RETHINKING THE NATURE OF SECURITY:

The U.S. Northern Europe Initiative

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That U.S. policy toward the Baltic region should merit discussion is in itself an indicator of how much has changed in the last decade. That U.S. policy toward the Baltic should have come to embody an intellectual revolution is nothing less than extraordinary. Nonetheless, this is in fact the case.

Traditionally, the most notable features of U.S. policy toward the Baltic region have been, on the one hand, deliberate ambiguity and, on the other hand, tension in the policy's internal logic. This is hardly surprising. The ambiguity and tension in America's relationship with the Baltic nations can be understood as reflecting the more fundamental unresolved dialectic in American foreign policy, which pits America's commitment to liberalism against its embrace of realpolitik. As historian David Foglesong has succinctly noted, "Three times in the twentieth century the recession and reassertion of Russian and Soviet power along the Baltic Sea have weighed the balance between American idealistic principles and United States strategic interests, between devotion to the rights of small nations and attention to the needs of great powers."[1]

Following the collapse of Soviet power, as on earlier occasions, the United States found itself caught between a moral commitment to the independence and self-determination of the Baltic nations and a

[1] David S. Foglesong, "The United States, Self-Determination and the Struggle Against Bolshevism in the Eastern Baltic Region, 1918-1920," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, volume 26, number 2 (Summer 1995), p. 107.

pragmatic concern with developing a *modus vivendi* with Russia. This was painfully evident during the critical years of 1989-91, when the United States pursued what might be most charitably described as a cautious policy, responding reluctantly to events rather than attempting to direct them, and preferring to limit its involvement as much as possible.[2]

During the second half of the 1990s, however, the United States moved decisively both to take a more active, constructive role in the region and to try to escape what it regarded as an unacceptable choice between, on the one hand, failing to support the legitimate aspirations of the Baltic states and, on the other hand, foregoing a constructive relationship with Russia. Undertaking a policy initiative separate from but parallel to the European Union's Northern Dimension, U.S. decision-makers sought to create the conditions under which the Baltic states could eventually join NATO without antagonizing Russia. American policy aimed at preventing the emergence of a short-term political-military vacuum in the region, encouraging regional economic integration, and making progress toward eliminating a scrap-bin of political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural problems that were seen as the tinder for some future conflagration.

In all this, American policy was arguably praiseworthy, but still hardly newsworthy. What, at least from an academic perspective, is newsworthy is the conceptual breakthrough that accompanied this policy development. U.S. policymakers stepped outside the traditional policy framework, abandoning "modern" conceptions of security and security-building in favor of something identifiably post-modern in approach.

Now Departing from Westphalia, Bound for the Hansa

The revolutionary nature of the resulting "Northern Europe Initiative" (NEI) was not immediately apparent, even to the policy's

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[2] For a thorough and extremely readable account, see Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Path to Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

authors, nor was (or is) the policy free from the internal tensions between liberalism and realism that characterized earlier American strategies. Indeed, as Christopher Browning has correctly and insightfully observed, not two but "three different, and in part contradictory, theoretical approaches can be seen to inform U.S. aims, discourses and practices in the NEI." As he argues, "the NEI contains elements of traditional geopolitical thinking, liberal internationalism and lastly, and most covertly, elements of postmodern deterritoriality/regionality."[3]

Surprisingly, however, these three logically distinct theoretical approaches – which start from very different assumptions about the nature of international political life and the possibility of achieving cooperation – manage to co-exist reasonably harmoniously in the NEI.[4] Even more surprisingly, the postmodern elements increasingly came to dominate the policy. While the postmodern elements of the NEI were initially only implicit, by 2000 the frankly enunciated postmodern logic of key American decision-makers revealed just how far down novel paths American thinking had moved.[5]

This article argues that a careful reading of the NEI suggests that it came to incorporate five key departures from modern thinking about world politics. Singly, any of these departures could probably be accommodated in a traditional modern, "Westphalian" account of international politics, with its emphasis on the sovereignty of states, the central role of states in providing domestic security and protection against external aggression, and the self-help nature of international political life. Indeed, it is even possible to adapt the modern model of world politics to adjust for all five of NEI's intellectual departures, much as Ptolemaic representations of astronomy were adapted to account for the observed movement of the stars. Taken together and viewed candidly, however, these five departures are more readily understood

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[3] Christopher Browning, "A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Regional Cooperation: The United States and the Northern European Initiative," Copenhagen Peace Research Institute Working Paper, 2001, p. 2.
[4] Browning, *op. cit.,* pp. 2-3.
[5] See, for example, Strobe Talbott, "A Baltic Homecoming," (Robert C. Frasure Memorial Lecture), Tallinn, Estonia, 24 January 2000 (http://www.vm.ee/index.html; downloaded May 11, 2001).

as embodying a fundamental conceptual change, one embracing a distinctly postmodern view of world politics and of the role of the state.

First, the NEI moved American thinking away from traditional notions of security. It shifted policymakers' focus from state security to human security. Rather than defining security narrowly in terms of protecting the territory of the state from external invasion or assault, the NEI conceived of security in terms of guarding against the full range of threats to human welfare and quality of life – including economic deprivation, energy shortages, infectious disease, environmental degradation, crime, corrupt political institutions, and loss of cultural identity. These dangers were understood to be inextricably linked, not only to each other but to more traditional concerns about the state's security and sovereign authority, since both the internal legitimacy of the state and its ability to avoid provoking its neighbors depended on solving the whole nexus of issues. Thus, the NEI acknowledged, protection from all of these threats, not just from foreign invaders, had to be achieved if the region were to be at peace.

Second, the NEI recognized the non-zero-sum nature of security thus conceived. In traditional thinking about security, more security for one party was generally assumed to imply less security for that party's neighbors (although, to be sure, scholars and policymakers have long recognized the possibility of mutually advantageous steps, such as arms control, that would reduce or eliminate some of these "security dilemmas"). The widened conception of security, however, made apparent that security was a *collective* good rather than the outcome of a *competitive* process. Security could not be created for some at the expense of others. There would be security for all or security for none. Safety from economic deprivation, disease, crime, environmental degradation, cultural loss, and so forth, could not be gained by making others less secure: it could only come by solving, or at least reducing, these problems for everyone in the region.

