the Baltic states enjoyed independence until the onset of the Second World War, a war with its origins in the imperfections of the treaties that concluded the First World War. Finland resisted the Soviet Union fighting later with, but not for, Germany. Finland retained her sovereignty, although she lost much in terms of territory and limitations on her freedom of action. The governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania chose not to resist the Soviet Union, although later many of their people did, and sovereignty was lost. What might have been the ultimate outcome if Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had resisted in 1939? It is, at this stage of history, of course impossible to say. Perhaps occupation and incorporation into the Soviet Union would have happened anyway, but there has to be a chance that their fate would have mirrored that of Finland, and there is perhaps a bigger chance that their fate would have mirrored that of Poland. Perhaps the 1990s could have seen democratic government restored instead of sovereignty.

Annex

President Wilson's "Fourteen Points":

1. Point One renounced secret treaties demanding, "open covenants openly arrived at".
2. Point Two required freedom of the seas outside territorial waters and an end to "blockade" tactics.
3. Point Three called for the removal, wherever possible, of trade barriers.
4. Point Four called for arms reductions
5. Point Five called for impartial arbitration of all colonial disputes
6. Point Six called for the evacuation, by the Central Powers, of all former Russian territory.
7. Point Seven dealt with the restoration of Belgium.
8. Point Eight admitted French claims to Alsace and Lorraine.
9. Point Nine gave some recognition to Italian territorial claims.
10. Point Ten provided "autonomous development" for the various nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

11. Point Eleven demanded the evacuation of occupied Romania, Montenegro and Serbia with the latter having access to the Adriatic Coast.

12. Point Twelve guaranteed Turkish sovereignty over its heartlands but demanded autonomy for subject peoples and the opening of the Dardanelles to international traffic.

13. Point Thirteen recognized an independent Poland with access to the sea.

14. Point Fourteen recommended a “general association” of nations.

1 After the Napoleonic War representatives of all the European powers, except the Ottoman Empire, gathered in September 1815 at Vienna. They had the imposing task of building a new political and diplomatic structure for Europe after a quarter century of wars and revolutions. Work went slowly during the ten-month span of the Congress of Vienna. The leaders who gathered at Vienna - Lord Castlereagh of Great Britain, Count von Hardenberg of Prussia, Prince Klemens von Metternich of Austria, Tsar Alexander I of Russia, and Prince Charles Maurice de Talleyrand of France - met in small secret conferences to decide the future of Europe. In an attempt to restore some balance, the Congress followed four principles: legitimacy, encirclement of France, compensation,

and balance of power. The desire to construct an effective balance of power remained at the centre of the Congress’ attention. Each power, however, had its own idea of what constituted a proper balance. Russia’s ambitions in Poland almost broke up the conference: Britain believed that an enlarged Russia threatened peace. Prussia wanted all of Saxony: Austria feared a growing Prussia. While the four wartime allies split, the clever French representative, Talleyrand, negotiated a secret treaty among the French, Austrians, and British that pledged mutual assistance to restrain the Russians and Prussians. Russia and Prussia eventually reduced their demands for land in Poland and Saxony, and the sought-after balance of power was achieved.

2 The city and region of Memel lies on the Baltic at the mouth of the River Niemen. The region came under Swedish control and, following the Napoleonic wars under Prussia. It remained within the German Reich until the end of World War I. Germans constituted a majority of the city’s population while Lithuanians predominated in the surrounding countryside. The Treaty of Versailles severed Memel and the surrounding district from Germany. Lithuanian representatives to the Paris Peace Conference had asked the Allied Powers to grant them possession of the Memel area, but instead it was placed under a French administration that governed under a League of Nations mandate. An Allied commission recommended establishing a “Free City” under League of Nations supervision in the fall of 1922. Memel’s German and Polish communities favoured the proposal

but local Lithuanians responded by forming a Committee for the Salvation of Lithuania Minor. Lithuanian sovereignty over Memel (Lithuanian Klaipeda) was internationally recognized when France, Britain, Italy, and Japan signed the Memel Statute in December 1923. Memel was formally incorporated as an autonomous region of Lithuania on March 8, 1924. The local assembly (Landtag) was given extensive power over internal affairs subject to the approval of a governor appointed by the President of Lithuania. Memel was returned to the Germans on March 23, 1939. The Lithuanians had bowed to Hitler’s inevitable demands and turned the region over without a fight. Memel was heavily defended throughout the Second World War. The Red Army captured the heavily damaged city on January 28, 1945. Memel was renamed Klaipeda and incorporated into the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1947.

3 At the time of the October Revolution Russia still used the Julian calendar, so to find the Gregorian date we use the “rule of thumb” that after February 1900 the Julian calendar was 13 days behind the Gregorian Calendar. This means that on 5 November 1917 Gregorian calendar, it was 23 October 1917 according to the Julian calendar. Different parts of Russia changed from the *Julian* (JU) to the *Gregorian calendar* (GR) on different times during and after the revolution. Most sources refer to the change in February 1918 where 31 January 1918 JU, was succeeded by 14 February 1918 GR. This law was signed on 26 January 1918 JU.

4 Please find the full text of the “Fourteen Points” in the annex to this article.