

# BALTIC SEA SECURITY

REGIONAL AND SECTORAL PERSPECTIVES



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The JAMESTOWN  
FOUNDATION

# Baltic Sea Security

## Regional and Sectoral Perspectives

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*Olevs Nikers and Otto Tabuns, editors*



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# Introduction

The complex Baltic Sea Region lies at the top of the agenda for many policymakers, strategists, and security stakeholders in Europe and beyond. The area, centered around one of the busiest seas in the world, is home to a hundred million people, covers nine countries, and is divided among several geopolitical blocs. And though the Baltic basin has not seen interstate war in three quarters of a century, the region nonetheless continues to experience periodic ratcheting up of tensions between Russia and members of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The following report aims to delve into the multifaceted security dilemmas facing the Western alliance in this region by approaching the subject from a unique perspective: exploring how the Baltic-littoral Euro-Atlantic states can best cooperate to meet those challenges and threats. This publication comes out of the Baltic Sea Security Initiative (BSSI), conducted between 2019 and 2020. As part of that project, dozens of experts and professionals of the Baltic Sea partnering countries assessed and analyzed the current volume of defense and security cooperation. They have developed recommendations for decision makers on how to strengthen defense and security cooperation leading to a more coherent regional approach to the shared problems. This study focuses on defense and deterrence as well as economic and societal security matters.

The enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union in 2004 and 2007 alleviated the security concerns of those institutions' new Central and Eastern European members. At the same time, their official accession to the Euro-Atlantic community brought additional stability to the whole of Europe—to the pleasure and benefit of some but the chagrin of others.

However, the Russo-Ukrainian war, which erupted in 2014, shook the commonly held perceptions of this stability in profound ways, adding a mix of conventional and hybrid regional security challenges not seen in almost a century. Additional and ongoing difficulties for maintaining physical and informational security emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Meeting both those established and newly emergent threats within the Baltic Sea Region will require increased defense and security cooperation not only among the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) but involving all of the Western Baltic-littoral partnering countries—the Baltic States, the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark), as well as Poland and Germany. Indeed, this was one of the key conclusions of the earlier Baltic Security Strategy Project (BSSP) in 2019.

The Baltic Sea Security Initiative is the logical next step following the Baltic Security Strategy Project: the BSSI not only takes a broader regional focus but also steers public attention to the issues of security cooperation among all nine of the Baltic Sea partnering nations. According to the earlier BSSP expert conclusions, the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union has so far not taken a serious-enough attitude toward Baltic Sea security. Sweden and Finland are not engaged as a part of any region-wide cooperative venture, and the EU could remedy this by trying to link the two more firmly into a common operational space. Furthermore, the Baltic region needs restructuring to concentrate not only upon deterrence (which is not strictly a military task) but also upon relevant war-fighting capabilities. Greater focus is needed on the pre–Article 5 stage of political decision-making within the North Atlantic Alliance and how the three Baltic countries interact in cooperation with each other, with NATO, and with key non-NATO partners.

According to the findings of the BSSP's concluding *Baltic Security Strategy Report* (2019), boosting the security of Euro-Atlantic allies



within the Baltic Sea Region necessitates, first and foremost, addressing their synchronization and partnership shortcomings within the areas of air defense, maritime security, financial security, cyber security and the informational space, as well as building cultural and identity coherence among these partner nations.

Building on the above-mentioned findings and conclusions, the coordinators of the follow-on BSSI project convened a series of eight workshops and one major Baltic Sea Security Conference that focused on four major topics of Baltic Sea cooperation: 1) military cooperation and interoperability in maritime and air defense; 2) societal resilience in resisting information warfare and other “hybrid” threats; 3) a joint approach to dealing with financial, economic and energy threats; and 4) a coordinated response to cyberattacks on strategic and physical infrastructure.

Each of these topics was discussed in two, linked expert workshops, with the initial one addressing the problem, while the concluding workshop was dedicated to outlining ways to solve the challenge through practical multilateral cooperation. The workshop participants included practitioners (governmental, non-governmental and private-sector), scholars and experts from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Germany and the United States.

The experts who contributed to the BSSI were each asked to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current state of cooperation between the Baltic Sea partnering countries in terms of maritime and air defense, societal security (including issues of disinformation, urban resilience and migration), economic security and cyber security?

2. How can Baltic Sea security cooperation benefit deterrence capabilities against the potential regional adversary within national and collective security dimensions?
3. What are the current technical, practical or policy impediments to further multilateral military interoperability, and how can these be overcome?
4. How will strengthening Baltic Sea security cooperation benefit NATO's collective security, the EU's Common European Defense and Security Policy, and partnership with the United States?
5. What regional arrangements should be reinforced or introduced in response to potential hybrid threats and to secure the informational space throughout the Baltic Sea Region?
6. What are the common security strategy instruments within the fields of defense and deterrence, economic security and societal security that should be reinforced or introduced in order to strengthen Baltic Sea security cooperation?

The Baltic Sea Security Initiative was capped by the Baltic Sea Security Conference in Helsinki, on December 3, 2020, titled "Towards a Coherent Strategy for the Region." During this conference, panelists and participants discussed key elements of the complex totality of the Baltic Sea security challenges, in particular, confronting the continuing problems related to geography, security, and the related military, societal, financial, cyber and infrastructure aspects.

Despite the vast numbers of publications, seminars, meetings, agreements and political institutions dealing with the subject, much critical thinking and painful discussion lies ahead. The following report, which features situational analysis and concrete proposals, thus aims to indicate the directions for further consideration and public conversations that will contribute to improved regional security.

This study consists of eleven articles, divided into two sections. The first section covers the regional aspects of Baltic Sea security, with particular attention devoted to geographic and national considerations. It begins with an outline of the multiple institutional frameworks that cover security and explains both the potential and gaps in NATO as a regional security stakeholder. The book continues with the cases of Germany and Sweden, analyzing factors within and beyond NATO that matter to the region. The section concludes with an analysis of the aforementioned issues from a perspective outside NATO and distant from the BSR itself, adding an objective side view to the stated concerns. The book's second section covers separate thematic spheres within the context of the main topic. These include threat perception, civil-military cooperation, resilience to disinformation, energy security, maritime security, as well as political and military deterrence.

\* \* \*

The Baltic Sea Security Initiative as well as the resulting final report were a collective effort that drew on the expertise of dozens of analysts, policymakers and practitioners from within and outside the region. Their contributions are reflected in the takeaways from the BSSI project workshops as well as the subsequent chapters of this book.

Participants of the BSSI Defense and Deterrence Workshops in Berlin and Lublin included: Dr. Zdzisław Śliwa, Capt. Navy (Ret.) William Combes, Glen Grant, Laima Zlatkute, Dr. Gary Schaal, Dr. Tadas Jakstas, Dr. Jan Sjolin, Dr. Viktorija Rusinaitė, Erling Johansson, Liudas Zdanavicius, Jörgen Elfving, Maj. Tomasz Karlinski, Dr. Bartosz Chmielewski, Ieva Palasz, Dr. Damian Szacawa, Dr. Wojciech Lorenz, Alexandra M. Friede and Dr. Brendan Flynn.

Participants of the BSSI Societal Security workshops in Riga and Aalborg featured: Dr. Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, Jokubas Pukenas, Dr. Erling Johansson, Dr. Viktorija Rusinaitė, Ina Svilāne,

Otto Tabuns, Dr. Søren Dosenrode, Christiern S. Rasmussen, Dr. Jan Sjolín, Dr. Nico Groenendijk and Dr. Malayna Raftopoulos.

The participants of the BSSI Economic Security Workshops in Vilnius were: Dr. Jan Sjolín, Dr. Eitvydas Bajarunas, Aivar Jaeski, Dr. Tadas Jakstas, Dr. Sigita Kavaliūnaitė, Kinga Raš, Dr. Jan Sjolín and Marius Laurinavičius.

Participants of the BSSI Cyber Security Workshops in Tallinn and Brussels consisted of: Aivar Jaeski, Līga Raita Rozentāle and H.E. Shota Gvineria.

We thank our experts, sponsors and friends for making this project possible!

Olevs Nikers and Otto Tabuns  
Riga, Latvia  
February 2021



# **Regional Perspectives**



# Institutional Frameworks

*Jörgen Elfving*

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR)<sup>1</sup> is a complex area from a security perspective. Looking at only the Western countries (that is, excluding Russia) in the region:

- Sweden and Finland are in the European Union but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),
- Norway is a member of NATO but not a member of the EU,
- Sweden, Denmark and Poland, though all EU members, are not part of the Eurozone,

The Swedish solidarity declaration from 2009 includes the EU member states, Norway and Iceland. This declaration states, “Sweden will not take a passive stance should another EU member state or Nordic country suffer a disaster or come under attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is similarly affected. Sweden should thus both extend and receive military support.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to its extended definition, it includes Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, as well as Norway.

<sup>2</sup> “A usable and accessible defence force – the policy’s orientation,” Swedish government, accessed April 10 2021, <https://www.government.se/49b730/contentassets/5f57c4bcf9114e77ad2984fa872a17e0/a-fuctional-and-defence-a-summary>.



To a great extent, these parameters establish the rules of the game when it comes to regional cooperation in the domain of defense and security. Due to the BSR's distinctive character in many aspects, it features a number of unique regional forms and fora for cooperation (most of which include Russia as a member), among them:

- The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)—includes a number of policy areas/actions to save the sea, connect the region and increase prosperity.
- The Council of the Baltic Sea States—a regional inter-governmental organization working on regional identity, safety, security, sustainability and prosperity.
- The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission—the governing body of the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, known as the Helsinki Convention (HELCOM).
- Euroregion Baltic—an institutionalized form of cross-border cooperation in the southeastern Baltic Sea Region.

These and other civilian fora might be forgotten when focusing on defense and security, but they have a role to play in that aspect. For example, they can highlight environmental issues that have an impact on regional security in the short or long term.

As a result of the Russian annexation of Crimea, the term “hybrid warfare” was introduced into popular military parlance. The inherent complexity of this form of warfare demands that the target of the “hybrid” aggression possess extremely good situational awareness in order to detect that it is actually under attack or threatened. The responsibility to achieve this lies with the target state's national intelligence and security agencies. But are they up to the task? For many reasons, the BSR today is an arena for Russian hybrid warfare, and states in the region can be used as platforms for targeting third

countries. The Euro-Atlantic Alliance is already well aware of this threat, which has resulted in the establishment of a number of common research and analysis centers tasked with identifying and combatting it:

- The NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (Riga),
- The NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (Tallinn),
- The NATO Energy Security Center of Excellence (Vilnius) and
- The European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Helsinki).

But do these institutions see the whole picture or just pieces of the mosaic? Due to the complexity of hybrid warfare, broader regional intelligence cooperation in the form of a regional intelligence fusion center might be necessary and feasible. Such a center should fuse available information from a vast number of sources in order to produce a common operational picture, give early warning and increase the knowledge of Russian *modus operandi*. However, such a center is not uncontroversial. Intelligence sharing is mostly a bilateral matter, and the individual states must consider what information can be shared without compromising one's own sources and/or revealing one's own capabilities or intentions. Another aspect is that the proposed center most likely will be seen by Russia as another example of Western Russophobia.

Looking at the most crucial interdependencies within the region, one area that can best be addressed collectively is deterrence—i.e., the sum of all efforts in the domain of defense and security undertaken by the non-Russian countries in the BSR. These efforts can be made unilaterally, or as a result of being a member of an alliance; and they

are motivated by changes in the security situation in the area since 2014. Deterrence is, to a large extent, dependent upon how Russia perceives the efforts in the area of defense and security. Establishing the necessary comprehension of those efforts by individual countries or NATO is therefore not an easy task. The Russian perception is, among other things, founded on the available forces of a single country or NATO in the BSR, their capability and degree of readiness, and the possibility of reinforcing them. Russian perceptions are also based on the focus, frequency and participants of exercises. Additionally, the presence, content, and outcomes of bilateral and multilateral agreements shape Russian perceptions of the West's deterrence posture in the BSR. In this context, the Swedish solidarity declaration from 2009 also plays a role. Besides purely military efforts, the civil society's resilience (i.e., its ability to withstand information warfare, cyberattacks and economic warfare) is also of importance when it comes to deterrence. Thus, collective efforts in defense and security, whether unified and agreed upon or not, determine the effectiveness of deterrence. If one country or the whole of NATO is lacking in its efforts, this may result in more aggressive Russian behavior, a crisis, or outright attack.