Third, in thinking about security and security architecture for northern Europe, the NEI abandoned the Westphalian model's traditional narrow focus on the activities of sovereign states and state institutions. It broadened its analytical vision to take into account the

crucial role to be played by intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational corporations, and sub-state actors. These were regarded not as peripheral or epiphenomenal institutions, but as being as central and real as the state itself. From the point of view of a policy practitioner, of course, this expansion of focus was simply a logical corollary of the broader vision of security, since the state was not particularly well endowed to resolve many of these new security problems.

Fourth, the logic of the NEI suggested the need to reconceptualize the parameters of political space and to stop paying unthinking obeisance to political borders. It was immediately apparent to the NEI's authors that the division between East and West was a central obstacle to be overcome. But the logic of the NEI pushed further than this. It was not simply the dark line on the map separating East and West that needed to be erased: it was the very habit of analyzing solutions in terms of pre-defined, bordered political space that had to be abandoned. In the NEI's analysis, neither security problems nor relevant actors were constrained by borders, or at least by a single set of fixed borders. Given this reality, it was imperative that thinking not be constrained by borders either. In efforts to provide security, broadly defined, boundaries needed to be set by the particular problem to be solved, not assumed a priori.

Implicit in this abandonment of bordered thinking was also the need to stop thinking in terms of national "we" and "they." Thus, a fifth departure: at least implicitly by the time its evolution had finished, the NEI refused to regard as given and unalterable the way northern Europeans constructed their identity. That is, where traditional, modern accounts of security assumed that politics would inevitably coalesce around mutually exclusive "national" identities associated with nation-states or with aspirations toward nation-statehood, the NEI at least implicitly accepted the possibility that meaningful political identities might be formed in a number of overlapping ways and that the resulting political landscape might be far more complex than a neat

Westphalian map, with its clearly defined borders and mutually exclusive sovereign polities.[6]

As the framers of the NEI recognized, what both they and the Finnish authors of the Northern Dimension were imagining had actual historic antecedents: what they were imagining was, in important regards, a return to a Hanseatic political architecture. As U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott noted in an effort to explain the NEI,

> the Hanseatic League was a concert of city-states -- precursors of nation-states -- that felt secure enough in their identities and in their neighborhood to make a virtue of their diversity and derive benefit from their interactions with one another…. It's in the spirit of resurrecting the region's Hanseatic past and burying its Soviet past that the EU has launched the Northern Dimension…. The U.S.'s own North European Initiative is in the same spirit as the EU's Northern Dimension.[7]

Of course, references to the Hanseatic League slip easily and comfortably off the tongue: given the central and positive role the Hansa played in the early economic development of the region and the gently obscuring haze cast by the centuries that have passed since the Hansa's collapse, allusions to the Hanseatic League may at first seem like a safely vacuous rhetorical device. What should be clear, though, is that the choice of referents is important. Whatever else is ambiguous, two features of the Hanseatic League are inescapably apparent. First, as the NEI's authors recognized, the Hansa's economic dimension cannot be regarded in isolation. The economic integration and prosperity created by the Hanseatic League did not exist in a political void. The Hanseatic League was a political system as much as an economic one. Second, for modern thinkers, this Hanseatic political system represents an alternative to the modern

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[6] For an extended discussion of these points, see Edward Rhodes, "The American Vision of Baltic Security Architecture: Understanding the Northern Europe Initiative," *Baltic Defense Review*, volume 2000, number 4 (December 2000) or Edward Rhodes, "The Northern European Initiative and U.S. Visions of Baltic Security," in Andres Kasekamp, ed., *Organizing Europe's Place in World Affairs: The European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2001).

[7] Talbott, *op. cit.*

model of international organization. Taken seriously -- and whether one likes the NEI or not, since it represents the official policy of the American superpower, one is obliged to consider it seriously -- arguments for "resurrecting the region's Hanseatic past" imply an abandonment of a Westphalian model of international politics.

This Hanseatic model of international politics does not assume that military security will cease to be important, that all problems are non-zero-sum, that states will disappear or be replaced by NGOs, that borders will cease to exist, or that national loyalties will evaporate. There is no reason to assume it is either naive or millennial. Rather, what the framers of the NEI have suggested is that a complex regional community can be created, in which individuals are linked by a variety of economic, political, cultural, and practical ties. While conflicts of interest within this community will surely still exist, they are not and will not be primarily or necessarily military, and the bulk of the critical challenges facing the region require cooperative solutions. Problem-solving within this community is best handled by a wide variety of institutions, of which the sovereign state is only one. Unlike Westphalian borders, the borders of and within this new northern European community will be permeable, multi-layered, and issue-specific. Identity and loyalty within this community will be increasingly diffuse and cross-cutting, and the resolution of disputes may conceivably be conducted with relatively little attention to national identity.

Obviously, this unusual departure from Westphalian thinking raises the question of where intellectual revolutions like this come from. When and how successfully can states -- which are after all the principal institutional embodiment of modern, Westphalian thinking -- move beyond modern, Westphalian models of international politics and begin to think about international order in other terms? To understand the NEI, how its revolutionary, postmodern elements emerged, its implications for the security architecture of Europe's north, and its potential replicability, it is useful to explore the evolution of American policy and the pressures that have driven that evolution.

