

# BALTIC FLEET

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The Baltic Fleet, which controls the Kronshtadt and Baltiisk naval bases, is headquartered in Kaliningrad Oblast (formerly called Königsberg), a region that once formed part of East Prussia. Today Kaliningrad is a Russian enclave completely cut off from the rest of Russia by Lithuania and Poland (now a NATO member). Thus, although the fleet is defended by a naval infantry brigade, its location is potentially the most vulnerable of the major Russian naval fleets. While the Baltiisk naval base is located on Kaliningrad's Baltic Sea coast to the west, the Kronshtadt base is situated on Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland, about twenty-nine kilometers northwest of St. Petersburg. The naval base occupies one half of the island, which is about twelve kilometers long and two kilometers wide. Mutinies at Kronshtadt took place in 1825 and 1882 and played a part in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. In March, 1921, a revolt of the sailors – steadfastly loyal to the Bolsheviks during the revolution – precipitated Lenin's New Economic Policy. Kronshtadt sailors also played a major role in World War II in the defense of St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) against the Germans.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania deprived the new Russian state of key bases on the Baltic Sea that were located in those states. The 15,000-square-kilometer Kaliningrad Oblast between

Poland and Lithuania remained as the fleet's only ice-free naval outlet to the Baltic Sea. One of the first steps taken in the late 1990s to reform the Baltic Fleet was to incorporate air defense units into the Baltic Fleet structure. A second step was to restructure ground and coastal troops on the Baltic Fleet units. As of 2000, these forces consist of the Moscow-Minsk Proletarian Division, a Marine Brigade, Coastal Rocket Units, and a number of bases at which arms and equipment are kept. The Baltic Fleet does not include any strategic-missile submarines, but as of mid-1997 it included 32 major surface combatants (3 cruisers, 3 destroyers, and 26 frigates), more than 230 other surface vessels, roughly 200 naval aircraft, 9 tactical submarines, and a brigade of naval infantry. As of mid-2000 the Baltic Fleet included about 100 combat ships of various types, and the Fleet's Sea Aviation Group units were equipped with a total of 112 aircraft. Operational forces as of 1996 included nine submarines, twenty-three principal surface combatants [three cruisers, two destroyers, and eighteen frigates], and approximately sixty-five smaller vessels. The Baltic Fleet included one brigade of naval infantry and two regiments of coastal defense artillery. The air arm of the Baltic Fleet included 195 combat aircraft organized into five regiments and a number of other fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. Generally, armed forces comparable in size to the entire Polish army are stationed in Kaliningrad Oblast.

In 1993 pressure for autonomy from the Russian Federation increased. Seventy-eight percent of the population (about 900,000 then) was Russian. Some claimed that, although Königsberg was awarded to the Soviet Union under the Potsdam Accord in 1945, the Russian Federation held no legal title to the enclave.

Polish critics and others claimed that the garrison should be reduced to a level of "reasonable sufficiency." Since Poland was admitted to NATO in 1999, however, Russian patriots argue that Kaliningrad is a vital outpost at a time when Russia is menaced by Poland or even Lithuania, if that country is also admitted to NATO.

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