Looking at the factors that limit defense cooperation and security synchronization, first and foremost neither Sweden nor Finland is formally a member of NATO, nor are they likely to join the Alliance in the foreseeable future. Indeed, in December 2020, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde stated in the parliament, "The military non-alignment serves Sweden well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe. It presupposes an active, broad and responsible foreign and security policy combined with enhanced defense cooperation, in particular with Finland, and a credible national defense capability. The Government has therefore been clear that it is

not relevant to make any sharp turns in Swedish security policy.”<sup>3</sup> When it comes to Finland, its view regarding NATO membership differs slightly from the Swedish standpoint, as expressed pointedly in the “Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy” from 2020:

Maintaining a national room to manoeuvre and freedom of choice are also integral parts of Finland’s foreign, security and defence policy. This retains the option of joining a military alliance and applying for NATO membership. The decisions are always considered in real time, taking account of the changes in the international security environment. Interoperability achieved through cooperation ensures the elimination of any practical impediments arising to a potential membership.<sup>4</sup>

Any potential decision to join NATO will most likely be taken by both countries in tandem and preceded by a referendum. In the meantime, not being a *de jure* member of the Alliance hampers defense cooperation and security synchronization. Despite this, both countries cooperate closely with NATO, including an agreement on Host Nation Support, which might give the impression of *de facto* membership. This seems to be the Russian view, and preventing Sweden and Finland’s *de jure* accession to NATO is likely a high priority objective of Russia’s foreign policy.

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<sup>3</sup> “Svenskt medlemskap i Nato, The Swedish parliament,” *Parliament of Sweden*, accessed April 10 2021, [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svar-pa-skriftlig-fraga/svenskt-medlemskap-i-nato\\_H812633](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svar-pa-skriftlig-fraga/svenskt-medlemskap-i-nato_H812633)

<sup>4</sup> “Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy,” *Finnish government*, accessed April 10, 2021, [https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162515/VN\\_2020\\_32.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162515/VN_2020_32.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

# NATO and Baltic Security

*Dr. Zdzisław Śliwa*

For the Western countries of the Baltic Sea Region, which are looking to improve their security situation, the most crucial keywords are “cooperation” and “unity of effort.” Pursuit of both aspects should start from the highest political levels and must cover the full range of instruments of power. The main issue is the common understanding that all of these countries are interdependent. But the major challenge for the Baltic Sea states within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the differing threat perceptions among the allies, based on each NATO member’s geo-strategic location. Whether Euro-Atlantic countries feel most threatened by Russia, international terrorism, or instability in North Africa is largely a product of proximity to these threats.

Therefore, continuity of discussion about security is important, and a number of high-level forums offered by Baltic Sea states already exist, such as the Munich Security Conference or, regionally, as the Annual Baltic Conference on Defense in Estonia, the Riga Conference, the Warsaw Security Forum, and the newly established Vilnius Security Forum. Additionally, many publications exist covering regional security aspects in broader terms, notably including the *Baltic Security Strategy Report: What the Baltics Can Offer for a Stronger Alliance*<sup>1</sup>, the principal outcome of the Baltic Security Strategy Project. It is crucial to continue such political and academic debates with unity and focus, enhancing solidarity and awareness with respect to the security

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<sup>1</sup> Olevs Nikers and Otto Tabuns (Editors), *Baltic Security Strategy Report. What the Baltics Can Offer for a Stronger Alliance* (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2019).

concerns of individual nations. The meetings, debates, consultations and dialogues are important tools to improve the consolidation of threat perceptions and networking regionally as well as across the Alliance, thereby making interrelation much easier. In that context, there is still the need to follow Russian behavior using, as stated by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, a “combination of deterrence, defence and political dialogue.”<sup>12</sup> Completely ignoring Russia and isolating it is not a solution; therefore, NATO and the European Union’s readiness to react in case of a negative escalation in relations must be part of the portfolio.

The roots of major issues among the Baltic Sea Region states are based in history, as there was little cooperation among them in the past. Cooperation remained anemic in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War; while historical debates and political misunderstandings continue to hamper closer relations between the regional neighbors to this day. Rather than being distracted by these negative narratives, the Baltic Sea littoral countries should focus on their common threat perception and set complementary priorities for defense and deterrence. A good example of solidarity is the extended presence of NATO member states’ troops in Central Eastern Europe, as well as the EU unity regarding preserving sanctions against Russia. The latter aspect has, to date, been successfully maintained despite some voices calling for a return to “business as usual”—most notably in the case of the Nord Stream Two natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany. The peacetime Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) is *per se* a deterrent factor, so its preservation along with NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), including the continued participation of all the main allies, is crucial. But this can only be achieved by cultivating a common awareness of eFP’s value as a defense project.

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<sup>2</sup> “Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the ‘NATO Talk around the Brandenburg Tor’ Conference,” NATO Website, last updated November 13, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_160241.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_160241.htm).

Politically, a common voice and common narrative are critical for promoting internal cohesion and unity of effort among the Baltic Sea Region nations. Additionally, utilizing strategic communications (STRATCOM) to promote a common voice for the Baltic littoral countries is essential to countering any efforts to sow doubt about the need to develop defense plans for NATO's eastern flank (such as when Turkey sought to block NATO's defense plan for the Baltics and Poland as a negotiating tactic within the Alliance). Externally, a shrewd collective Baltic Sea region STRATCOM will underpin the West's efforts to negate Russian aggressive information operations that try to divide European countries and antagonize Western societies. In that context, the Western states of the Baltic basin, or NATO and the EU in general, lack sufficient tools that can impact the Russian population and promote democratic values and human rights. This is a significant shortcoming vis-à-vis powerful Russian propaganda and STRATCOM capabilities through a variety of sources. The decision to ban some Russian disinformation channels is a good first step, but still quite limited in its effectiveness. As such, Cold War-era messaging tools like the Russian-language services of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* could be worthy of investment to reach not only Russian society inside the Russian Federation but also Russian-speaking populations in EU and NATO member states. Moreover, NATO and the EU should more strongly emphasize and promote the security narrative among their own populations, showcasing a variety of its dimensions and possible consequences. The challenge is that there is still a lack of proper understanding within European societies of the threats coming from the use of conventional military forces to change borders. The lessons from the last decades and territorial annexations are rather quickly forgotten—but “business as usual” is not an option.

Militarily, the need to develop contingency plans is of great importance in order to create the capability for quick decision-making and rapid reaction in the case of aggression or attack against any NATO member. Most of the Baltic countries are still vulnerable, and

a “tripwire” presence is not enough. It is especially related to Central and Eastern Europe, excluding for example Germany, which is safer. Robust eFP Rules of Engagement and enhanced capabilities are necessary along with Host Nations’ efforts to create infrastructure ready to deploy more than battalion task forces from other allies. During the next NATO summits, there is a need to promote such a solution and the full implementation of the “Four Thirties” concept,<sup>3</sup> as agreed in Brussels. The decision to further enhance command-and-control (C2) abilities within the NATO Force Structure is another important factor, along with determinations to build division-level C2 elements—Multinational Division North-East and Multinational Division North. The Lithuanian declaration to build its own division-level headquarters is another good example. The challenge, however, is to possess division-level units and capabilities; it could be a problem for the country as it is linked with significant investments and resources. Another aspect is the need to create better possibilities to deploy units—for example, United States military forces from Germany, through Poland to the Eastern Flank. Current infrastructure in the region does not support such logistics at the desired level. It must be improved by joining NATO requirements and EU projects to extend troop mobilization capabilities. Good examples are such concepts as the creation of a “NATO military Schengen zone,” complemented by EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) “military mobility” projects. The concepts are proper but must be forwarded faster. Currently, more progress needs to be made on transit projects such as Via Baltica and Rail Baltica, which will facilitate faster north-south movement. This would help overcome some military mobility difficulties and support the West’s defense posture. Among these logistical difficulties, it is critical to ensure the

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<sup>3</sup> During the October 24–25, 2019, Brussels Summit, allies committed themselves to collectively being able to provide 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat ships to NATO within 30 days.



rapid deployment of heavy units (armored and mechanized), as those are necessary to match the adversary's offensive capabilities.

With respect to the military domain, positive preexisting trends can also be observed. Intra-regional military cooperation has been tightening through joint staff meetings and cross-border exercises. Such activities engender a better understanding of allies' capabilities and improve the integration of military reform efforts. These are supported by increased military budgets, the growth of the armed forces, development of territorial defense forces, the reintroduction of conscription, and national or joint procurement of advanced weapons systems. Another positive factor has been the growing awareness throughout the region of the requirement to continue investments into national and international civil-military defense interactions according to a whole-of-government approach. Among them, the procurement of weapon systems should be discussed and coordinated if feasible—for example, air-defense assets and major combat platforms—in order to save money, facilitate easier maintenance, and unify ammunition and supplies. This must be based on the clear understanding that no European Baltic country possesses a full range of capabilities within its armed forces. Therefore, coordination is required to ensure that, for instance, within the navy, national contributions ensure the ability to conduct all types of required missions within the joint environment.

Particularly promising for the Baltic Sea region is the recognition of the exceptional political and military value that joint exercises bring. Public demonstrations of deployment capacities and military capabilities not only have a positive effect on deterrence but also improve NATO members' cohesion and interaction in many domains. In 2020, the international exercise codenamed Defender Europe 2020 delivered significant value in those areas, but it could have benefited from wider and more deliberate promotion by STRATCOM messaging in order to complement the exercise's

deterrence effect.<sup>4</sup> During the Defender Europe exercise, paratroopers from the US 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 6<sup>th</sup> Polish Airborne Brigade landed on Lithuanian soil, and the US 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade jumped into Latvia, joined by Spanish and Italian paratroopers. The Transatlantic deployment of some 20,000 US troops to join 9,000 pre-stationed in Europe, using, among other locations, the Paldiski seaport in Estonia, served as a significant deterrence and defense factor, showcasing clear proof of the United States' dedication to support European Alliance members, which themselves deployed some 8,000 troops for the maneuvers. In that context, the role of Germany and Poland is crucial. Regarding Germany, Defender Europe underscored the critical significance of the country for deployments of US troops and for hosting pre-positioned stocks for incoming forces. Meanwhile, Poland had long shown ambition to be a leader in this part of Europe and a critical geo-strategic link with the three Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>5</sup> As such, Poland has consciously been scheduling its annual Anakonda exercises concurrently with US European Command's Saber Strike drills. Moreover, the series of Spring Storm exercises verified that it is possible to deploy a US brigade to Lithuania via the so-called "Suwalki Corridor" from Polish territory.<sup>6</sup> It proved the importance and value of keeping this Corridor open as a vital link allowing for the effective

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<sup>4</sup> Read also: Zdzisław Śliwa, Viljar Veebel and Illimar Ploom, "The NATO "Defender 2020" Exercise in the Baltic States: Will Measured Escalation Lead to Credible Deterrence or Provoke an Escalation?" *Comparative Strategy* 39, no 4 (2020): 368-384.

<sup>5</sup> "DEFENDER-Europe 20 Fact Sheet," U.S. Army Europe, last modified December 6, 2019, <https://www.eur.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/DEFENDEREurope/DEFENDEREurope20Factsheet191216.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> John Vandiver, "US tanks and troops headed to Lithuania for lengthy deployment," *Stars and Stripes*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-tanks-and-troops-headed-to-lithuania-for-lengthy-deployment-1.600424>.

reinforcement of the defense capabilities in the three Baltic countries.<sup>7</sup> Those are all positive developments to enhance the Alliance's deterrence posture in the region and are critical contributors to the defense of the Baltic States, whose security, when endangered, will impact the security of all the other European countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.

The added value of such joint regional exercises and other forms of cooperation in the military and deterrence space is self-evident, directly contributing as it does to enhancing mutual understanding and denying the opponent's efforts to undermine cohesion among the Baltic allies. These countries are demonstrating a growing readiness to react in the event of a crisis, including through an improving capability to respond quickly, based on real-time knowledge and information sharing. The investments into military or logistical infrastructure and joint NATO-EU defense projects are positive decisions. Another factor is the increasing awareness of the issue of accessibility to ensure reliable deployment between, for example, Germany, where pre-positioned stocks for incoming US troops are located, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The notable eagerness of all the Baltic littoral countries to contribute to common initiatives is creating a cooperative spirit underpinned by a recognition of the need to react collectively to face common threats.

It is necessary to underpin any ongoing NATO projects and operations that are already in progress. For instance, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a key role to play in creating the proper conditions to ensure the continuity of regional air policing and enhanced Forward Presence deployments. Another important mechanism in the region is the US's European Reassurance/Deterrence Initiative, which also needs to be extended and funded further. The Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) platform, which includes

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<sup>7</sup> Zdzisław Śliwa and Leszek Elak, "The Suwalki Gap – NATO's fragile hot spot," *War Studies University Scientific Quarterly* 103, no 2 (2016): 24-40.