The Roots of the NEI

The initial seeds of the NEI sprouted in the most modern -- that is, traditional -- of soils: the Clinton administration's commitment, in the mid-1990s, to NATO enlargement. While the Clinton administration supported the rapid enlargement of NATO, it was clearly apparent and generally recognized that inclusion of the Baltic states in the first round of enlargement was not in the cards. Neither in Europe nor in America was there sufficient support. The reasons for this lack of support were multiple. The most obvious were geographic and crudely geopolitical. Despite Danish arguments to the contrary, the Baltic states were not regarded as strategically essential to the defense of the alliance against a potential Russian attack. While a map might suggest that the Baltic states would represent a forward bulwark for Sweden and a strategic flank for Finland, neither Sweden nor Finland was a member of NATO. Further, given their exposed position, small size, and lack of significant geographic obstacles, the Baltic states would be extremely difficult to defend with conventional forces and would present the Alliance with pressures for early (nuclear or horizontal) escalation. Compounding these geographic problems were discreetly voiced political concerns: in the early years following the restoration of their independence it was not wholly inconceivable that Estonia and Latvia might provoke a Russian intervention through their policies toward Russophone minorities. In addition, although the Baltic states had proved willing to make concessions to resolve border disputes, Russian foot-dragging also meant that their eastern borders – that is, what would be the border between NATO and Russia -- were still not definitively accepted. Ultimately, however, the obstacle was an essentially realpolitik one: admission of the Baltic states was seen as unacceptably provocative to Russia. Not only had the Baltic states been part of the Soviet Union, they also separated Russia from its forward military bastion, Kaliningrad, and would place Petersburg and other important Russian cities within easy range of NATO forces.

The difficulty for American policymakers, however, was that failure to include the Baltic states in NATO enlargement risked creating a security vacuum, in the traditional sense, and created a danger that a grey zone of uncertainty and instability might emerge. If NATO

enlargement proceeded and the Baltic states were not admitted, some alternative security architecture for northern Europe had to be developed. As Ronald Asmus, who would become the prime architect of the NEI, and Robert Nurick noted in the 1996 article that offered the first exploratory sketch of the policy that would become the NEI,

> the improbability of near-term Baltic membership in NATO underscores the need for the Alliance to develop a strategy for strengthening Baltic independence and anchoring these states in the West…. NATO has repeatedly pledged that enlargement will enhance the security of Europe as a whole and not produce new dividing lines. Few issues are more likely to test this proposition than the question of where the Baltic states fit into overall Western strategy.[8]

As Asmus and another co-author succinctly observed in another article written about the same time,

> as action on enlargement draws near, NATO must lay out a vision for its new security structure in Europe, establish clear steps toward that goal, and reassure countries that may feel threatened or abandoned by the process, while retaining needed flexibility for the alliance…. Developing a strategy toward the have-nots [that is, the states not admitted to NATO] is far from a side issue in the NATO enlargement debate; it is front and center. Over the next few years there will be no more visible barometer of the alliance's true priorities and leadership – or lack thereof.[9]

In other words, in the context of NATO enlargement in central Europe, benign neglect and policy drift in northern Europe were not acceptable options for the United States. Some sort of policy toward the Baltic states would be necessary.

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[8] Ronald D. Asmus and Robert C. Nurick, "NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States," *Survival*, volume 38, number 2 (Summer 1996), p. 121.

[9] Ronald D. Asmus and F. Stephen Larrabee, "NATO and the Have-Nots: Reassurance after Enlargement," *Foreign Affairs*, volume 75, number 6 (December 1996), p. 20.

Asmus and Nurick identified five requirements that this new northern European security policy would have to satisfy. First, the American policy must not leave Russia with the impression that the Baltic states were within its sphere of influence and that it would be free to coerce, intimidate, or re-annex them. Second, the policy would have to reassure the Nordic states: it would have to demonstrate that NATO enlargement in central Europe and the withdrawal of Russian forces from that theater would not have the effect of leaving the Nordic states as the new exposed frontline in any East-West confrontation.[10] Third, the policy would have to be domestically acceptable to NATO member states. In the case of the United States, this meant satisfying not only the small but vocal Baltic-American ethnic community but also the sizeable portion of the national elite with an ideological commitment to undoing Yalta and creating a single Europe, whole and free. As Asmus and Nurick noted, in Danish domestic politics, the issue of guaranteeing Baltic security was even more important. Fourth, the policy needed to facilitate EU enlargement – which might be jeopardized by the absence of a credible security architecture for the region. Fifth and finally, the policy would have to "take into account the question of Russia's relations with the West," as Asmus and Nurick delicately put it. "Given the political sensitivity surrounding this issue [of Baltic security arrangements] in both Russian and US domestic politics, it has the potential to damage US-Russian relations and to undercut efforts to create a 'privileged partnership' between NATO and Russia."[11]

It is interesting to note a sixth imperative that did not make Asmus's and Nurick's list of requirements, but that was logically connected to the accomplishment of the five they noted: that the policy contribute to political stability in the Baltic states. By the mid-1990s, political leadership in all three Baltic states had already definitively and unambiguously rejected any security architecture that was not based

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[10] On the importance of the Nordic states and their concerns in American thinking, see also Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 55. Olson ranks the need to work closely with the Nordic states as first among the reasons for initiating the NEI.

[11] Asmus and Nurick, *op. cit.,* pp. 125-29. The quotations are from pages 128 and 129.

on membership in NATO and the EU.[12] Any policy that ruled out NATO membership would fundamentally recast the political landscape in these nations in ways Americans and Western Europeans would find deeply worrisome.

