International Relations · GS - II

Analyse how the geographical position of Kaliningrad shapes the security dynamics of the Baltic Sea region and Russia–NATO relations.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 24/11/2026	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Exclave geography, Baltic Sea, NATO enlargement, military strategic depth, Suwałki Gap, maritime security, escalation risks, regional stability

Model Answer

Introduction

Kaliningrad is a Russian exclave situated between Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic Sea. Its geographical isolation and military significance make it an important factor in European security.

Strategic Significance

1. **Geographical position:** Kaliningrad provides Russia with a forward military position in the Baltic region, despite being separated from its mainland territory.
2. **Military presence:** It hosts Russia's Baltic Fleet and advanced missile systems, including nuclear-capable Iskander missiles, strengthening Russia's regional deterrence capabilities.
3. **NATO's eastern flank:** Its proximity to Poland and Lithuania, both NATO members, creates a sensitive military interface between Russia and the alliance.
4. **Suwałki Gap:** This narrow stretch of territory between Poland and Lithuania connects the Baltic States with the rest of NATO's land territory. Its strategic vulnerability is closely linked to Kaliningrad and Belarus.

Implications for Regional Security

1. **Military escalation:** Increased deployments, military exercises and incidents can intensify threat perceptions and raise the possibility of miscalculation.
2. **Hybrid threats:** Subsea infrastructure damage, cyber operations and drone incidents complicate attribution and crisis management.
3. **Transit disputes:** Restrictions affecting access to Kaliningrad can generate tensions over sovereignty, sanctions and regional connectivity.
4. **Nuclear signalling:** Nuclear rhetoric increases escalation risks and complicates deterrence calculations.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen military communication and crisis-management mechanisms.
2. Protect critical maritime and subsea infrastructure.
3. Maintain diplomatic channels and respect applicable international law.
4. Promote transparency in military exercises and confidence-building measures.

Conclusion

Kaliningrad demonstrates how geographical discontinuity can acquire strategic significance in a competitive security environment. Regional stability requires credible deterrence alongside diplomacy and effective crisis management.

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