Sweden and Finland, should be marked by closer cooperation with NATO. By the same token, some Baltic Sea countries (e.g. Estonia, Latvia and Denmark) need to take a more serious role in promoting closer cooperation with Sweden and Finland; this is not only linked with geo-strategy but also these countries' strong historical ties and common threat perceptions. Finally, all the countries of the region must consider and continue their efforts to invest more into their defensive and offensive capabilities.

When discussing specifically the three Baltic States, it is clear that, in the event of open war with Russia, they would not be able to survive alone even with eFP support. They have deterrence-by-denial capabilities but notably lack deterrence-by-punishment competencies. They also have significant shortcomings related to air defense. This is a rather well-known issue and must be complemented by other NATO allies, as airpower would play a crucial role during the initial phase of any conflict with Russia.

The greater Baltic region boasts many multilateral groupings focused on political, economic and social goals, including the Visegrad Four, Weimar Triangle, NORDEFECO and the Eastern Partnership. They should be utilized in a more coordinated fashion to promote common regional interests. Their joint effort could help counteract individual regional countries from putting national interests and selfish agendas ahead of shared security concerns. Because these interstate platforms deal with both security issues and the promotion of democratic values and human rights, they enhance security broadly for all the Baltic Sea countries. Those groups are supporting the NATO and EU strategic partnership, which is key to using all the instruments of power in a well-synchronized way.

# Germany's Emergence as a Baltic Sea Security Provider

*Alexandra M. Friede and Prof. Dr. Gary S. Schaal*

The Baltic Sea region (BSR) is a highly cooperative space: Baltic Sea states are connected by manifold security arrangements, including through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) and various bi- and multilateral formats. Yet cooperation in the BSR has not reached its full potential; Baltic Sea states should make existing formats more efficient, synchronize initiatives, and integrate more “silent” actors into the regional “security companionship.”<sup>1</sup>

Germany has become an “emerging, yet ambiguous security actor”<sup>2</sup> in the BSR. While Germany is commonly portrayed as a rather reactive and passive player with “fragmented and selective”<sup>3</sup> contributions to Baltic Sea security, its involvement has remarkably intensified over the last several years—as illustrated by its substantial contributions to the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Rukla (Lithuania), the HQ Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin (Poland) and the

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<sup>1</sup> Katri Pynnöniemi and Charly Saloniuss-Pasternak, “Security in the Baltic Sea region: Activation of Risk Potential,” *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, Briefing Paper 196 (June 2016): 9.

<sup>2</sup> Andris Sprūds and Elizabete Vizgunova, “Indifference is not an option: Germany’s growing role in the security of the Baltic Sea region,” in *Perceptions of Germany in the Security of the Baltic Sea Region*, eds. Andris Sprūds and Elizabete Vizgunova (Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2018), 213.

<sup>3</sup> Sprūds, A., and Vizgunova, E. “Indifference is not an option: Germany’s growing role in the security of the Baltic Sea region,” 213.

formation of the Baltic Maritime Component Command in Rostock (Germany).

In the years to come, Germany is expected to act as a leading Baltic Sea security provider. Limiting factors nonetheless exist. Of course, the BSR is not homogenous. Baltic Sea states have, for example, varying (in)security perceptions and historically shaped strategic cultures. Germany is no exception. Europe's largest economy continues to lag behind when it comes to strategic long-term thinking or planning; its "national interests" have gone undefined for a long time. Furthermore, Germany's bureaucratic culture has led to inefficiencies, especially related to arms procurement. The country's parliamentary commissioner for the Armed Forces has recurrently criticized this administrative "diffusion of responsibility."<sup>4</sup>

Public opinion is another—often neglected—factor that frames policy-making. Surveys conducted in 2019 by the Körber Foundation and the Center for Military History and Social Science of the Federal Armed Forces (ZMSBw) shed light on the ambivalent attitude of the German public toward the country's role on the international scene.<sup>5</sup> The majority of Germans feel safe (10 percent) or somewhat safe (52 percent) at the national level; the international environment is perceived as less stable.

While most Germans support the Bundeswehr in principle, they rarely support the use of force. It is remarkable that Germany's contribution to the eFP and Baltic Air Policing is neither well-known

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<sup>4</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, "Unterrichtung durch den Wehrbeauftragten: Jahresbericht 2018 (60. Bericht)," Drucksache 19/7200 (January 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Körber-Stiftung, "The Berlin Pulse. German Foreign Policy in Perspective", September 2019; Markus Steinbrecher, Timo Graf and Heiko Biehl, "Sicherheits- und verteidigungspolitisches Meinungsbild in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Ergebnisse und Analysen der Bevölkerungsbefragung 2019", *Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr*, Forschungsbericht 122 (December 2019).

(50 percent have never heard of it) nor particularly popular (one-third of the entire population backs it unequivocally). Both items correlate with each other, so visibility is likely to generate support.

In general, the attitude of Germany's society is described as "anti-militarist, anti-Atlantic and multilateral."<sup>6</sup> The outbreak of war in Europe or Russian aggressions are not a prime concern; climate change, inflation and migration rank higher. According to the poll, 66 percent of Germans support more cooperation with Russia. At the same time, Germany's integration into "Western" structures is highly valued by 55 percent.

Over the last decade, the Bundeswehr launched several "*Trendwenden*" or "turnarounds" (on, e.g., expenditures, equipment, personnel management) to prepare the Armed Forces for collective defense tasks. Germany raised its defense budget from 32.4 billion (2014) to 44.9 billion euros (2020)<sup>7</sup> (\$39.0 billion to \$54.1 billion), started to (re)invest in the development of previously neglected capabilities (e.g. multi-role combat ships) and restructured its armed forces. It also played a more active role in shaping project-based defense cooperation at NATO (e.g. Framework Nations Concept) and EU (e.g. Permanent Structured Cooperation) level.

On paper, the terms "resilience" and "comprehensive approach" have gained traction. The "Konzeption der Bundeswehr" ("Armed Forces Concept"—KdB) defines resilience as the armed forces' robustness and ability to act; it covers *inter alia* cognitive, material and organizational aspects.<sup>8</sup> The KdB explicitly refers to civil-military

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<sup>6</sup> Markus Steinbrecher, Timo Graf and Heiko Biehl, "Sicherheits- und verteidigungspolitisches Meinungsbild in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Ergebnisse und Analysen der Bevölkerungsbefragung 2019," 5.

<sup>7</sup> IISS, "Chapter Four: Europe," *The Military Balance*, 121:1, 66-163 (2021); IISS, "Chapter Four: Europe," *The Military Balance*, 115:1, 57-158 (2015).

<sup>8</sup> Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, "Konzeption der Bundeswehr" (2018).

crisis management as a means to protect “global commons” and counter “hybrid” security challenges. Remarkably, the “Konzeption der Zivilen Verteidigung” (“Civil Defense Concept”—KdZV) formulates the policy objective to strengthen self-protection mechanisms across the whole population; the KdZV also prioritizes the protection of critical infrastructure, communications and supply chains.<sup>9</sup>

However, when it comes to organizing national defense, a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach is far from standard practice; even the establishment of public-private partnerships proves difficult.

To sum up, defense planning assumptions had been modified post-2014, and Germany's contribution to Baltic Sea security is on the rise. But the country must make sustained modernization efforts to live up to the expectations expressed by Berlin's partners.

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<sup>9</sup> Germany, Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, “Konzeption der Zivilen Verteidigung” (2016).



# The Swedish Variable in the Regional Security Equation

*Erling Johansson*

The United States Army has plans to reinforce the Baltic States from the Benelux region, through Germany and Poland<sup>1</sup>; and the US Marine Corps (USMC) intends to reinforce the Baltics from Norway, through Sweden. As such, Sweden will provide direct support to the US in the latter's defense of its Baltic allies Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The Swedish Defense Commission proposed, in 2019, the establishment of four territorial infantry battalions that should be allocated to protect the lines of communication for US troops in their task.

Overall, the buildup of the Swedish Armed Forces, of course, aims to put "Sweden first." But at least one element of this process—the development of the ground forces and, in particular, the territorial (Home Guard) battalions—can be said to bolster the common security of the Baltic area and consciously takes into account the role those Swedish forces would play in supporting US operations to defend the Baltic States. Explicitly, Sweden's territorial infantry battalions are needed to defend and protect the lines of communication routes from Norway, partly from the Oslo area and

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<sup>1</sup> Several ports on the North Sea coast will be used: for example, Bremerhaven in Germany.

partly from Trondheim, where the US Marine Corps has a heavy mechanized brigade stockpiled.<sup>2</sup>

The Swedish Defense Commission noted a clear need for such units for the protection of the western lines of communication via western Svealand to the Oslo area and via Jämtland county to Trondheim.<sup>3</sup> In effect, this means that Sweden considers logistics links with NATO and the US via Norway so important for Swedish defense that Stockholm is prepared to allocate separate infantry battalions and Home Guard units solely for the protection of these routes. The territorial battalions will be educated and trained at their present garrisons, until new garrisons and barracks are organized and built up. These will be located within the concentration area, which means that the battalions are going to be trained and educated in their operational area.

The proposed new territorial units will probably also be assigned the task of protecting the Swedish ports of Gävle and Sundsvall, from where the USMC Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), pre-stored in Trøndelag county, is intended to be shipped out to southern Finland and/or Estonia or the other Baltic States when needed. The troops arrive by air-lift to Trøndelag from the US.

Security in northern Scandinavia presently depends on Sweden's series of agreements with the US, Finland and Norway. On May 8, 2018, the Finnish and Swedish ministers of defense, Jussi Niinistö and Peter Hultqvist, respectively, met with then-US Secretary of Defense James Mattis, at the Pentagon. As a complement to the bilateral agreements, the three defense ministers also signed a Trilateral

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<sup>2</sup> Fredrik Lundmark, "Försvarsmakten kartlägger länets infrastruktur," SVT, October 24, 2019, <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/jamtland/forsvarsmakten-kartlagger-lanets-infrastruktur>.

<sup>3</sup> *Swedish Defence Commission's final report 2019:8*, May 14, 2019, page 186.

Statement of Intent (SOI) to improve and solidify defense cooperation among the three countries.

The Swedish-Finnish-US SOI aims to enhance the trilateral defense relationship in seven areas: defense policy dialogue, military policy interoperability, expanded regional situational awareness, strengthened capabilities and posture, combined multinational operations, strategic communications, and US-NATO-EU cooperation. In line with the agreement, Sweden intends for one of the new Swedish brigades (either an Arctic or an infantry brigade), with reinforcements, to also be prepared for operations in Finland in a crisis, under a threat of war, or in wartime. This was announced by the chair of the Swedish Defense Commission and former speaker of the parliament, Dr. Björn von Sydow, at a May 14, 2019, press conference.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is the Finnish border with Russia that must be reinforced first, so Stockholm is additionally setting up a new Norrland-based brigade nicknamed “the Finnish Brigade” that will be able to snap in quickly. Consequently, these units should also have the best materiel and personnel. If the Norrland Brigade is trained for winter operations in the Finnish province of Eastern Finland, it will also have the capacity to operate inside the other eastern Baltic countries.

During the spring of 2020, the United States planned to test its capability to quickly reinforce Europe. The exercise, Defender Europe 2020, was to be structurally quite similar to the Cold War-era Reforger exercises, and it should have taken place from February to June 2020. As one key element of these drills, the US Army was supposed to have practiced drawing out its Army Prepositioned Stock and exercised with it at the brigade level. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Defender 2020 was downscaled, and just a few elements

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<sup>4</sup> *Swedish Defence Commission’s final report 2019:8*, May 14, 2019. Summary in English, page 9

were practiced. In the exercise scenario, Sweden was tasked with securing the air and sea domains of the southern Baltic flank area in order to facilitate the passage of US Army forces from Benelux to Poland and the Baltic States.

Two major Swedish exercises were planned to take place simultaneously with Defender 2020. The first exercise was Aurora 2020,<sup>5</sup> with a primary focus on Host Nation Support (HNS), and which should have involved military forces from Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the US, as well as the EU and NATO.<sup>6</sup> The Aurora 2020 exercise was postponed until an indeterminate future date. The second exercise, Total Defense Exercise (TFÖ) 2020,<sup>7</sup> however, did take place from January to November 2020 and involved all of society. The third phase of TFÖ 2020 should have been performed at the same time as Aurora 2020. It was concentrated chiefly on supporting the Swedish Armed Forces and the HNS. The three exercises, Defender Europe, Aurora and TFÖ, should have provided experience in undertaking joint security activities when the US puts into operation its plans to defend the Baltic States from a southern concentration area. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Aurora 2020 postponed. Defender 2020 was partly performed, and a few elements of TFÖ 2020 were postponed to 2021.