In their 1996 article, Asmus and Nurick went on to lay out what they called the "building blocks" of a new American policy.[13] First, the United States needed to encourage continued political and economic reform in the Baltic states; their principal concern was that the United States maintain pressure on Estonia and Latvia to incorporate their Russophone communities in the body politic. Second, the United States needed to encourage the Baltic states to expand and modernize their military capabilities, presumably along Nordic lines, both to create a meaningful homeland-defense capability and to permit participation in international peace-keeping missions. Increased military cooperation among the Baltic states was explicitly seen as an essential element in this modernization effort. Third, the United States needed to encourage and facilitate increased Nordic-Baltic cooperation. While acknowledging the Nordic states could not be pressured into offering formal security guarantees to the Baltic states, Asmus and Nurick underscored the importance of keeping the Nordic states deeply involved in building up the Baltic states' military, political, and economic infrastructure and capacity. Fourth, the United States needed to encourage the EU to offer admission to one or more Baltic state, to assist the Baltic states in achieving the necessary level of development to make such an offer possible, and to coordinate NATO and EU enlargement timetables. Fifth, the United States needed to maintain the open-door principle regarding eventual NATO membership, to expand Partnership-for-Peace (PfP) and other military cooperation, and to continue to work to eliminate the obstacles to Baltic membership. Taken together, these five steps were intended to "enmesh the Baltic countries into a web of bilateral, multilateral and institutional ties with the West, without provoking a Russian reaction that increases the security threats to those states or seriously

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[12] See, for example, Peeter Vares, "Estonia and Russia: Interethnic Relations and Regional Security," in Olav F. Knudsen, ed., *Stability and Security in the Baltic Region* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 155-56.
[13] Asmus and Nurick, *op. cit.,* pp. 129-39.

undermines other Western policy objectives towards Russia."[14] One can also see in this framework a progressively widening focus, defining the security problem first in internal terms, then in national and tri-national terms, then in terms of the larger Nordic-Baltic region, then in European terms, and finally in trans-Atlantic terms. In other words, there was not a single appropriate geographic framework or set of institutions appropriate for addressing the problem of Baltic security: this problem had to be addressed simultaneously on a variety of geographic and institutional levels.

Sixth, moving even beyond the geography of the trans-Atlantic relationship and even beyond trans-Atlantic institutions, the United States needed to work with Russia to reduce the sensitivity of the Baltic question. This explicitly meant working through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) "to demonstrate that the West is not indifferent to legitimate Russian grievances, to work with the Nordic countries in pressing the Baltic states where necessary to take further initiatives and dampen the risks of real conflict, to document the real progress that has been achieved and to make it more difficult for Russian political forces to exaggerate and exploit the issue for their own purposes."[15] It also meant including Russia in multilateral security institutions when possible, and trying to achieve joint Russian-Baltic participation in cooperative security efforts like PfP exercises and Baltic Sea naval activities.[16]

The Baltic-American Charter

Although the NEI was launched in September 1997, the cornerstone of the policy was laid in January 1998, when the Baltic-American Charter was signed in Washington. The Charter incorporated nearly all of Asmus's and Nurick's "building blocks" for creating a stable post-first-round-enlargement Baltic region. While falling well short of offering American military guarantees to the Baltic states, the Charter addressed the traditional, modern security concerns of the Baltic states. It bound the signatories to consultations "in the

[14] Asmus and Nurick, *op. cit.,* p. 137.
[15] Asmus and Nurick, *op. cit.,* p. 137.
[16] Asmus and Nurick, *op. cit.,* p. 138.

event that a Partner perceives that its territorial integrity, independence, or security is threatened or at risk"[17] and committed the United States to a range of cooperative defense initiatives aimed at strengthening Baltic capabilities.

Perhaps more importantly, the Charter directly addressed the fourth and fifth "building blocks," underscoring American support, in principle, for the full integration of the Baltic states into Western institutions:

> As part of a common vision of a Europe whole and free, the Partners declare that their shared goal is the full integration of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania into European and transatlantic political, economic, security, and defense institutions…. They believe that, irrespective of factors related to history or geography, such institutions should be open to all European democracies willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities and obligations of membership, as determined by those institutions.[18]

Specifically with regard to the EU, the Charter noted that "the United States of America recalls its long-standing support for the enlargement of the EU, affirming it as a core institution in the new Europe and declaring that a stronger, larger, and outward-looking European Union will further the security and prosperity for all of Europe."[19]

Even more explicitly, the Charter committed the United States to keeping the door to NATO membership open and ruled out a Russian "veto" over Baltic membership:

> The United States of America reiterates its view that the enlargement of NATO is an on-going process. It looks forward to future enlargements, and remains convinced that not only will NATO's door remain open to new members, but that the first

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[17] "Charter of Partnership among the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Lithuania and the United States of America," (www.nato.int/pfp/lv/charter.html; downloaded August 24, 2000), p. 5.

[18] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* pp. 3, 4.

[19] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* p. 4.

> countries invited to membership will not be the last. No non-NATO country has a veto over Alliance decisions…. The United States of America welcomes the aspirations and supports the efforts of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania to join NATO. It affirms its view that NATO's partners can become members as each aspirant proves itself able and willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and as NATO determines that the inclusion of these nations would serve European stability and the strategic interests of the Alliance.[20]

This formulation, of course, avoided any definite commitment, since the question of when "the inclusion of these nations would serve European stability and the strategic interests of the Alliance" remained an open one. To ensure the point was not lost, the "fact sheet" issued unilaterally by the White House on the day that the Charter was signed explicitly noted that "the Charter does not pre-commit the United States to Baltic membership in NATO. So too, the Charter does not offer back-door security guarantees. The Baltic governments understand, and have said so publicly, that such guarantees can only come through NATO membership." At the same time, however, the White House implicitly acknowledged that the Baltic governments saw no non-NATO option as acceptable: "the Charter is not an alternative to NATO membership, nor is it an effort to regionalize the security of the Baltic states."[21]

There was, however, a quid pro quo for the U.S. pledge to assist the Baltic states with their defense efforts and their efforts to join the EU, and to keep the NATO door open indefinitely. The Charter extracted the commitments that Asmus and Nurick had implicitly sought in their first "building block" – it bound the Baltic states to continued political and social reform, specifically in the area of human rights guarantees for the Russophone communities. The Charter's

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[20] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[21] The White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Baltic Relations," January 16, 1998 (www.pub.whitehouse.gov/uri-res/I2….:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/1998/1/20/7.text; downloaded July 27, 2000), p. 2. Like the phrase "no one has a veto on Baltic NATO membership," the phrase "the Charter does not contain pre-commitments" has become a standard part of any diplomatic statement on U.S.-Baltic relations. See, for example, Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 56.

preamble noted that the signatories were "committed to the full development of human potential within just and inclusive societies attentive to the promotion of harmonious and equitable relations among individuals belonging to diverse ethnic and religious groups."[22] It went on to "affirm" the Partners'

> commitment to the rule of law as a foundation for a transatlantic community of free and democratic nations, and to the responsibility of all just societies to protect and respect the human rights and civil liberties of all individuals residing within their territory…. The Partners will observe in good faith their commitments to promote and respect the standards for human rights embodied in…OSCE documents and in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. They will implement their legislation protecting such human rights fully and equitably.[23]

This commitment was important to the United States because it created an acknowledged and accepted standard to which it could hold the Baltic states.

