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Author(s)	Shigematsu, Hisashi
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Oliver Moody, *Baltic: The Future of Europe* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2025), ix+372 pp.

Oliver Moody's *Baltic: The Future of Europe* is a timely and penetrating work that situates the Baltic countries—encompassing not just the Baltic states, but also other countries bordering the Baltic Sea, such as Poland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Russia—at the heart of Europe's unfolding geopolitical struggle. Published in 2025, the book combines historical depth, journalistic immediacy, and strategic foresight to argue that the Baltic is not a peripheral arena but rather one of the two decisive fulcrums in the contest between Russia and the West—the other being, needless to say, Ukraine.

At its core, Moody's thesis is clear: the Baltic region is indicative of Europe's future security dilemmas. The area is of significant geopolitical importance, has been historically contested, and remains strategically vital. He asserts, "The situation that is only now gradually dawning on western Europeans has been part of their [Baltic countries'] reality for decades, if not centuries, and in many ways they have adapted to it far better than we have. By virtue of their history and their geography they are, in a sense, already living in the future" (p. 6). As demonstrated by the author, the Baltic has repeatedly functioned as a site for experimentation "at almost every conceivable level below direct military confrontation, from energy and economics to parliaments and social networks" (p. 2). However, the author acknowledges the significance of this region not only because of its precarious security and identity, but also because it is a wellspring of ideas and optimism, which are essential for Europe's future. Consequently, he underscores not only uncertainty about the future but also *resilience* and *resistance* as crucial factors in the region's *survival*. These themes structure each part of the book.

Part I outlines a variety of methods for cultivating *Resilience*. Estonia's "Tiger Leap" (Chapter 1) demonstrates how memories of occupation and the constant threat from Russia accelerated the implementation of rapid market liberalization, digital governance, education reform, and deep integration into NATO and EU. These efforts developed robust territorial and cyber defences, as well as a societal culture of resilience. Finland's "Total Defence" (Chapter 2) illustrates how the nation's harsh climatic and geopolitical environment has shaped its characteristics over the *longue durée*. These characteristics include an indomitable spirit and adaptive capacity, prudent resource management, and the anticipation of dangers. Chapter 3, which addresses the subject of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, portrays the ongoing "banal integration" taking place in everyday life. This phenomenon offers a contrasting perspective to the views expressed by both Latvian and Russian politicians. The analysis reveals that while maintaining a stance of caution towards the Putin regime, the majority of Russian-speakers advocate for the promotion of reconciliation within Latvian society. Concurrently, this chapter alludes to the tensions engendered by Western liberalism. Chapter 4 explores environmental, resource, and seabed infrastructure concerns in Bornholm and the Baltic Sea, contending that the region's capacity to withstand these challenges is being fortified.

Part II, *Resistance*, traces how Europe's strategic centre of gravity is shifting to the north and the east, with frontline states pressing the rest of the continent towards clarity and resolve. Chapter 5 delineates how, amid the Russian threat, Poland is striving to become NATO's pillar in the region and to contribute to the promotion of

broader European unity, referring to different conceptions of statehood in the past and present. Chapter 6 shifts its focus to Germany, where the *Zeitenwende*—or "turning of the times"—is reshaping long-standing habits and practices. This chapter delves into the advancements achieved and the persistent challenges across three pivotal domains: energy, military, and foreign policy. Chapter 7 focuses on "The Hobbits" of this region, particularly Lithuania, which asserts its position and takes action for the sake of Western values such as freedom and democracy, as well as for its own survival. Its choices demonstrate how conviction and historical memory serve as driving forces for resistance, compelling larger European nations to follow.

While the initial two parts of the book provide a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary situations in each country, drawing upon their respective modern historical contexts, Part III, *Survival*, adopts a forward-looking perspective, exploring the future prospects of the entire region within the context of the present circumstances. Chapter 8 explores Russia's strategic intentions and motivations, along with the various measures concerning NATO's defence posture. Moody presents different views on Russia's objectives regarding NATO and the likelihood of Russia pursuing a full-scale war with the alliance. The author posits that Russia is quite capable of gambling on a war with NATO by 2030. The final two chapters are devoted to an analysis of the military capabilities of Russia and NATO countries. NATO members' demonstrated preparedness for a potential war contributes to the deterrence of such an event, provided that Moscow recognises it. The author posits that just as the ability of Ukrainians to endure the ongoing war is crucial for the security of the Baltic countries, the endurance of the Baltic countries on the frontlines is deemed essential for the security of NATO, including that of the United States, in the event of a potential war.

A notable strength of the book lies in its judicious balance between narrative storytelling and rigorous analysis. Moody is a distinguished foreign correspondent for *The Times*, and his writing exhibits the clarity and vividness characteristic of field reporting. Nevertheless, his narrative is consistently anchored in empirical evidence: Moody's approach involves a comprehensive examination of diverse viewpoints, built on in-depth interviews with political leaders, intelligence officers, and historians. The result is a book that largely avoids both abstract theorizing and journalistic superficiality.

The historical contextualisation is equally robust. Moody reminds readers that the Baltic has for centuries been a theatre of great-power contestation, spanning from the medieval era through the Cold War. The author presents a compelling argument that history should not be regarded as mere background, but rather as a living resource. Leaders and citizens of Baltic states, for instance, consciously draw on memories of occupation, deportation, and resistance to inform their present-day decisions. The examination of Russian policies is similarly contingent upon a consideration of their historical context, as the nation's past significantly influences its present policies. In this sense, the book presents a compelling argument for the significance of historical literacy in comprehending contemporary phenomena.

Where Moody is perhaps most effective is in challenging the complacency that prevails in the West. He critiques the tendency of larger European states to underestimate the Baltic perspective, whether in underfunding defence or in prioritizing economic ties with Russia.

However, it is important to note that there are limitations. Moody's employment of elite interviews results in the book's occasional prioritization of state perspectives over grassroots voices. Furthermore, the author's framing exhibits a notable degree of sympathy towards the region, with a limited effort to engage with Russian perspectives. While this is understandable given the book's objective, it may leave some readers wishing for a more nuanced account of Russian motivations.

Nonetheless, the book accomplishes its central objective with remarkable efficacy: it successfully repositions the Baltic from the periphery to the strategic core of Europe. This book can be regarded as a clarion call, compelling policymakers and the general public to acknowledge that security is not merely an abstract concern but rather a tangible reality for millions of Europeans. Moody demonstrates that resistance in the Baltic is not merely a passive endurance of circumstances but rather an active effort to shape the future trajectory of Europe.

In conclusion, Oliver Moody has authored a book that is both urgent and enduring. Urgent, because it addresses the most immediate strategic challenge facing Europe in the 2020s: whether NATO can deter and withstand Russian aggression. Enduring, because it situates this challenge within centuries of history and within the broader question of how societies defend their values under duress. For scholars, policymakers, and informed readers alike, the book offers both a sobering analysis and grounds for cautious optimism, concluding that resilience and unity can prevail, if the lessons of the Baltic are heeded.

Hisashi Shigematsu