The first requirement of deterrence and denial is capacity: the deterrer must have the necessary means. A country's capacity can be measured in its "order of battle." The second requirement is the ability to act. A

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<sup>5</sup> "Aurora 20," *Swedish Armed Forces*, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/activities/exercises/aurora-20/faq/>.

<sup>6</sup> Government Press Release September 6, 2018, "Regeringen ger Försvarsmakten tillstånd att bjuda in utländska förband till nationell försvarsmaktsövning 2020."

<sup>7</sup> "Total Defence Exercise 2020," *Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency*, accessed April 21, 2021, <https://www.msb.se/en/training--exercises/exercises-section/total-defence-exercise-2020/>.

country's military ability depends on how well educated and trained the armed forces are. A third requirement is intention, where a number of factors influence a state's decision or intention to act: What is the nation's historical track record? How has it acted before? Has the country limited its actions when faced with economic sanctions and diplomatic threats? Has the nation historically acted proportionally and have its actions been automatic?

NATO's present deterrence posture to prevent Russia from acting militarily against the Baltic States consists mainly of the US European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and the Alliance's enhanced Forward Presence program (eFP). Currently, eFP consists of four deployed battle groups, one in each of the Baltic States and one in eastern Poland. However, eFP alone is insufficient to deny or prevent Russia from rapidly overrunning the Baltic States. That said, it is important to point out that the eFP multinational battalions are intended to show common support, not to alone repulse an attack. EFP is an important symbol of NATO's commitment to defend its members, and its main function is to be a tripwire.

So far, however, this tripwire is not connected to an automatic response. It should be made clear to Moscow that if Russian forces enter the Baltic States, the "southern and northern options"<sup>8</sup> should be automatically activated. It is also worth remembering that it could take up to six months before US forces can reach Baltic territory in sufficient numbers. In the meantime, the Russian military would have a reinforced and organized defense in the Baltics. Simultaneously, Russian diplomacy would seek to divide NATO during this period.

The lead eFP countries—the United States, Canada, France and Germany—must have an alternative option to act, led by the US. A

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<sup>8</sup> The southern option refers to the US Army moving from Benelux to Poland south of the Baltic Sea, and the northern option refers to USMC moving from Norway across Sweden and the Baltic Sea to the Baltic States.

first step is to have reliable operation plans against a swift Russian action. The minimum requirement is to convince Russia that a rapid attack would fail and that there would be no way for Moscow to achieve a *fait accompli*, unlike in Crimea. To make this credible, the Baltic States must each have an organized defense plan for total resistance even during occupation, as the Lithuanian freedom fighters did after the Second World War. Additionally, the Baltic States need more soldiers on the ground, for which there is only one logical option—conscription. The eFP battle groups and the Baltic Armed Forces together should have an order of battle of approximately seven brigades, according to a RAND study from 2018.<sup>9</sup> With support from neighboring countries, such a force would be able to fight against invading Russian forces for at least four to five weeks and obstruct Moscow's attempts to seize control of the Baltic States' territories.

NATO's command and control relies on consensus in decision-making. To facilitate this process, a division headquarters is going to be set up in Riga. However, most of the same could be immediately achieved by advanced coordination within the eFP. One proposal is to develop operational plans to act with military forces in neighboring countries, which would further discourage Russia to act against one country at a time and keep the others on hold, as during June 1940.

The reinforcement of US troops in the Baltic States can be done both from the south, via Poland and the Suwałki Corridor, and from the north, via the northern Baltic Sea. Russia has to take both of these options into account in its planning, which will tie up Russian forces in the northern and southern areas adjacent to the Baltic States. The types of joint multinational actions and maneuvers that would be necessary to carry out in a crisis in the southern concentration area

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<sup>9</sup> David A. Shlapak, *The Russian Challenge*, RAND Corporation, 2018

were partially<sup>10</sup> practiced during the exercises Defender Europe, Aurora and TFÖ; but corresponding exercises in the northern concentration area have so far only been held without international troop participation. Swedish and Finnish support for enabling the northern route represents a small step for Stockholm.<sup>11</sup> But together with other decisions and military planning, it is important for deterring potential Russian aggression against the Baltic States.

Sweden is not part of any military alliance; and its unilateral declaration of solidarity with neighboring partners as well as other bilateral and regional defense cooperation arrangements that Stockholm is part of do not include any mutual defense obligations. Nevertheless the Defense Commission considers that Sweden must, as far and quickly as possible, develop opportunities for joint operational planning with Finland and also coordinate planning with Denmark, Norway, the UK, US and NATO.<sup>12</sup> The Commission also considers that strengthened defense, security policy and defense cooperation with Canada should be investigated. This is particularly important given the role Canada plays in the Arctic and its involvement in the Baltic Sea region, as it is a framework nation for NATO's eFP battle group in Latvia.

Another interesting political move was observed in Prime Minister Stefan Löfven's "Statement of Government Policy" at the opening of the Riksdag (parliament) session on September 10, 2019. The former statement "that Sweden shall not seek membership in NATO"<sup>13</sup> has now been changed to "The Transatlantic link is being safeguarded and

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<sup>10</sup> Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only minor elements of Defender 2020 were exercised.

<sup>11</sup> However, when coordinated with other decisions, such a small step provides gives a multiplier effect.

<sup>12</sup> *Swedish Defence Commission's final report 2019:8*, May 14, 2019, 293–298.

<sup>13</sup> Swedish Government policy statement in 2019.

our defense cooperation is being deepened, not least around the Baltic Sea. It will be faster to give and receive operational support within the Finnish-Swedish military cooperation.”<sup>14</sup> It would, thus, behoove NATO policymakers not to wait for Swedish and Finnish membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. Rather, they should act from the present existing situation and build up NATO’s regional posture on top of reinforced bilateral and trilateral agreements until all countries around the Baltic Sea share a common operation plan for defense and deterrence against Russia.

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<sup>14</sup> Swedish Government policy statement in 2020.



# Looking at Baltic Security From Beyond the BSR and NATO

*Dr. Brendan Flynn*

To date, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has invested in a training commitment and a trip-wire forces concept for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Neither is trivial and both are paying significant dividends. Indeed, NATO's deterrent profile in the Baltics is much stronger today than it was just several years ago. However, this has bred a certain complacency—“*We have done what we realistically can for the Balts.*”

Though such sentiments are rarely if ever spoken out loud inside the Alliance, one sometimes garners that intimation from NATO officials. Moreover, it is interesting how the focus is all on NATO's responsibility to help the Baltics. This ignores the national effort of the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) themselves, or of the three collectively, which is a dimension that remains less explored. It also ignores vital bilateral links—foremost with Sweden and Finland. Finally, it is worth asking why the European Union has decided that sending troops to Mali is vital for the security of Europe but not to the Baltics? A clear need exists to unseat such complacency by being clear-headed about the threat in the BSR and how to deter it.

The Euro-Atlantic community must go further in deterring Russian aggression against the Baltic States because what NATO has done so far—stationing tripwire multinational battalions in the region, training local forces or carrying out an aerial policing mission—are akin to relatively small stakes in a poker game. Although there is a fashion in some academic circles to downplay the Baltics as a likely

subject for Russian aggression,<sup>1</sup> this hardly represents a sound basis for policy: assuming the best of all possible outcomes. From Chechnya, to Georgia, to Ukraine and more lately Syria and even Libya, the reality is that Putin's evolving regime over 20 years has waged and arguably won several wars and, indeed, thrives on war. Though, it is accurate to note all of these were states that were outside NATO or EU membership and security guarantees, and thus are qualitatively different than the Baltics.

Therefore, what seems more plausible is a Russian threat to the Baltics with some lower intensity "hybrid" operation, although an intensive all-out invasion surely requires contingency planning as well. The temporalities of Russian hostile actions are also worth thinking about. Russia could act swiftly: a 72-hour campaign is entirely within its strategic culture. But alternatively, it may also embark on a long-lasting "strategy of tension" through a series of hybrid aggressions and provocations in a slow-burn campaign of attrition to wear down NATO and the Baltic States and, above all, to promote division. This could last years. Indeed, psychologically, a key insight would be to understand that such a campaign has already begun and is underway at, for now, a low level of intensity.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 199-200; Michele E. Commercio, "Why Putin won't attempt to 'integrate' Estonia and Latvia into the Russian Federation," *LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP) Blog*, July 3, 2018, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/03/07/why-putin-wont-attempt-to-integrate-estonia-and-latvia-into-the-russian-federation/>; Emily Ferris, "Probing the Baltic States: Why Russia's Ambitions Do Not Have a Security Dimension," *RUSI Commentary*, November 21, 2018, <https://rusi.org/commentary/probing-baltic-states-why-russia%E2%80%99s-ambitions-do-not-have-security-dimension>.

## **To Deter Russia, NATO Needs to Understand What Moscow Wants**

What does Russia want as regards the Baltics? Reclaiming its Tsarist imperial domain is arguably not the primary motive. In many ways the costs of a full-scale conflict would be obviously disproportionate for Russia. In particular Russia has wider geopolitical interest in keeping the Baltic Sea Region open for business.

Russia's maritime trade remains heavily dependent on its Baltic ports for around 30 percent of all overseas imports and exports, notwithstanding the problem of ice in the winter months, sanctions, and increasing trade with China and other parts of the world, which have boosted the importance of Russian ports in the Azov and Black seas.<sup>2</sup> The Baltic is also central to Russian oil and natural gas export plans, notably through the Nordstream One pipeline, in operation since 2012, and Nordstream Two pipeline, whose construction has been delayed because of US sanctions.

These projects inevitably have many geo-strategic and security implications: for example, increasing Russian economic opportunities in the wider European gas market and reducing the exposure to pipelines through the Ukraine and Poland, while increasing Germany's dependence on direct Russian gas imports and possibly the Kremlin's leverage over Berlin.<sup>3</sup> Therefore any "war" that plunged the region

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<sup>2</sup> See Table 1 in Alexander Druzhinin, "The sea factor in the spatial and socio-economic dynamics of today's Russia," *Quaestiones Geographicae* 38, no.2, (2019): 93.

<sup>3</sup> Many unknowns remain about the impact of Nordstream Two, but at least some of the economic modelling suggests clear geopolitical outcomes that are preferential to the Kremlin. See: Balázs R. Sziklai, László Á. Kóczy, and Dávid Cserscsik, "The impact of Nord Stream 2 on the European gas market bargaining positions," *Energy Policy* 144 (2020): 111692; Maik Günther and Volker Nissen, *Gas Flows and Gas Prices in Europe: What is the Impact of Nord Stream 2?* Technische Universität Ilmenau, Fakultät für Wirtschaftswissenschaften und Medien, Institut für Wirtschaftsinformatik, April 12, 2019, <https://tu->

into turmoil would not make economic or political sense for Russia since that maritime-based trade would be badly disrupted.

However, that does not mean conflict is impossible. Rational state actors can still end up in a conflict cycle that contradicts their self-interests. Russia has ethno-national and cultural populations within, especially, Latvia and Estonia that it may seek to “protect,” although these large ethnic minorities are not manifestly ill-treated to any extent that could plausibly justify Russian intervention. It has been well observed that although Russian minorities are, justifiably, proud of their Russian culture and heritage, it does not mean that they necessarily seek re-integration with the “Motherland.” Nonetheless, it is a strategic necessity that this sort of pretext is denied to Russia by an excellent standard of treatment of Russian minorities, which may not always be popular with some elites or voters in the Baltic States.

Moreover, such minority “gold plating” will not come cheap. Yet in terms of strategic legitimacy, it strengthens NATO and the Baltic States to be seen to take this approach and to actually deliver on it.

One can speak of three R’s here as regards the political messaging: RESPECT for Russian culture, minorities, language and people; REFUSAL to be intimidated by aggression, threats or hostile actions of any Russian government; and RECIPROCATION toward any

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[dresden.de/bu/wirtschaft/bwl/ee2/ressourcen/dateien/enerday-2019/Paper-Guenther.pdf?lang=en](https://www.dresden.de/bu/wirtschaft/bwl/ee2/ressourcen/dateien/enerday-2019/Paper-Guenther.pdf?lang=en). For a more general discussion of European exposure to Russian gas see: Anna Mikulska, “Gazprom and Russian Natural Gas Policy in the First Two Decades of the 21st Century,” *Orbis* 64, no. 3 (2020): 403–4.

Russia government that is willing to repair and reset relations with its neighbors on a fair and transparent basis.