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[22] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* p. 1.

[23] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* pp. 2-3. The United States has continued explicitly to link progress on social integration to any international guarantees of territorial sovereignty. In remarks in Tallinn in 2000, for example, Deputy Secretary of State Talbott went on at length: "the issue of social integration will, I have no doubt, remain vexing – both in your own politics and in your dialogue with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Let me therefore speak with candor about the American view about that body. We believe that the OSCE and its predecessor, the CSCE, have, over the past several decades, performed an immense service to all of us. They've reinforced two vital and positive principles of modern national and international politics: first, that borders must not be changed by force, either by aggression or by violent secessionism; second, that every government has a responsibility not just to defend the territorial integrity of the state but also to preserve and enhance what might be called the *civic* integrity of the population – that is, to ensure that all citizens have all the rights, benefits and obligations that citizenship entails. As a corollary to this principle, the OSCE and all of its members have accepted the principle that the way a government treats its own people is not just an 'internal matter'; it's the business of the international community, because there are issues of both universal values and regional peace at stake – and also because true security in Europe can only come when those commodities exist within society as well as between states." Talbott, *op. cit.,* p. 5. It is hard to imagine a more explicit linkage in a public, diplomatic statement.

Similarly, in the economic realm the Charter bound the Baltic states to stay the course and to continue to pursue the open, liberal economic development and trade strategies that the United States viewed as essential.

> Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania emphasize their intention to deepen their economic integration with Europe and global economy, based on the principles of free movement of people, goods, and services. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania underscore their commitment to continue market-oriented economic reforms and express their resolve to achieve full integration into global economic bodies, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) while creating conditions for smoothly acceding to the European Union…. The Partners will work individually and together to develop legal and financial conditions in their countries conducive to international investment. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania welcome U.S. investment in their economies.[24]

Finally, the Charter addressed the sixth of Asmus's and Nurick's "building blocks" and attempted to minimize the impact that this formal agreement linking the Baltic states to the United States would have on Russian politics. The Charter carefully avoided picturing Russia as an enemy. Its sole reference to Russia occurred in the paragraph in which "the Partners underscore their interest in Russia's democratic and stable development and support strengthened NATO-Russia relationship as a core element of their shared vision of a new and peaceful Europe. They welcome signing of NATO-Russia Founding Act and the NATO-Ukraine Charter, both of which further improve European security."[25] The United States was insistent that the Charter was not to be interpreted as an anti-Russian pact, or an attempt to leave Russia out of the security architecture of the region. As the U.S. unilateral interpretive statement explained, "the parties affirm their desire to develop close, cooperative relationships among all the states in Northeastern Europe."[26]

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[24] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* p. 6.
[25] "Charter of Partnership," *op. cit.,* p. 5.
[26] White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Baltic Relations," *op. cit.,* p. 2.

The fact that the United States obtained a four-party (or, perhaps more accurately, a three-plus-one) agreement rather than three bilateral ones is significant. In American thinking, not only would any competition or favoritism be counterproductive, but it was also essential that the three Baltic states understand that they would have to work together.

The Evolution of the Revolution

Interestingly, American policymakers quickly began to see the NEI as a test of a whole new approach -- as an experiment to see whether conceptually new pathways to creating international order were possible. As early as July 1997, even before the formal announcement of the NEI, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was describing "the Baltic issue as a litmus test of our ability to create a Europe without dividing lines, in which the old zero-sum logic of the Cold War would be replaced by a new win-win philosophy."[27]

While the Charter established the formal framework of international understandings and commitments essential for U.S. policy, it gave only the slightest hint of the novel directions in which U.S. policy was moving. The Charter is a state-to-state document, outlining the extent of the United States' diplomatic commitment to the Baltic states and the quid pro quo, in terms of Baltic states' domestic policies, demanded. But what began as an effort to keep NATO enlargement from destabilizing the Baltic region came to be reconceptualized as a larger project to recreate the region's political and security architecture.

From the American perspective, the NEI was seen as having three linked objectives: first, to "integrate the Baltic states into a regional network of cooperative programs with their neighbors and support their efforts to prepare for membership in key European and

[27] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 56.

Euro-Atlantic institutions;" second, to "integrate northwest Russia into the same cooperative regional network to promote democratic, market-oriented development in Russia as well as to enhance Russia's relations with its northern European neighbors;" and, third, to "strengthen U.S. relations with and regional ties among the Nordic states, Poland, Germany, and the European Union."[28]

While this three-part formulation of objectives remained invariate, the understanding of what would be necessary to build this cascading set of overlapping communities -- to weave the Baltic states into the region and into the Western world, to incorporate northwestern Russia into the same nexus of institutions, and to strengthen the ties between the United States, the Nordic states, and Western Europe that already existed -- grew in sophistication and complexity as policymakers examined the problem. It is in fact possible to understand the movement of the NEI from a piece of modern, Westphalian logic to an exercise in Hanseatic thinking as embodying a series of linked conceptual breakthroughs, each logically implying the next. The first was to conceive of the problem not simply as a Baltic (read: Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian) one, but as a northern European one: the objective of the NEI was not to create a satisfactory security architecture for the Baltic states but to build security for the entire region, defined as including the Nordic states and northwestern Russia. The second, related breakthrough was to understand that this security needed to rest on "an economically and socially unified region" and that the strength and stability of the region rested on "cooperation and cross-border ties."[29]

This recognition, of course, logically implied that security was indivisible not simply geographically but in terms of interlinked dangers.

