Михаил Мельтюхов, *Прибалтийский плацдарм (1939–1940). Воз-*
вращение Советского Союза на берега Балтийского моря. Москва:
Алгоритм, 2014. 720 с. ISBN 978-5-4438-0602-0

In military terms, a bridgehead (in French *place d'armes*, a square where
the army would assemble) defines a relatively small area maintained by
an army on the edge of an enemy-controlled water obstacle, or an area
that is used as a base for the army to assemble and go into position be-
fore launching an attack on another state. It is a place in enemy-occupied
territory, or one soon to be attacked, which has to be maintained, or at
least controlled so as to land or transfer troops and supplies, and/or to
provide enough space for a manoeuvre necessary for further operations. It
may also refer to a stronghold area where forces are gathered ahead of an
attack on the enemy. The title of Mikhail Meltyukhov's book, published
in 2014, describes perfectly the USSR's actions in the eastern Baltic Sea
region in 1939–1940. In this case, it must be said that the Baltic States
(Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) were seen by the USSR as a territory
where military forces would be assembled ahead of a strike on the West.
The author maintains the position that the 'return' to earlier-occupied
territories is quite understandable, in order to legitimise the re-occupation
of the Baltic States.

In the preface and conclusion to his book, Meltyukhov highlights
the idea that 'the Baltic States were not occupied,' that Soviet rule was
'reinstated there', and that over the last two decades 'Baltic scientists-rus-
sophobes have been manipulating history' with their claims about the
Soviet occupation of these countries. Russia's representatives stress that
in 1940, the Baltic States did not take up arms in opposition to the de-
velopments; however, based on such facts of non-engagement in military
action, we could also say that in 1938–1939 Germany did not occupy
Austria or Czechoslovakia.

The author discusses in his book the changes within the structure of the
Red Army in 1939–1940, detailing the number and size of various divisions
that were to make up the USSR's military forces, and in which regions of
the country these forces were to be concentrated. These facts help determine
the assembly areas of the Red Army, what forces were available to the
USSR in peace time, and their mobilisation potential. Having presented
the general situation in the Red Army, Meltyukhov discusses the problem
of mustering the USSR's military forces along the border with the Baltic
States, making separate mention of the Red Army's invasion of Poland,

and reaching Lithuania's administrative line. [1] In this context, it is claimed in the book that on 4 September 1939, the Lithuanian government allowed military leaders to carry out a partial mobilisation and to strengthen its military forces (p. 23), although in fact we know that a secret military mobilisation had already commenced in Lithuania on 28 August after the announcement of *special* exercises, while on 1 September the decision was made to start the mobilisation of border protection (cover) units according to Schedule No 4. The resolution regarding partial mobilisation was passed on 16 September, while regarding the de-mobilisation of 23 September, the author incorrectly (p. 32) states that Lithuania's army was reduced from 60,000 to 25,000 men, as after the partial mobilisation Lithuania's forces counted over 90,000 soldiers (in the event of full mobilisation, military forces were to increase to 150,000 or 160,000 men), while after de-mobilisation there were still over 40,000 soldiers. [2]

Further on in the book, there is an analysis of the USSR's nego-tiations with the governments of the Baltic States over the creation of mutual-assistance agreements and the dislocation of Red Army troops on their territory. This context reveals the means of military pressure exerted on the Baltic States by the USSR, whereby the Red Army assembled on their borders amid preparations for a military invasion. Demonstration of the USSR's military might was obvious, and Meltyukhov goes into detail in his description, adding that on 29 September 1939 Soviet naval forces had to be on alert, ready to strike a crushing blow to Estonia's warships and to cut the country off from any sea access routes (pp. 44–45). In Lith-uania's case, the author states that in Stalin's view, 'The Soviet Union will annex Lithuania' (p. 67) only after reaching a consensus with Germany, and having exchanged appropriate territories.

There is a broad discussion of the problems the Red Army faced in establishing its troops in the Baltic States, and their ability to act there, stating quantitative changes and the amount of arms actually held. Some economic aspects are also covered, i.e. the economic benefit the Baltic States were expected to gain from having Soviet military bases on their territory. Meltyukhov analyses the issue of the 'looting' by Red Army soldiers in

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[1] In the interwar period, no state border between Lithuania and Poland that Lithuania actually acknowledged, ever existed, which is why the boundary between the two states was called a demarcation or administrative line. Lithuania only acknowledged a state border defined in an agreement signed with Soviet Russia on 12 July 1920, which went along the Breslau and Molodechno line, then along the River Nemunas until the River Swislatch (*Świsłocz, Свислочь*), and further until Sztabin. The territory mentioned covered around 88,000 square kilometres; in 1923–1939 Lithuania controlled only 55,670 square kilometres of this territory.

[2] V. Jokubauskas, 'Lietuva ant karo slenksčio: 1939 m. kariuomenės mo-bilizacija', *Karo archyvas*, t. XXVII (2012), pp. 276–332.