Russia does have long-term strategic or military territorial interests in the BSR; a land corridor to Kaliningrad would make military sense, and more generally access to some of the Baltic States' coastline would help in the defense of the approaches to St. Petersburg. However, modern military technology—notably, the long range of Russian anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) sensors and missiles—has made these territorial imperatives perhaps less essential. Moreover, whether either of these territorial attractions are sufficient to justify Russian invasion seems doubtful.

Rather, they would be added to the calculus of any action along with a host of other factors. Indeed, the Vladimir Putin regime has notably been more “opportunistic” in its employment of force rather than strictly strategic; the Crimea operation and especially the Donbas operations in 2014 as well as ongoing Syrian “adventures,” were, it seems, all extemporized operations based on well-rehearsed contingency plans, undertaken because the opportunity arose. A master plan of cynical chess moves is not really what NATO and the wider West are facing, but rather the possibility of aggression if the need and opportunity arises.

Finally, what the current Russian regime probably seeks most of all as a strategic outcome is the weakening of the NATO alliance and, by extension, Sweden and Finland remaining neutral or returning to being neutralized with minimal NATO cooperation. In a NATO context, Russia would seek to exploit internal divisions between the United States and the European countries. A part of this would be to test German reluctance to use force against, say, Polish willingness to show resolve. Moscow can easily play off those internal NATO dynamics. Increasing the North Atlantic Alliance's dysfunction is Moscow's core objective right now.

Such could be delivered by a hybrid operation designed to create a panic that exposes NATO as slow, shambolic, uncertain and unwilling to act fast enough or united enough. If that happened, it would be a strategic “win” for any Russian operation. It does not have to seize territory or engage in rousing Russian minorities. What is essential is that Russia embarrass, expose and weaken NATO and its allies.

Probing the ambiguous relationship between Sweden and Finland with NATO would be another logical arena for Russian hybrid operations. If Moscow could create a manufactured crisis resulting in an unwillingness for Helsinki and Stockholm to act together in concert, it would produce an ideal political outcome: Finland could be cowed into returning to some sort of residual “neutralized” status if domestic political opinion and the elite run scared or feel abandoned by Sweden, NATO and the EU. In that case, the old Finnish arguments for neutralization and a special bilateral relationship with Russia might resurrect themselves. This may seem rather far-fetched at present, but the West needs to be alert to the political logic behind possible Russian aggression.

### **Deterring but Not Threatening Russia**

NATO has to play a balancing act in creating forces within the Baltic States that have sufficient deterrent value but are not so powerful and threatening that Russia decides it must take military action to remove a perceived impending threat to its territory. The Kremlin likely harbors some level of fear that NATO forces in the Baltic could conceivably intervene in a “color”-style revolution in Belarus or, more fancifully, in Russia itself. And if this fear grows more acute, the Putin regime or its successor could well lash out at the Baltics, if only out of a sense of following a diversionary logic. Thus, NATO has a delicate balancing act as to what it signals. The Alliance needs to make clear that it will not attack Russian territory or intervene in its internal affairs but, on the other hand, that it is ready to violently resist armed and other aggression toward the Baltics.

### How to Deter Russian Aggression Towards the Baltic States?

The literature on deterrence is vast, but one can draw out a number of important threads, above all the centrality of deterring by punishment and/or denial.<sup>4</sup> Deterrence by punishment means an enemy fears it will lose something if it is counter-attacked. In the context of the Baltic States, this is not a particularly strong deterrent for Russia.

While NATO might threaten Russia with the seizure of Kaliningrad in the event of an all-out attack on the Baltic States and thus deter Russia by punishment (in this case, territorial loss), the obvious danger here is that such an act would be highly escalatory. It would involve NATO forces invading and holding actual sovereign Russian territory. One cannot think of a faster way to provoke a Russian threat (whether a bluff or otherwise) to employ tactical nuclear weapons.

Kaliningrad, as an ice-free bastion at the heart of the BSR, is real estate that any Russian government would be reluctant to lose. Moreover, who will do the difficult urban fighting required for a NATO occupation of Kaliningrad—the Polish and German armies? Would they be the same units that would be slated to come to the aid of the Baltics? The military fantasy of punishing the Russians by taking

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<sup>4</sup> For the classic literature on conventional deterrence see: John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1983) or Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). For more recent literature on conventional deterrence see: John J. Mearsheimer, “Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John J. Mearsheimer,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 3–8; Robert P. Haffa, “The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, (Winter, 2018): 94–11; Paul K. Huth, “Military Deterrence and Statecraft,” in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. 2nd edition, ed. Lester Kurtz (San Diego: Academic Press, 2008), 1,256–1,266; Elbridge Colby and Jonathan Solomon, “Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe,” *Survival* 57, no. 6, (2015): 21–50.

Kaliningrad should be set aside as an unrealistic, escalatory and possibly counter-productive idea.

A NATO counter-threat to cross over and invade mainland Russian territory or Belarus is equally not entirely plausible, even if it makes a certain amount of military sense in the short term. Yet consider it: how would that end for NATO, or rather, where would that end? Such an operation would quickly escalate with much greater conventional fighting and quite probably Russian threats of tactical nuclear weapons. Moreover, if Belarus feigns neutrality, it would be difficult to justify a NATO strike or projection into its territory.

Instead, NATO will probably have to resign itself to a policy that will comprise a flexible response: invasion from Belarus or Russia may well result in physical cross-border raids and cross-border penetrations, if such are necessary for tactical reasons, not to mention definite strikes on legitimate targets within such territory. However, strategically, NATO should rule out any operations designed to seize, hold and occupy Russian or Belarusian territory.

### **Facing Down the Russian Tactical Nuclear Threat**

This brings the analysis swiftly to the topic of nuclear weapons, which casts an implicit shadow over everything NATO and Russia do in the Baltics. The Russians have apparently scripted tactical nuclear employment as a signaling escalatory “break” in their various recent military exercises, although there is considerable ambiguity about



whether much of this is cheap theater<sup>5</sup> or serious contingency planning.<sup>6</sup>

In general, Russian strategic doctrine has stressed a more permissive approach to the possible use of (tactical) nuclear weapons when faced with conventional attacks that threaten the existence of their state, reflecting a longstanding fear that Russian forces are inferior to NATO's higher technology platforms.<sup>7</sup> However, given that in the BSR theater, Russia possibly has significant conventional force advantages, the necessity for any resort to tactical nuclear blackmail

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<sup>5</sup> For a particularly skeptical view, see: Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "The Myth Of Russia's Lowered Nuclear Threshold," *War on the Rocks Blog*, September 22, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/the-myth-of-russias-lowered-nuclear-threshold/>; For a more balanced but ultimately dismissive view of Russian tactical nuclear "signaling," see: Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political War: Moving Beyond the Hybrid* (London: Routledge, 2019): 21. It is worth pointing out that the idea of an employment of tactical nuclear weapons is not unique to Russian defense thinking. France originally conceived of tactical nuclear weapons as a signaling "test" mechanism, although how workable this was remained hotly debated. See: Sten Rynning, *Changing Military Doctrine: Presidents and Military Power in the Fifth Republic France, 1958–2000* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002): 26–27.

<sup>6</sup> Perspectives that place greater weight on the possibility of Russian threats of tactical nuclear weapons in the context of some sort of wider and intense conflict with NATO include: Mark B. Schneider, "Russian nuclear 'de-escalation' of future war," *Comparative Strategy* 3, no.5 (2018): 361–372; Dave Johnson, "Russia's Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crises, and Nuclear Thresholds," *Livermore Papers on Global Security No. 3*, (Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Center for Global Security Research, February, 2018): 66–74, <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/Precision-Strike-Capabilities-report-v3-7.pdf>; Marcel H. Van Herpen, "Russia's nuclear threats and the security of the Baltic states," *Cicero foundation great debate paper*, No. 16/05 (July 2016), [http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marcel\\_H\\_Van\\_Herpen\\_Russia\\_Nuclear\\_Threats\\_Baltics.pdf](http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marcel_H_Van_Herpen_Russia_Nuclear_Threats_Baltics.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See Dima Adamsky, "From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41, no. 1–2, (2018): 38; Bettina Renz *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018): 172.

may well be even more far-fetched than scenarios that envisage full-scale conventional invasion.

Nonetheless, the possible threat of tactical nuclear weapons significantly complicates NATO plans and options. Possible Russian targets here could include any NATO naval concentrations at sea, or more politically motivated objectives, such as aggressive threats to Poland or Germany, attempting to create a dramatic internal NATO alliance fissure. A more politically complex threat could involve targeting non-NATO Sweden or Finland, especially if the latter were permitting their territory to be used as a staging area for NATO forces in the context of a live Russo-NATO conflict. Technically, Article 5 would not apply to them in such cases.

While the credibility of a Russian tactical nuclear threat remains unclear, Moscow's access to a variety of tactical nuclear weapon capabilities is beyond doubt, notably Tochka and Iskander-M land-based missiles but also many systems available to its naval forces and stand-off missiles and gravity nuclear bombs for the air forces.<sup>8</sup> Russia may have reduced the overall numbers of its tactical warheads, but it has also modernized and made more capable some that it retains.

By way of contrast, NATO's existing tactical nuclear war stocks in the European theater lack credibility: it seems they are little more than modernized B61 tactical bombs dropped from aircraft and perhaps one could notionally include some French air- or carrier-launched nuclear-tipped missiles.<sup>9</sup> Air force experts might be able to make the

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<sup>8</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Russian nuclear weapons, 2021," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 77, no. 2, (2021): 90–108.

<sup>9</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, and Matt Korda "United States nuclear weapons, 2021," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 77, no.1, (2021a): 43–63; Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Tactical nuclear weapons, 2019," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 75 no. 5, (2019): 252–261. They note that the French ASMPA missiles are classified as "strategic" although, as weapons, they exhibit tactical parameters.

case for how such a force is a credible and potent deterrent, especially if combined with a new platform such as the F-35 fifth-generation stealth jet.

Given the abandonment of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a new generation of US tactical nuclear weapons will surely emerge. But it remains to be seen if these will be deployed in the European theater. In any event, there is a frightening but inescapable logic suggested here: the Russian regime needs to understand that if it deploys a tactical nuclear weapon in the BSR, it will automatically be punished in kind with a sophisticated, accurate and proportionate response that will not target a civilian population center, but a crucial military asset.

Currently, this is missing from the strategic calculus because NATO cannot deliver such, or at least there is doubt about the viability of the residual NATO capability here. This uncertainty provides perverse incentives for Russian to threaten the use of tactical low-yield nuclear weapons as a type of escalatory blackmail, although the likelihood of it doing so surely remains remote. It needs to be stressed that such a scenario would undoubtedly have disastrous repercussions for the entire region—all the more reason to deter it.

### **Developing a Common, Joint, Pooled Baltic-Wide Missile-Defense Capability**

If NATO or European countries are squeamish about this grim logic, the only other alternative is to invest in weapons systems and approaches that can reduce the effectiveness of the Russian tactical nuclear weapon arsenal, creating doubt in Russia's mind about whether such threats can be deployed.

Conceivably, a mixture of theater missile defense, advanced counter-A2/AD platforms, and aggressive precision targeting of Russian platforms could do this to some extent. However, given the nature of

nuclear weapons (only one needs to get through), it seems this approach would only ever be a partial solution.

Sweden and Poland have recently invested billions of dollars in Patriot missile batteries, which have some properties that permit missile defense.<sup>10</sup> Denmark has plans to upgrade by 2023 some of its warships to have a credible missile-defense role, which would enable some Russian nuclear systems to be engaged.<sup>11</sup>

Arguably, these countries are exploring and evolving a limited capability to reduce the ability of Russia to threaten their capitals from low-yield tactical nuclear strikes. They are well aware that no systems are 100 percent effective. The problem is that the Russians may simply find gaps and other targets of opportunity (for example NATO's logistics hub at Bodo, Norway) to bully a ceasefire based on nuclear terror.

To summarize here, NATO needs a Baltic-wide missile-defense force to degrade Russian tactical missiles by having a capability to shoot down a significant number of these. This does not stop outright

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<sup>10</sup> See: Tomasz Pradzynski. *Policy Brief A New Alliance Between Poland, Sweden, and the United States for Baltic Security?* German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), May 30, 2019, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/new-alliance-between-poland-sweden-and-united-states-baltic-security>; James Shotter and Evon Huber, "Poland Strikes \$4.75bn Patriot Missile Defence Deal with US.," *The Financial Times*, March 28, 2018; Tony Bertuca, "State Department Approves \$3.2b Missile Defense Sale To Sweden," *Inside Defense Blog*, February 21, 2018, <https://insidedefense.com/insider/state-department-approves-32b-missile-defense-sale-sweden>.