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[28] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern European Initiative," May 1, 2000 (www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/nei/fs_000501_nei.html; downloaded July 24, 2000), p. 1.

[29] See, for example, Lyndon L. Olson, Jr., "The U.S. Stake in Northern Europe," in Lassi Heininen and Gunnar Lassinantti, eds., *Security in the European North – From "Hard" to "Soft"* (Rovaniemi, Finland: Artic Centre, University of Lapland, 1999), p. 58. These remarks were initially presented by Ambassador Olson at the Third Annual Conference on Baltic Sea Security and Cooperation on November 19, 1998.

The rapid political, social, and economic transformation taking place in the Baltic states and Russia, and the burden of a problematic institutional and environmental legacy from the Soviet period, had created a host of security issues that threatened both the legitimacy of the various states and their ability to get along -- and that could not be resolved in isolation from each other. If military stability and positive diplomatic relations between states required "an economically and socially unified region" and "cooperation and cross-border ties," then military security and everyday human security were not two separate problems. Traditional security, defined in terms of inviolate state sovereignty, could not be insured if human security were not also secured.

Combined with an examination of the real conditions in the region, this insight yielded yet another: the most immediately pressing problems were not the traditional security ones, however serious these might be, but the ones of insuring protection from economic, environmental, criminal, and cultural threats. This in turn raised the possibility that the institution most capable of addressing key items on this broader security agenda might not be the state -- which in fact might be poorly designed or positioned to handle some of these problems, especially those that spilled over borders or that would require external expertise or capital to resolve. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that this wider range of security threats could be satisfactorily addressed only by relying on a complex mix of intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, transnational corporations, and sub-state actors. Very quickly, then, the model of problem-solving that emerged was not that of the modern, hierarchical, sovereign nation-state, but a non-hierarchical regional network not dissimilar to that of the Hanseatic League. The Hanseatic analogy, however, in turn implied a final insight: in this new northern European world, identity need not be constructed exclusively around national loyalties.[30]

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[30] It is worth noting that on this last point, American thinking is clearly foreign to Russia and at odds with the dominant trends within the Baltic communities. For any number of reasons, it may be easier for Americans to think in terms of "post-national" politics than it is for Russians, who have experienced numerous recent blows to their national *amour*

The NEI's Architectural Vison

This has made the NEI a very odd initiative. Five peculiarities are worth underscoring. In the first place, rather than act directly, the United States has sought to empower other institutions, and to encourage these institutions to work together. As Ambassador Lyndon Olson argued, "we want to help knit together private sector groups, governmental institutions, and NGOs interested in the region."[31] Perhaps the best image is of the NEI as a piece of cloth, in which a variety of actors are woven together -- not a wheel, in which actors are connected to a central hub (the United States).

In the second place, the NEI has not created any new "NEI" agency or institution, either at the intergovernmental level or at the international one. Again in Ambassador Olson's words, "the NEI works largely through well-functioning, existing institutions. Our contributions of material support, expertise, and diplomatic influence bring unique 'value added' to regional efforts."[32] The community is to be built around a multiplicity of institutions, not around -- or directed by -- one central institution. The vision is not of central governance -- some sort of super-federal organization or a governing council of sovereign leaders -- but of a decentralized network of problem-solving organizations.

Third, in creating this interwoven network of institutions, the NEI has adopted a broad vision of the relevant institutions. While state-to-state contacts remain important, they are not given pride of place. The U.S. State Department officially describes the NEI as "a new approach to diplomacy" that is based on a "conscious effort to develop a more active public-private partnership in the conduct of diplomacy, in which the U.S. Government works closely with the business and NGO

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propre, or for members of Baltic nations, who are legitimately concerned with the survival of their national cultures.

[31] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 58.

[32] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 58.

community to achieve shared goals."[33] To some degree this strategy has been dictated by the need to leverage U.S. dollars.[34] Philosophical as well as practical arguments drive this "partnership" approach to problem-solving, though. The strengthening of non-state institutions is in itself a goal of the NEI, quite apart from the immediate problems being solved. If security is to rest on a Hanseatic network rather than on Westphalian sovereignty, then the Hanseatic institutions and players need to be built even while the region's problems are being dealt with.

Fourth, in creating this public-private partnership, the NEI focuses on transnational, rather than national or international, problems and solutions. "NEI projects have two things in common: they address concrete practical needs, and they do so in a way that promotes cooperative cross-border and regional linkages. They range from large-scale multi-million dollar nuclear waste management projects to small, targeted NGO-sponsored development programs. Few of these projects are financed solely by the U.S. Government; most are co-financed by other governments in the region and/or private NGOs."[35]

Fifth, as the NEI's authors never tire of emphasizing, the vision of the NEI is to create "win/win" outcomes, not simply to win. The NEI attempts to identify shared problems and to find ways to solve them, by building a border-spanning network of institutions that blur national identity and create an outlook that does not foster a zero-sum mindset. The strategy adopted assumes that the way to resolve traditional state security issues (that is, to deal with fears that one state will attack, conquer, or threaten another state) is to address the non-zero-sum issues. If the underlying problems of human security can be solved -- if individuals can feel sure of their personal physical, economic, and

[33] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[34] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[35] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.,* p. 1.

cultural security -- then most if not all of the pressures leading states to use violence against their neighbors will disappear.

Thus while continuing to emphasize that Russia needed to get over its unwarranted concerns about NATO enlargement and its view of NATO in traditional zero-sum terms (that is, if NATO enlargement made the Baltic states more secure, it must by definition make Russia less secure), the NEI's authors also were in no rush to expand NATO. Their goal was to create conditions under which all parties stopped thinking about military security

While American officials have described the NEI as having three distinct "tracks" – a Baltic one, a Russian one, and a Nordic one[36] – this is misleading, for two reasons. In the first place, the three are inseparable, rather than distinct or divisible strands. In the second place, the Nordic element of the policy is quite different from the Baltic and Russian ones. Where the Baltic and Russian "tracks" are aimed at helping to solve problems in these nations, the Nordic "track" is all about entangling the Nordic states in efforts to deal with the problems identified by the Baltic and Russian "tracks." Put differently, the Baltic states and Russia are seen as having human security concerns that need to be resolved, while the Nordic states are seen as having resources to help resolve these concerns; of course, so long as the Baltic states and Russia are insecure, the Nordic states can never be secure, but this insecurity is secondary, a product of conditions elsewhere.