Lithuania, and, based on archival documents, he states that there were no cases of looting, but that there was an obvious lack of discipline among Red Army units dislocated in Lithuania. Red Army soldiers simply deserted.

There is an interesting chapter in which the author goes into fine detail discussing the negotiations between the Baltic States and the USSR in 1940 over the acquisition of arms, presenting comprehensive lists prepared by the Baltic States and presented to Moscow regarding the military measures they desired, and also giving the results of these negotiations. The factographic information from this chapter does correlate with the 'Lithuanian' material kept in Lithuania's archives, and even supplements it. The material Meltyukhov presents about the arms held by the armies of the Baltic States and other military equipment needs is relevant, as on one hand it allows us to make a more thorough assessment of the directions in which the military leaders of the Baltic States planned to develop their military forces when the Second World War was under way. On the other hand, it also shows the USSR's approach to military cooperation with the Baltic States, as it protracted the question of selling even trophy arms (seized from the Polish army in September 1939). It can be said that prior to the Soviet occupation, Lithuania never managed to acquire any arms from the USSR, while Latvia and Estonia received only very meagre quantities (provision data is on pp. 204, 217).

The author begins his chapter about the Red Army's military planning by stating that the Baltic States, like other countries that had borders with the USSR, were considered as potential military enemies by Moscow (p. 291), but he ignores the exception of Lithuania, where the USSR had been considered an eventual military ally for two decades.[3] Detailing the assembly areas for Red Army military units aimed at the Baltic States, Meltyukhov indicates that on 8 June 1940, the question of a military operation against the Baltic States was discussed in Stalin's office. Further (pp. 292–338), he gives a comprehensive account of the Red Army's planning and preparation for an invasion of the Baltic States. In this part, he gives information about what kind of combatant tasks were formed for Red Army compounds, and what directions and the pace Soviet forces had to keep once they had invaded the Baltics. It should be noted that this information is useful in trying to model possible military action between the USSR and the Baltic States. Though, of course, a very critical assessment of Meltyukhov's facts about the Red Army's plans is necessary, as the examples of the Winter War and the invasion of Poland of 1939 testify that Red Army officers had a difficult time coordinating the activities of their units, and some were not at all competent. However, generally speaking,

[3] A. Kasparavičius, 'Lietuvos kariuomenė Maskvos politinėse ir diplomatinėse spekuliacijose (1920–1936)', *Lietuvos nepriklausomybei – 80. Straipsnių rinkinys*, ed. N. Andriušienė (Vilnius, 1999), pp. 4–57.

Meltyukhov's study is an excellent factographic base for an analysis of the Baltic States' military defence potential in June 1940.

When analysing the USSR's ultimatums to the Baltic States, Meltyukhov does not touch on the question of why Lithuania was occupied before Estonia or Latvia. We would think that this was a very important strategic decision by the USSR, as the Red Army's occupation of Lithuanian territory, and the Soviet navy's blocking of Latvian and Estonian ports meant these two countries were completely surrounded and physically isolated. Their governments and military forces had no chance to retreat and be interned in any third countries. Lithuania was in a completely different situation, as it shared a rather long border with Germany (East Prussia). Thus, had Lithuania started an armed opposition, in the event of war, at least Latvia's political leaders and the remains of its army could have had a chance to retreat towards East Prussia.

Meltyukhov fails to note how the USSR managed to occupy Lithuania without a war. We would firstly think that Lithuania's government was afraid of Germany, especially following the seizure of the Klaipėda region in 1939;[4] in addition, it was wrongly thought that an agreement could be reached with the Soviets. Also, Lithuania's political elite believed that Germany would lose the war. Thus, the decision by Lithuania's government not to oppose with weapons the Soviet occupation of June 1940 (based on plan 'R')[5] can be explained as: a) an inadequate assessment of the situation and incomprehension of the resulting outcomes; b) the aspirations of some of Lithuania's political and military elite (the Christian Democrats and Peasants' Party, whose representatives were members of the last government) to fully assume leadership in Lithuania from Antanas Smetona and the Nationalists.[6] The USSR made excellent use of these failed 'court upheavals', while the Red Army could be amazed at

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[4] Based on international and bilateral agreements, from 1923 the Klaipėda Region had autonomous rights as a part of Lithuania; however, in March 1939, Germany presented an ultimatum to Lithuania, and, threatening military force, it occupied the Klaipėda Region.

[5] V. Jokubauskas, 'Lietuvos kariuomenės R planas (1939–1940 m.)', *Istorija*, t. XCIII, no. 1 (2014), pp. 5–47.