<sup>11</sup> The Danes have ordered fifty US SM-2 missiles for their air-defense frigates and may order more capable SM-6 missiles in the future, which would allow intercepts of Russian ballistic missiles. See: Edward H. Lundquist, "An interview with Capt. Claus Andersen, Royal Danish Navy," *Defense Media Network*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/royal-danish-navy-growing-into-new-missile-defense-role/>.

Russian tactical nuclear blackmail, but it might delay such threats, or make it harder to employ brinksmanship of this type.

### **Developing a Common Joint and Pooled SEAD/CA2D capability for the Baltic**

Relatedly, NATO needs a combined counter-A2/AD force (CA2AD) focused on Suppression or Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD/DEAD), probably exploiting the capabilities of “new” Danish, Norwegian and eventually Polish F-35s, plus the advanced aircraft of Sweden and Finland.<sup>12</sup> This primarily air-based force could be designed to take apart Russian A2/AD systems in a way that would be not dissimilar to how the Israeli Air Force destroyed Syrian (and Russian) air defenses in the Beqaa valley in the 1982 Operation Mole Cricket 19.<sup>13</sup> Clearly modern Russian air defenses would be more complex and challenging, yet they are not invulnerable and are sometimes dramatically overhyped.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The F-35 may be ideal for interdiction of A2/AD assets, hunting elusive mobile missile batteries because it has stealthy characteristics, excellent potential for integration of electronic warfare payloads, and great situational awareness and the ability to share targeting data from other sources. On the other hand, there are too few of these extremely expensive aircraft, their endurance is far from outstanding, and there are outstanding issues of reliability and availability. Such a role would require dedicated training and payloads that so far, are not evident in Europe, although it would appear the US Air Force and Navy are exploring using F-35s to target North Korean missile launchers. The Belgians and Danes will initially utilize the F-35 as an air-defense asset, although it may, in time, evolve toward a “wild weasel” SEAD/DEAD role. At the time of writing, Finland had not yet chosen its new fighter aircraft, but the F-35 is obviously a strong contender.

<sup>13</sup> For details of this operation, see: Dave Slogget, *Drone Warfare: the Development of Unmanned Aerial Conflict* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014): 95.

<sup>14</sup> See: Keir Giles and Mathieu Boulegue. “Russia’s A2/AD Capabilities: Real and Imagined,” *Parameters* 49, no. 1/2 (2019): 21–36. For another hype busting and skeptical view of Russian A2/AD capabilities, see: Michael Kofman, “It’s Time To Talk About A2/AD: Rethinking The Russian Military Challenge,” *War On The*

No one BSR country can afford this type of standing force, and it is not enough to simply wait for it to be assembled *ad hoc* as a crisis unfolds. The argument for a joint, combined and pooled Baltic SEAD Wing seems quite strong. However, as usual, national perspectives and variable interests will likely stand in the way. A combined Baltic SEAD/CA2AD training facility might be more politically acceptable. Obviously, NATO does this already to some extent. But what is suggested here is an enhanced capability and one that is advertised and signaled in a way that deters the Russians, making them think twice before any military adventure in the Baltics.

### **Enhancing Long-Range Conventional Precision Strike**

Finally, some punishment deterrent value certainly is possible by letting Russia know that if it strikes the Baltic States' cities with heavy weapons, say artillery, it will be repaid in kind with long-range precision conventional strikes on military targets, possibly even as far as in St. Petersburg and other locations in Pskov Oblast.

This speaks to an important capability for long-range precision-strike fires, which should be organic within the Baltic States, whether it comes from land, naval or air units. Some countries in the region already have elements of this capability: Finland's F-18 Hornets and Poland's F-16 Fighting Falcons (*Jastrzębie*) are equipped with precision attack missiles (AGM-158 JASSM), while Germany's Eurofighters or Tornados, and Sweden's Gripens have the Taurus missile. The Baltic States possess nothing like this.

More explicitly, it is in the long-term strategic interest of the Baltic States themselves to wield a capability for conventional long-range precision-strike. Because they have no fast mover jets, any airborne

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*Rocks*, September 5, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/its-time-to-talk-about-a2-ad-rethinking-the-russian-military-challenge/>. For a more general discussion of SEAD in the contemporary era, see: Justin Bronk, "IV. Air Forces: Approaching a Fork in the Sky," *Whitehall Papers*, 96 no.1, (2019): 52–62.

system is not plausible. Land systems exist that can achieve something similar. Poland has recently developed this capability with its purchases of M142 HIMARS rocket artillery, which can fire long-range (300 kilometers) ATACM missiles.

Something like this would seem logical if the objective is to acquire a deterrence by punishing counter-strike capability, although these are admittedly highly expensive platforms for the Baltic States. Joint training and procurement could be done with Poland, which might bring down the cost. The joint purchase and crewing of even a single battery (six firing units) might be affordable if phased over time.

A much cheaper but less effective pathway to long-range precision-strike “punishment” would be to enhance the range and lethality of existing 155-millimeter self-propelled (SP) systems. Estonia has 18 new Finnish-type 155 mm systems of South Korean origin, while Latvia fields a quantity of old Austrian 155 mm SP guns, probably the Baltic country’s single most powerful weapons system. Lithuania has state-of-the-art German 155 mm artillery systems. Some US, German and Italian-led technical programs are currently ongoing to increase the range of this class of weapons, beyond the typical 30 kilometers to distances of 70+ kilometers with guided shells.<sup>15</sup> Plainly, this would not have the same “punishment/fear” deterrent value as rockets that can reach 300 km, but it could prove a more affordable route to an organic Baltic “punishment” capability.

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion, see: Matilda R. Brady and Paul Goethals, “A comparative analysis of contemporary 155 mm artillery projectiles,” *Journal of Defense Analytics and Logistics*, 3, no. 2 (2019): 171–190; Dan Goure, “Army artillery: Restoring the king of battle to its throne,” *Defense News*, January 19, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/01/31/restoring-the-king-of-battle-army-artillery-to-its-throne/>.

Politically, it is important that the Baltic States possess their own organic strike-back capability without having to wait for lengthy Article 5 deliberations or NATO reinforcements that might never arrive. Russia would then know that the Baltic States themselves would have military capabilities to hit them hard without waiting for NATO allies. On the other hand, such weapons cannot really be used to invade Russian or Belarusian territory, because, in this guise, they would represent a shared counter-battery deep-strike asset. They do not facilitate wider offensive operations but can neutralize Russian strike assets.

### **Deterrence by Denial: The Importance of Heavy Metal**

The other major tradition in conventional deterrence theory is deterrence by denial, which involves viable military land forces that possess properties to deny territory to an aggressor through use of firepower and maneuver. It is most important to prevent losing land territory—crucial especially for a small state. Large states like China or Russia can afford to (temporarily) trade space for time and have done so in their military history. But small territorial states lack this defense in depth. Related to this, but secondary, is denial of air supremacy to the enemy and denial of its access to the sea.

Denial of territory can be provided by mobile mechanized forces, which is how Israel has done it, but with a crucial twist that it used these forces to wage mobile and decisive warfare inside the territory of its neighbors (Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon). Waging aggressive forward defense with mechanized forces deep into Russian territory following the Israeli playbook is strategically untenable for NATO. It will quickly run out of steam if it does not first, within a matter of days or hours, result in Russian employment of tactical nuclear weapons to signal conflict termination.

However, mechanized forces, notably those with tanks, arguably have a significant deterrent value because they are mobile concentrations



of firepower that can be used, even in tight spaces, to creatively outflank and destroy enemy formations. Armored units create uncertainty for any would-be invader, especially if they are handled by aggressive and audacious commanders, and they become formations that fix the enemy's attention cycle. What matters most is not so much the models of tanks, or even how many, but rather the quality of a given armored formation and its leadership. How this type of land force is employed directly relates to how deterrence by denial is delivered.

In the case of the Baltics, their geography is basically a tight inverted trapezoid shape, oriented north to south, around the size of the state of Florida. At the top of the "box" is the Gulf of Finland, about 350 km long from Narva to the Baltic Sea proper. At the bottom, is a narrow band, about 150 km wide, from Kaliningrad to the Belarusian border, and in the middle, there is a tight "waist" of about 250 km, from Pskov Oblast to the Gulf of Riga. What this means is that territory is at a premium in the southern Baltics. Lithuania, notably, has its capital within artillery range of Belarus. A little more territory is available to play with in Estonia and also large water obstacles (Lakes Peipus and Pskov), although the border here is actually with Russia rather than less-threatening Belarus.

Ironically, it is Lithuania that, arguably, wields the better-quality mechanized forces—the so-called Iron Wolf Brigade, which is receiving a variant of the German Boxer wheeled combat vehicle. Yet Estonia is also an important location for any mechanized battle group to use as its starting point given that friendly land forces are relatively far away. The Via Baltica road (E67) will stretch over 900 km, from Tallinn to Warsaw, and in any conflict with Russia it would become both a strategic artery but also the focal point of hostile operations by both sides.

Because NATO forces will not likely want to cross Russian borders, except as a tactical expediency, the focus for the land units would

likely be on north–south and/or south–north flanking maneuvers (coming up from Poland through the Suwałki Corridor) delivering scythe-like hooks capable of cutting apart discrete Russian formations and pushing them against the “wall of the coast” for encirclement and destruction, rather than simple, linear, east-to-west rolling battles.

In this context, what stands out as odd is that none of the Baltic States have any battle tanks. Such expensive and complex machinery arrives from time to time from other NATO countries for exercises. But the absence of tanks most of the rest of the time seems illogical: why pretend to have mechanized units if these formations actually lack tanks, which are still the lynchpin of armored formations?

Yes, the expense and the learning required to develop armored formations is enormous. But from a deterrent perspective, will the Russians be intimidated more by scores of fancy wheeled vehicles or a proper NATO-standard tank battalion with Leopards or Abrams vehicles?<sup>16</sup> While there has been a great deal of speculation about Russian hybrid warfare approaches, there is also much continuity in Russian military thought and practice. Russian strategic culture continues to greatly respect tanks and heavy artillery land forces.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is plausible to assume that Moscow will be more likely deterred by a mixed force of tanks and mechanized supporting

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<sup>16</sup> This type of argument has also been well made by Richard Hooker who notes how the United States has gifted a significant number of Abrams tanks to Morocco in recent years, posing the question why this has not been offered to the Baltic States? See: Richard D. Hooker, Jr., *How to Defend the Baltic States* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2019), 15–16, <https://jamestown.org/product/how-to-defend-the-baltic-states/>.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, “A Closer look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War,’” *Kennan Cable*, no. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, Kennan Institute, April 2015), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no7-closer-look-russias-hybrid-war>. See also: Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political War: Moving beyond the Hybrid* (London: Routledge, 2019), 47.

elements rather than motorized light infantry. Arguably, wasting time and money on anything else is a dangerous false economy.

The logical next step is for some sort of tank force to be acquired and given over to the Baltic State militaries, although there would certainly be issues about affordability and even just having the required manpower. What is worrying is that each country is basically developing its own mechanized infantry battlegroup.

However, if they pooled their resources, a proper integrated light division could be possible. Currently, this is probably impossible because of incompatible equipment: the Lithuanians possess mainly state-of-the-art German equipment and vehicles; the Latvians have old former British Army vehicles, and the Estonians have surplus Swedish mechanized infantry combat vehicles (MICV). However, the obvious military approach should be to develop a pool of common vehicles across the three states, whether US, German, Swedish, etc.

The existing mechanized infantry formations of the Baltic States, if they are handled conservatively, could be easily treated by any Russian intensive attack as “penny-packets” to be bypassed or bottled up and dealt with piecemeal. A larger integrated Baltic mechanized formation would present the Russians with a much more formidable threat. One that would be more likely to deter them.

Politically, it would mean that the Baltic States would have their own resources to “pay down” Russian forces rather than wait for heavy mechanized forces to be flown or shipped in. Given the large numbers of relatively modern tank hulls stored by Germany and the United States, it seems rather unbelievable that a battalion’s worth has not been donated to each of the Baltic States. If the objection is that the Baltic State militaries are not best able to afford or manage such assets, then a credible plan needs to be put in place that raises them up to a level of capability that they can begin to integrate such systems.

NATO and its Baltic State members will arguably have to, sooner or later, develop an integrated Baltic armored division that would routinely train, move, deploy and fight across the entire Baltic space, sharing a common or compatible tank and MICV class (with the same ammunition and missile logistics, similar levels of protection, and comparable fuel/speed parameters). The current Baltic land forces should be regarded as merely transitional training formations.