The Baltic "track" has focused on three sets of problems – political, economic, and military – that could potentially threaten the security of ordinary people in the region, where security is understood in its broadest terms. On the political front, the NEI has involved working "jointly and with the private sector to consolidate the transition to democracy by supporting the development of civil societies, including the integration of Russian minorities in accordance with OSCE norms."[37] On the economic front, the NEI has attempted to help national governments set priorities in energy, telecommunications,

[36] Again, see Olson, *op. cit.,* pp. 58-60.
[37] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 58.

transportation, and the environment, to work to improve the investment climate, and to assist in efforts to join the WTO and EU. On the military front, the United States has worked with the Baltic states to identify appropriate force modernization priorities and the steps necessary to insure NATO-compatibility and has encouraged military collaboration between the Baltic states.[38]

The Russian "track" of the NEI aims to integrate northwestern Russia into Baltic and northern European institutions and to knit the economy of northwestern Russia more fully into the European one. It also aims to address a host of problems in northwestern Russia that risk spilling over into the rest of Europe – problems like the environmentally dangerous storage of nuclear material, the rise of organized crime, the spread of tuberculosis and AIDs, and trafficking in women and children.[39]

The NEI as a Key Element in America's Russia Policy

It would be disingenuous, though, to suggest that the NEI involves Russia only because Russia is an essential part of northwestern Europe and that problems such as military security, environmental degradation, economic development, the spread of contagious disease, and crime can be dealt with only if Russia and Russian regional authorities are involved. American policy-makers have embraced the NEI also because they see it as a valuable tool in efforts to encourage a liberal/democratic transformation of Russia as a whole. In other words, while engaging Russia is part of America's NEI policy, the NEI is also "an important part of broader U.S. Russia policy."[40]

Thus, integrating Russia into Baltic/northern European political, economic, and social institutions simultaneously represents a challenge that must be met if northern Europe is to be secure and the best available opportunity for encouraging a process within Russia that

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[38] Olson, *op. cit.,* pp. 58-59.
[39] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 60.
[40] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.,* pp. 4-5.

would eventually yield a stable, Western, liberal democracy. As Ambassador Olson notes, "promoting Russia's integration in regional cooperation is both essential and commonsensical to the success of our regional strategy." He goes on to note, though, that "if Russia smoothly integrates with this region, it is more likely to integrate with the rest of Europe. But if Russia fails – or refuses – to build strong ties based on mutual respect and mutual benefit with this strategically and economically vital region, it will be much harder for Russia to find its place within the new Europe."[41]

In the U.S. view, the Baltic region and northwestern Russia represent a historic but once-again usable pathway for ideas and values, a northern window to the West. "Our hope," Strobe Talbott has asserted, "is that Russia will come, over time, to view this region not as a fortified frontier but as a gateway; not as a buffer against invaders who no longer exist, but as a trading route and a common ground for commerce and economic development – in a word, that Russia will come to view the Baltics Hanseatically." But Talbott has gone further and implied that Russia might view not only the Baltic region but herself in Hanseatic terms. "Why should that not be? After all, certain parts of Russia – and certain episodes of Russian history – shared in the Hansa."[42]

Picking up on this Hanseatic analogy and explaining why the Baltic region was so important in America's Russia policy, Ambassador Olson has argued that "Russia will have to make that psychological adjustment itself, in keeping with its own evolving concept of its national interests. But we and our European partners can help by involving Russia to the greatest extent possible in the political, commercial, environmental and other forms of collaboration developing among the states along the Baltic Sea littoral. This is a unique region with unique advantages to make Russia's integration with the West work."[43]

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[41] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 57.
[42] Talbott, *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[43] Olson, *op. cit.,* p. 57.

Ultimately, the goal is to recreate Russian identity, using Hanseatic-style economic engagement and human contact to change how Russians think about themselves and about how they can be secure in the world. Hanseatic contact would breed a Hanseatic mindset, and this would in turn fundamentally change Russian foreign policies in ways that would make it a better neighbor. Speaking to an Estonian audience, Talbott explained that "unlike Estonia, Russia is not exactly sure where its home is – where, in its own transition from the Soviet era, it should go next; where it should come home *to* – at least in terms of what [Estonian Foreign Minister] Tom [Ilves] calls mental geography…. The Russian people want many of the same things as Estonians and other Europeans: they want economic prosperity, and they want security for themselves, for their families and for their state. The problem, as Estonians know better than most, is that, historically, Russia has tended to define security in zero-sum terms – win/lose, or, as Lenin famously put it: *kto/kogo*. The Soviet Union seemed unable to feel totally secure unless everyone else felt totally insecure. Its pursuit of *bezopasnost',* or absence of danger, posed a clear and present danger to others, especially small countries on its periphery. The issue on all our minds is whether post-Soviet Russia, as it goes about redefining its political system through elections, will redefine its concept of state security as well."[44]

The NEI in Practice

As a practical matter, the NEI identified six priority areas – none of which included traditional security or military development. The first was business and trade; the second, law enforcement; the third, civil society; the fourth, energy; the fifth, the environment; and the sixth, public health.[45] All six represented fields in which the northern European states faced either shared problems or internal problems with international ramifications. Moreover, all six offered the potential for win/win solutions and for the kind of trans-border institution-building

[44] Talbott, *op. cit.,* p. 3.

[45] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.,* pp. 1-3.

and non-state partnerships that the NEI saw as key in developing a new Hanseatic mindset.