[6] It was believed that a new government, as the USSR demanded, would comprise Div. Gen. Stasys Raštikis, a placeman of the Christian Democrats, while the prime minister would assume the president's post once the existing president, Antanas Smetona, fled the country, as outlined in the Constitution. In this event, both the Government and the Presidential Office would be in the hands of Raštikis and the opposition parties. However, when Lithuania accepted its ultimatum, the Kremlin reconsidered, and the Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs Juozas Urbšys, then in Moscow, was informed that a special delegate, Vladimir Dekanozov, sent by the Soviets from Moscow to Kaunas, would be taking care of the formation of the new government: A. Svarauskas, 'Valstybinė opozicija ir politinė krizė Lietuvoje 1940 m. okupacijos išvakarėse', *Istorija*, t. LXXXX (2013), pp. 22–35.

how another country's territory could be occupied without a battle. Once Lithuania was occupied, there was less drama among the political elite in neighbouring Latvia and Estonia, as these countries' presidents, unlike Lithuania's leader, remained in Riga and Tallinn to witness the Soviet occupation. Had he drawn attention to the set of reasons for Lithuania's capitulation, Meltyukhov might not have limited himself to explanations (about the meagre prospects of a military opposition) of why the Baltic States did not counter their occupation, but he could have given a broader depiction of the events, their causes, and how they were linked.

Acknowledging that the USSR exploited the general geopolitical situation in Europe, created a diplomatic conflict, and 'recovered the Baltics into the composition of the Soviet Union' (p. 395), the author says that the Baltic States capitulated due 'to the non-viability of military opposition'. However, at this point, the author ignores the concept of the two-decades-long partisan resistance in Lithuania, where a wide-scale partisan war was to break out over the entire enemy-occupied territory, led by riflemen and soldiers. The USSR's leadership was aware of this rather unattractive prospect, as breaking down a partisan-backed opposition required time and great resources.[7] Not taking into account the mentioned factors, Meltyukhov claims an improvement of the USSR's military strategic situation in 1940; however, had the USSR taken up a defensive position, then the appearance of Red Army forces in unfriendly territory (in Lithuania and the other Baltic States) raised the threat that given the outbreak of war, the population of the Baltic States would be shooting Red Army soldiers in the back. Even after liquidating the armies of the occupied countries, over 250,000 members of para-military organisations[8] remained in the Baltic States, whose network was not affected by the elimination of formal organisations, but had an impact on the armed anti-Soviet opposition in June 1941 when Germany attacked the USSR. The author fails to analyse this problem in his book.

The actions of the USSR in 1939–1940 were directed towards the formation of a bridgehead in the east Baltic region, even though in his book Meltyukhov tries to prove that by being a part of the West, the region posed a threat to central Russian regions, and that the USSR's potential was limited. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania, the only threat was to East Prussia (p. 5). However, this must be either a suppression of the facts, or an attempt not to see the wider context, as after the invasion of Poland of 17 September 1939, and the parade of joint-allies, the Red Army and the Wehrmacht, in Brest on 22 September, the USSR gained a border with Germany from the Carpathians to the Baltic Sea. War history

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[7] See: V. Jokubauskas, *'Mažųjų kariuomenių' galia ir paramilitarizmas. Tarpukario Lietuvos atvejis* (Klaipėda, 2014).

[8] Ibid., p. 405.

testifies that in this region there are two main directions determined by the Prypyat Marshes: north of the marshes, towards Moscow or towards East Prussia and Pomerania (depending on who is attacking, the Soviet Union or Germany), or south of the marshes, towards Ukraine or Galicia and the Visegrad countries. Just which direction the Red Army chose is debatable; probably, the main blow in 1940 was meant for north of the Prypyat, and having liquidated the enemy forces in East Prussia, to continue to the River Vistula, while the main attack for 1941 was meant for the Galicia district.[9] Taking into consideration the attack-based plans of the USSR's military forces, and their focus on going into war in general, the occupation of the Baltic States and the formation of a bridgehead for further operations is seen as the first stage of a strategic attack on the West.

Thus, by reading the book and skipping the preface and conclusions, which make up 41 (pp. 5–7, 614–652) out of a total of 720 pages, harnessing ideological embellishments, the author presents a comprehensive view of the Red Army's concentration near the Baltic States, and their activities in the years 1939–1940, based on 2,001 references to sources and historiography. The reader can find a massive amount of information relating to the Red Army's activities in the Baltic States in 1939–1940, which supplements our wealth of facts, as opportunities to work in the archives of the Russian Federation containing military documents are restricted. On the other hand, they contribute to our understanding as to why the USSR embarked on a long-term political-strategic and even military (appreciating the experiences of 1941) error in 1940, the occupation of the Baltic States, not being satisfied with them as satellites. We can only imagine the course of events and the long-term outcomes had the USSR had not occupied, annexed and brutally Sovietised Lithuania in 1940. What would relations have been like between these states after the war, and in the 21st century?

This book by Meltyukhov, like his other works, are becoming a subject of interest for war historians in the Baltic States, despite his many contradictory insights and assessments, especially for the relevance of his spectrum of themes and wealth of empirical material.

Vytautas Jokubauskas

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[9] See: М.В. Захаров, *Генеральный штаб в предвоенные годы* (Москва, 2005); М. Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина. Схватка за Европу 1939–1941 гг.* (Москва, 2008).