### **The Risks of Fashionable Defense Resilience Rhetoric**

Territorial denial can also be achieved by fixed defenses, especially if arranged in depth and backed up by mobile forces. However, it is a method that has not generally enjoyed good press since the “failure” of the Maginot Line (1940) or the Bar Lev Line (1973). The main psychological problem seems to be a false sense of security and the fixed sunk costs, as well as the fact that Russian forces have a strong strategic culture of dealing with such fixed defense obstacles as merely engineering challenges. However, this approach may have merit in certain specific terrain features, notably toward the narrow bottom of the trapezoid, where Lithuania meets Kaliningrad. This is a more logical zone in which to partially fortify terrain because there is so little of it to play with.

Over the last few years, the Baltic States have made a lot of moves toward improving their home guard and territorial defense units. This has been inspired by the “little green men” phenomenon in Crimea and the widespread focus on “hybrid operations.” The fashionable word for such a defense posture is “resilience” capabilities<sup>18</sup> or a “thornbrush/porcupine” strategy of making the Baltic States uneasily

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: Stephen J. Flanagan, Jan Osburg, Anika Binnendijk, Marta Kepe, Andrew Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance*. RAND Research Report 2779, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2019), <http://www.rand.org/t/RR2779>.

occupied by Russian forces<sup>19</sup> in part by employment of local forces in guerrilla-style opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Yet this approach invites a certain level of skepticism. It amounts to spending a lot of time, money and energy on increasing the quantity and quality of light infantry, which may well be a false economy. Light infantry equipped with sophisticated anti-tank guided weapons (ATGW) are psychologically appealing in ways, because they show the resolve of ordinary Baltic State citizens to fight, literally, for their home ground. The undoubted courage and resolve of such soldiers are undeniable. However, in military terms, they can be easily crushed by a concentration of Russian artillery and mechanized forces.<sup>21</sup>

Light infantry forces lack mobility, firepower and protection; and while cities and urban areas give them cover, the Russia way of war stresses brute force and firepower. The Russian army has dealt with such tactical problems before, in Grozny in the 1990s and, more recently, in Syria. Indeed, the current generation of military leadership in Russia is heavily made up of veterans of the Chechen

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<sup>19</sup> Vylius Leskys, “Thornbush Strategy – Deterrence By Denial In Lithuania,” *Small Wars Journal*, June 17, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/thornbush-strategy-deterrence-denial-lithuania>.

<sup>20</sup> James K. Wither, “‘Modern Guerrillas’ And The Defense Of The Baltic States,” *Small Wars Journal*, January 13, 2018, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/modern-guerrillas-and-defense-baltic-states>.

<sup>21</sup> British General Frank Kitson, writing in the late 1980s context of Cold War West Germany, noted that while light infantry and Home Guard type units have useful screening roles in certain terrain, augmenting mobile mechanized forces, it would be a mistake to exaggerate... “little groups of reservists armed with light anti-tank weapons which certain theorists like to suppose could stop the Russians. The idea, which sounds so attractive from a political and economic view, would be totally impractical if for no other reasons than because the defence once laid out could not be manoeuvred around. All the enemy would need to do would be to swamp the defence in one sector thereby destroying them and move through the gap.” Frank Kitson, *Warfare as a Whole* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 28.

wars. Moreover, Russian historical methods for waging counter-insurgency do not trouble themselves with Western conceptions of “hearts and minds.”<sup>22</sup>

It will not greatly deter a Russian regime bent on launching an attack on Estonia to know there are several thousand well-armed infantry, waiting for them in Tallinn, assuming these troops can even mobilize in time. The Russians could simply bypass the city and its resilience forces entirely, seal it off and lay siege, while seizing the strategic prizes of the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa along with Muuga Harbor. Retreating to the forests to re-fight the “Forest Brothers” war of the 1950s in this century is also not a serious proposition in an era of more advanced sensors, helicopters, drones, etc.<sup>23</sup>

Resistance would not necessarily be futile nor insignificant and could certainly be effective in these terrains; yet strategically, investing in local light infantry forces will not deliver a high deterrent value against a regime like Russia’s with the strategic culture it has.

### **Major Issues and Gaps of Baltic Sea Defense and Deterrence to Overcome**

The maritime aspects of the Baltic States’ defense predicament are often overlooked,<sup>24</sup> and their navies have been “over specialized” as

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<sup>22</sup> See for example: Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Tomáš Šmíd and Miroslav Mareš, “‘Kadyrovtsy’: Russia’s counterinsurgency strategy and the wars of paramilitary clans.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 650–677.

<sup>23</sup> For a good critique of the allure of light infantry/guerrilla forces as a deterrent to Russia, see: Kevin Blachford and Ronald Ti, “For Baltic Defense, Forget The ‘Forest Brothers,’ ” *War on the Rocks Blog*, October 16, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/for-baltic-defense-forget-the-forest-brothers/>.

<sup>24</sup> See the comments by Michael Kofman, “Fixing NATO Deterrence In The East Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love NATO’s Crushing Defeat By Russia,” *War on the Rocks Blog*, May 12, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/fixing->

mostly local mine warfare and counter measures (MCM) forces with some patrol boat capability. Estonia's navy has just three former Royal Navy minehunters, Latvia four former Dutch navy MCM vessels, and Lithuania is slightly stronger with four formerly Danish navy patrol vessels augmenting a force of three MCM boats.<sup>25</sup>

Strategically, this focus on naval mine warfare makes sense for NATO if one assumes that their only likely mission will be to keep the ports open so NATO can ship in reinforcements. However, if the local Baltic ports and their handling gear come under direct Russian artillery concentrations, have already been destroyed or are actually occupied by Russian forces, then the Baltic MCM forces will appear rather toothless and unconnected to the land fight. What is needed is more realistic—that is, pessimistic—thinking.

### **The Need to Embrace Littoral Multi-Domain Amphibious Operations**

How will the fight at sea and air contribute to the fight on land if it becomes really difficult? In the event of an outright Russian invasion, NATO's posture and thought process has to shift to a number of related naval specialties beyond MCM: amphibious raiding, sea-based fire support of land operations, and, ultimately, staging a significant amphibious landing of land forces that can credibly take back territory.

To be blunt, those are exceptionally challenging requirements. NATO has little historical precedent for such operations. The last time Western forces staged large-scale, opposed, landings, was as far back

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[nato-deterrence-in-the-east-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-natos-crushing-defeat-by-russia/](#).

<sup>25</sup> See: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*. 121, no.1, (London: IISS, 2021): 66–163.

as Suez and Inchon in the 1950s or, perhaps, the British landings in the Falklands in 1982—although those latter amphibious operations were not directly opposed by significant land forces, as one must assume the Russians would do.

Nevertheless, the deterrent value of knowing that NATO is developing the ways and means to land significant mechanized forces in the Baltic States from the sea would, by itself, be useful. A prevalent fixed idea in the West is that the D-Day landings were the epitome of amphibious operations. However, today, such large concentrations would merely provide inviting targets for Russian artillery fires, precision missiles and possibly tactical nuclear weapons. Therefore, a more distributed concept of amphibious operations is probably required, which would involve phasing and synchronizing what would look like to the Russians as multiple amphibious raids. Such disparate raiders could then combine and unite to deliver a concentrated fast-moving land force.

It is important to create uncertainty in Russian military thinking that even if its forces swarm over the Baltic States in 72 hours, they will face a determined fight back for possession and that NATO has the capabilities to come back and reclaim possession from the sea.

The dangerous situation now is that the North Atlantic Alliance has shown it can land only what would amount to amphibious raiding forces or that NATO can “screen” its way into the Baltic ports, assuming these are held by friendly forces. However, the capability to land larger formations that can “fight up the beach” and retake territory is less obvious.

What would be required is a shift in mindset that realizes that what NATO would face would be a complex littoral battle, a “multi-domain battle” in the latest fashionable US lexicon, where land, sea and air forces blend together. To give depth to the Baltic States, their naval forces need to be able to convincingly join the land battle.



Above all NATO has to stop with the pretense of assuming the Alliance will have the luxury of time to reinforce the Baltics through their own ports, or that this will not be heavily contested. It is better to assume from the outset that what is necessitated is a large, kinetic, opposed amphibious operation.

### **Measures the Baltic States Can Undertake to Improve Their ‘Littoral War Fighting’ Capability**

Obviously, the assets required here are not something that the Baltic states can readily provide given the costs of modern naval systems and the fact that they are already committed to extensive spending as regards land forces.

Nonetheless, the small Baltic navies could invest in a number of platforms that would enable such an operation. Marine or naval infantry forces would help because, politically, some countries may not want to risk their soldiers in what would be among the most dangerous missions. A joint Baltic marine battalion could be hosted in Gotland and equipped with Swedish fast raiding craft. Simply knowing that such a trilateral force existed would exert some deterrent effect on Russia, which would have to anticipate intensive amphibious raiding even if it managed to overwhelm the Baltic States.

The lethality of some existing naval platforms could also be enhanced so that they have credible ways to join the land battle. For example, the Lithuanian Navy has several quite effective formerly Danish Flyvefisken-class patrol ships that could be equipped with naval missiles that have long-range strike capabilities, including against land targets.

In fact, there is a global trend for relatively small navies to acquire (Israel, Norway, South Korea, Australia, Vietnam) or else plan for procuring (Netherlands, Poland, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Pakistan,

etc.) long-range land-attack strike missiles.<sup>26</sup> Ironically Russia is one of the leading possible global suppliers of such weapons, which it has employed in Syria. Given the limited financial means of the Baltic states, some of these capabilities for “strike from the sea” can be extemporized from existing systems and weapons and thus are somewhat more likely to be affordable. Some anti-ship missiles, such as the Swedish RBS15 can be reconfigured for land-attack missions, and similar claims have been made for latest versions of the Italian Otomat anti-ship missile.<sup>27</sup> The Norwegian firm Kongsberg<sup>28</sup> produces a Naval Strike Missile (NSM),<sup>29</sup> which the US Navy and the US Marines have ordered in a land battery variant,<sup>30</sup> but which can be carried by relatively small vessels, including Skjold-class fast attack craft (FAC). The German navy has signaled that it plans to both

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<sup>26</sup> Swee Lean Collin Koh, “Emerging from obscurity: small navies and sea-launched land-attack cruise missiles,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 12, no. 1 (2016): 46–57.

<sup>27</sup> The Swedish manufacturer of this missile claims that the latest variants have a range of “more than 200km” and can be “used in naval land attack missions engaging stationary targets on land such as buildings, depots, hangars, air defence sites etc.” See: <https://www.saab.com/products/the-rbs15-family>, accessed April 13, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> See: <https://www.kongsberg.com/kda/what-we-do/missile-systems/naval-strike-missile/>, accessed April 13, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Just over 400 kilograms, it carries a relatively small warhead (125kg HE) up to a range of 185 km. It is described as a fifth-generation missile with GPS, terrain following and passive homing guidance. See <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/naval-strike-missile-nsm/>, accessed April 13, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Jensen, “USMC to Buy Naval Strike Missile in \$47 million Dollar Deal,” *OvertDefense*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.overtdefense.com/2019/05/09/usmc-to-buy-naval-strike-missile-in-47-million-dollar-deal/>.

acquire and further develop the Norwegian Naval Strike Missile.<sup>31</sup> Both missiles are used by Poland, the NSM with coastal batteries.

### **NATO Should Transfer Appropriate Surplus Vessels to the Baltic Navies**

Latvia used to have a small number of former Norwegian FACs, but these were mothballed, both in part because these were quite old and to save money. Possibly, NATO could broker the transfer of surplus naval units—notably the Norwegian Skjold-class FACs<sup>32</sup> or hovercraft, such as the US Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC), which the US Navy is currently disposing of as a class and replacing with new variant LCACs.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “After submarines, Norway and Germany team up on missile production,” *Naval Today*, February 13, 2017, <https://navaltoday.com/2017/02/13/after-submarines-norway-and-germany-team-up-on-missile-production/>.

<sup>32</sup> The last of the class was delivered in 2013, so they are still relatively new in service. Nonetheless, the latest version of the Norwegian defense plan for 2017–2020 identified that the six vessels should be decommissioned to pay for expensive new submarines and F-35s, although this has provoked some degree of domestic controversy. See: Rowan Allport, “Fire and Ice: The Defence of Norway and NATO’s Northern Flank,” *Human Security Centre*, April 2, 2017, <http://www.hscentre.org/uncategorized/fire-and-ice-the-defence-of-norway-and-natos-northern-flank/>. Also, from personal communication with Danish and European naval expert Dr. Michael Kluth, Roskilde University.