The diversity of the projects initiated, and the broad understanding of security that is embodied in them, is revealing. For example, the "Cross-Border Cooperation and Environmental Safety in Northern Europe Act of 2000," singled out the following eight projects: "A United States-Lithuanian training program for entrepreneurs from Belarus and Kaliningrad; the Great Lakes-Baltic Sea Partnership program that is being implemented by the Environmental Protection Agency; a Center of Excellence for Treatment of Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis in Riga, Latvia; a regional HIV/AIDS strategy being developed under United States and Finnish leadership; multiple efforts to combat organized crime, including regional seminars for police officers and prosecutors; programs to encourage reform of the Baltic electricity market and encourage United States investment in such market; language and job training programs for Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia and Estonia to promote social integration in those countries; a mentoring partnership program for women entrepreneurs in the northwest region of Russia and the Baltic states, as part of broader efforts to promote women's participation in political and economic life."[46]

The range of partner institutions also illustrates the shift away from state-centric models of security-building. While some of the projects involve traditional bilateral state-to-state interaction, a large number bring in other players, in interesting functional combinations. To provide capital for small and medium-sized companies and for residential investment, for example, the U.S. government established a

[46] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "H.R. 4249: Cross-Border Cooperation and Environmental Safety in Northern Europe Act of 2000 Fact Sheet" (www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/nei/fs_000526_nei_bill.html; downloaded July 26, 2000), pp. 2-3. The act endorsed the NEI, encouraged the EU to fund its Northern Dimension at higher levels, endorsed continued U.S. support for NEI projects, particularly with regard to environmental problems in northwest Russia, and called upon Russian President Putin to press ahead with collaborative environmental projects. The joint communiqué of the U.S.-Baltic Partnership Commission chose to highlight many of the same projects, plus Latvian-U.S. cooperation in developing plans for the conversion of former military bases. See "U.S.-Baltic Partnership Commission Communique," June 7, 2000 (www.usislib.ee/parternship.html; downloaded July 24, 2000), p. 2.

mixed public/private Baltic-American Enterprise Fund. In the area of law enforcement, the NEI has provided funding to the Riga Graduate School of Law, worked with the Council of Baltic Sea States to combat organized crime, and helped fund an international police-training program based in Poland. To build civil society, the NEI has collaborated with Nordic states in language-training programs in Latvia and Estonia and has partnered with the Soros Foundation in supporting NGOs. In public health, the United States has joined with the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, and Finland in developing health care strategies, while the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have worked with Sweden, Latvia, and the EU in a collaborative effort to treat tuberculosis.[47]

The NEI, the ND, and the Future

The NEI and the EU's Northern Dimension (ND) are in many ways parallel efforts, sharing many of the same goals. They are not, however, in competition: the EU and the United States have emerged as informal partners, not as rivals, in the task of building a security architecture for northern Europe. Consultations between the United States and the EU regarding the NEI/ND nexus have resulted not only in agreement to work together and to continue to rely upon multilateral and regional institutions, but in the identification of a list of shared priorities (energy, the environment, nuclear safety, international finances, civil society and democratic development, legal reform and law enforcement, and health). The United States and the EU have also developed an institutional framework for continued discussions for identifying joint and parallel projects.[48]

It is interesting to observe that the NEI has met the requirements suggested by Asmus and Nurick in 1996 – it has avoided giving Russia the impression that the Baltic states lie within her sphere of influence, it

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[47] Bureau of European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Overview of the Northern Europe Initiative," *op. cit.,* pp. 1-3.

[48] The White House, "U.S.-EU Joint Statement on Northern Europe Fact Sheet," December 7, 1999 (www.pub.whitehouse.gov/uri-res/I2…pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/1999/12/22/2.text.2.html; downloaded July 27, 2000).

has reassured the Nordic states regarding the consequences of NATO enlargement in central Europe, it has proven domestically acceptable in the various NATO states, it has in general facilitated the EU enlargement process, and it has not provoked a break in the Russia's relations with the West. It has also provided reassurance to Baltic political elites that the Baltic states are regarded as members of the West and that Baltic inclusion in Western security institutions would eventually occur.

It could also be argued that the NEI continues to be based on the six "building blocks" identified by Asmus and Nurick. A more perceptive reading of the NEI, however, suggests that, without abandoning these "building blocks," it has moved far beyond them. The Charter proved to be not the end of the road but the beginning. It has served as the jumping off place for a far more ambitious effort aimed at not simply securing the sovereign states of northern Europe but to transform the nature of political life in the region, expanding and empowering a dense network of trans-border institutions aimed at solving the region's varied problems and ensuring human security without excessive reliance on sovereign nation-states.

It is far too early to provide more than an interim assessment of the NEI's success. Whether the Hanseatic architecture embraced by the NEI can succeed in stabilizing northern Europe, much less encourage the liberalization of Russia, depends on developments still unfolding in Russia.

Whether the United States will choose to stay the NEI course, or abandon it and return to more traditional approaches to guaranteeing Baltic security, also remains uncertain. While NATO membership for the Baltic states is clearly in the cards, the Bush administration has yet to offer a clear strategy for northern Europe.

There are, however, potentially compelling reasons why the Bush administration may choose to continue to pursue the NEI. In the first place, it is a remarkably inexpensive policy, not only in terms of money but in terms of decision-makers' time. Given other, more pressing demands on American coffers and decision-making resources, this is

not a trivial argument. In the second place, the NEI continues to offer an opportunity for constructive engagement with Russia. Even while adopting a tougher bargaining stance with Russia on other issues, the Bush administration may find continued pursuit of a win/win agenda for cooperation in northern Europe useful.

Regardless, though, of whether the Bush administration abandons or embraces the NEI, the NEI offers a model worth careful study. The reconceptualization of security, of the relevant actors on the world stage, and of the nature of political identity marks this as a remarkable departure in American thinking, one that may prove to have been a useful exercise in coming decades, as globalization presses heavily on the international system and transforms the political landscape. Ultimately the question of whether the Westphalian model or the Hanseatic one offers the best opportunity for building a secure world – or how best to combine the two models – must be addressed, and the NEI experience will prove valuable.