<sup>33</sup> One obvious objection here is that the old LCACs may be completely worn out and not fit for further service. Regarding the new model, see: Christen McCurdy, “U.S. Navy receives two new Landing Craft Air Cushion hovercraft,” *Navalrecognition.com*, September 4, 2020, <http://navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2020/september/8935-u-s-navy-receives-two-new-landing-craft-air-cushion-hovercraft.html>.

Hovercraft are particularly suitable for the Baltic,<sup>34</sup> given winter conditions, as they can generally operate over ice.<sup>35</sup> These types of vessels would allow the Baltic States' navies to play a significant role in amphibious raiding and, ultimately, in any large-scale amphibious landings. They would, if appropriately armed, have some ability to strike Russian targets of value on land (especially Russian artillery concentrations or fixed positions) with precision missiles or munitions.

Of course, they would be vulnerable; but politically, one cannot overstate the importance of the Baltic States having their own forces that can continue the fight, if need be, even from the sea in the event that their land forces are overwhelmed. If the Russians think they can simply smash and grab the Baltics and then present the rest of the Alliance with a *fait accompli* bolstered by the threat of tactical nuclear weapons, they may, in a moment of brazenness, be tempted to try such an operation.

However, if Moscow can see a credible Baltic State littoral force that will definitively continue the fight, this will complicate such neat, and ultimately flawed, assumptions about a seamless re-annexation.

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<sup>34</sup> Hovercraft have speed and are resistant to mines, and they can easily navigate mudflats as well as, crucially for the Baltic, frozen ice. Obviously, they have advantages and disadvantages like any weapon system. On the negative side they are costly to run and maintain, lack stealth and, like most naval vessels today, are unarmored. On the positive side, they are especially fast (40–50 knots is routine) and flexible with open decks (LCAC) that can be used to land troops and vehicles as large as (a single) tank on undefended beaches. Finland planned and developed a class of hovercraft missile-attack vessels—the so-called Tuuli class—from the late 1990s, explicitly because such vessels would be able to operate over ice conditions. This class was canceled because of budgetary and doctrinal considerations. The Russian Baltic Fleet possess two larger Zubr (Project 12322) LCAC-type vessels, which can employ bombardment rockets, carry up to three tanks or as many as several hundred troops.

<sup>35</sup> Matti Leppäranta and Kai Myrberg, *Physical Oceanography of the Baltic Sea* (Chichester, U.K.: Springer/Praxis Pub, 2010), 220–225.

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia need to own that type of capability, which produces uncertainty for the enemy and demonstrates the Baltics' resolve to make any Russian re-annexation attempt bloody, contested, long, uncertain and unpredictable.

It is additionally worth noting that Baltic Sea cooperation may well provide a good platform for deterring Russian aggression that falls within the “hybrid spectrum”—i.e., aggression that is not war nor even obviously armed conflict but plausibly deniable, or just opaque actions that disrupt, confuse, panic and intimidate. Such “hybrid” actions may involve passive or aggressive, overt or covert submarine patrols (a favorite against Sweden); ramming; and sail or fly close incidents by Russian vessels or aircraft. It could also employ aggressive shadowing and naval signals intelligence (SIGINT) operations, or use of civilian vessels to create maritime incidents, etc.

### **Regional Cooperative Structures to Deescalate and Manage Maritime Incidents**

In this regard, hybrid incidents at sea could be partially managed by structures such as the multilateral Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC), which includes Russia as a member.<sup>36</sup> This could be an advantage in a way, as it is necessary to keep channels of communication open. Another possible option is the EU's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,<sup>37</sup> although its primary focus is on

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<sup>36</sup> For details, see:

[https://bsrbcc.org/Webs/BSRBCC/EN/02\\_BSRBCC\\_About/about\\_node.html](https://bsrbcc.org/Webs/BSRBCC/EN/02_BSRBCC_About/about_node.html), accessed April 13, 2021. For a thorough academic evaluation, see: Åsa Gustafsson. "The Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC) and border management in the Baltic Sea region: A case study." *Marine Policy* 98 (2018): 309–316.

<sup>37</sup> See: “EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/baltic-sea/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/baltic-sea/), accessed April 13, 2021.

environmental and planning issues and works with the Helsinki Convention machinery on the protection of the marine environment.

The link here is on how maritime security can be relabeled as coastguard-type safety and environmental activities, which serves to deescalate and defuse a situation that has otherwise been deliberately manufactured to create a political effect. In some ways, this reduces the impact of such deliberate provocations and makes them less rewarding. It also means navies are not distracted or risking their valuable platforms to deal with “gray zone” threats when coastguard vessels can be more suitable.

Finally, it presents opportunities to broaden the financial base for the Baltic States. While NATO has helped the Baltics, the EU, because of its limited competences on defense, has obviously played a much more marginal role. However, EU funding instruments for border and coastguard forces exist and probably will expand, and such funds have been used to pay for helicopters, small vessels and, more recently, drones.<sup>38</sup> In the future, this could also include unmanned vessels. Such funding should continue to be explored by the Baltic States; and the EU should demonstrate its solidarity by ensuring these countries have among the best-resourced border forces, which will often be the first responders to a hybrid-type incident at a lower threat threshold.

### **Understanding the Benefits (and Possible Costs) of the UK-Led Joint Expeditionary Force**

Quite a different type of regional security structure, and one not explicitly focused on the Baltic Sea, is the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which has a mostly Nordic (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland) and Baltic membership but also

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<sup>38</sup> Vít Novotný, “Surveillance Aircraft and the Borders of Schengen,” *European View* 9, no. 1 (2020): 27–35.

includes the Netherlands besides the United Kingdom.<sup>39</sup> However, the vital Baltic countries of Poland and Germany are missing.

Nonetheless, the rationale of the JEF is to project credible UK-led military task forces quickly into the Baltic and the wider Scandinavian theater without the specter of delay that may result from NATO's unwillingness to collectively agree on an Article 5 operation—such as, for instance, Germany's unwillingness to confront Russia. The JEF conducted impressive exercises in 2019, with a strong maritime and amphibious feature. Royal Marines of the 45 Commando battalion did a great deal of mock fighting on the southern Swedish coast against Danish soldiers playing the “enemy” (which undoubtedly greatly pleased the local Swedes).

Such a force has utility if the aggression it is responding to is a “hybrid” operation below the threshold of Article 5. And it especially has utility if the Russians try to pick off Sweden and Finland with an operation that is targeted at them alone—a seizure of a Swedish or Finnish island, say.

From the North Atlantic Alliance's perspective, it raises the possibility of a military operation against Russian forces that would not be, strictly speaking, a NATO operation. This may be diplomatically expedient but raises serious issues as regards to what extent such a force can truly operate outside NATO structures.

Perversely, it may also undermine the Alliance because some NATO member states may reason: if the British-led JEF can face down the Russians, why should we agree to do so, risking a much bigger war?

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<sup>39</sup> On the JEF's origins, see: Håkon Lunde Saxi, “British and German initiatives for defence cooperation: the Joint Expeditionary Force and the Framework Nations Concept,” *Defence Studies*, 17 no. 2 (2017): 171–197; Tormod Heier, “Britain's Joint Expeditionary Force: A Force of Friends?” in *The United Kingdom's Defence After Brexit: Britain's Alliances, Coalitions, and Partnerships*, eds. Rob Johnson and Janne Haaland Matlary (Cham, CH: Palgrave MacMillan/Springer, 2019), 189–214.

On balance however, and to be clear, the JEF gives the Baltic States more options, and such a force plugs the major risk of exposure for Finland and Sweden, which are formally outside any mutual defense guarantee, unlike NATO member states

### **Conclusion**

In summary, what has been stressed here is the need for the Baltic States themselves to increasingly embrace their own capacities for deterrence, while being careful not to overstate the level of threat they face nor forget how they are part of a wider NATO dynamic.

As surely as the fashions of academia now seem to shift toward rejecting the idea of Russian hybrid war as mistaken and passé, or listening to those who argue a Russian threat to the Baltics is anyhow fanciful, the need for solid defense contingency planning will not go away.

Central to that supposition should be a clear-headedness about the need for a political strategy to be matched with a credible deterrence strategy, whether by punishment or denial. The BSR countries and their allies, whether NATO or EU members, need to understand Russian motivations, which can be summed up as probably not seeking war but certainly seeking to subvert NATO and even EU unity.

The fundamental linkages between nuclear and conventional weapons in any strategic approach also must be appreciated. It appears likely that the US, in particular, is embarking on developing a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons, which eventually will play some part in Russian strategic calculations about the use of nuclear weapons, which could be anyhow more permissive than NATO.

To avert nuclear threats, conventional forces need to be strong to buy time, to deny possible Russian advantages arising from geography and



their A2/AD weapon complexes, and to deter the more easily made threats.

However, there is also a need for political realism. Aggressive open-ended military doctrines that might conceive of occupying Kaliningrad or crossing into sovereign Russian or Belarusian territory with NATO land forces need to be treated with the utmost caution as likely to be disproportionate as regards their escalatory effects.

That does not mean deterrence by punishment is unworkable or meaningless. What has been stressed here are two possibly novel approaches. First is a shared Baltic-wide SEAD air capability optimized to defeat the A2/AD problem in the BSR, either in the guise of a pooled squadron or wing, or just a joint training facility. Also useful, given existing procurements of American missiles, would be to co-ordinate ballistic missile defense capabilities, which are emerging from the Swedish, Polish and Danish armed forces. This might, in time, evolve into some kind of Baltic-wide missile-defense capability. The aim here is not to deliver a technologically wonderful “defense umbrella” but to increase uncertainty as to the viability of key Russian missile platforms.

Second, and also politically important, would be the abilities of the Baltic States to mobilize and immediately employ three types of forces that they currently lack at any credible level. The first of these would include precision distant-strike systems (long-range artillery in plain speak), which could deter Russian use of the same. Also vital would be an integrated mechanized land force that combined main battle tanks with supporting arms. Rather than face the Russians with three basically discrete mechanized light brigades (or battle groups) of variable quality, a truly integrated Baltic joint armored light division would have more deterrent value, without presenting a serious offensive threat to Russia. Finally, the Baltic States and their allies need to embrace the sea behind them to confer strategic depth. This would necessitate a shift in maritime forces beyond just the over-specialized

domain of naval mine hunting and sweeping. Instead, the Baltics need to demonstrate how they would be able to continue their fight by striking from the sea, supported by their allies. In that regard, the obvious multilateral structures of NATO and, to a lesser extent, the EU are not the only “shows in town.” Smaller discrete regional institutional projects offer the chance of bespoke solutions. For example, working through civilian Baltic maritime governance regimes for safety, environmental and communication could be a relatively “safe space” to resolve attempts by Russia to create incidents at sea as part of a hybrid strategy. If faced with more obviously military threats, entities such as the British-led JEF could be tasked to provide reassurance without obviously invoking NATO or the EU, and thus providing some wiggle room for the diplomats.

In other words, the Transatlantic alliance needs to think beyond the mental contours of traditional frameworks that label the security challenges of the BSR as merely “a NATO problem,” reducible to conventional deterrence alone, or a wicked defense problem that geography, strategic culture and politics simply cannot resolve. The Baltic States are defensible by deterrence, if there is a will and if the ways to do so are carefully crafted and resourced. They certainly deserve more than “tripwire forces” and yet more training.



# **Sectoral Perspectives**



# Overcoming Different Threat Perceptions

*Alexandra M. Friede*

The “interconnected,” “liminal,” “transnational” and “cross-jurisdictional”<sup>1</sup> nature of maritime security makes cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (BSR) a natural choice. Disruptions at sea transcend the maritime domain and affect a plethora of stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Baltic Sea is the defining and unifying feature of the BSR.

The BSR is marked by remarkable economic performance, high maritime traffic intensity (confined to a few busy sea routes), underwater pipelines and cables, power lines, offshore wind farms, a great number of small- and medium-sized ports with sophisticated IT infrastructure and, what is sometimes overlooked, about 1.6 million tons of unexploded munitions buried in German sea waters alone.

This calls for a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach to Baltic Sea security. Implementing such an approach, however, requires the shared willingness to act.

As the Latvian state secretary of the Ministry of Defense, Jānis Garisons, put it in 2018, “What we need to change is our attitude and see that this isn’t just about Russia. It’s about us.”<sup>2</sup> He delivered a clear

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Bueger, Timothy Edmunds, “Beyond seablindness: a new agenda for maritime security studies,” *International Affairs*, Volume 93 Issue 6 (November 2017): 974.

<sup>2</sup> Jānis Garisons, “Resilience – how to cope with future multilevel threats?” Berlin Security Conference (November 2018).

message: it is (at least) as important to “know us,” mitigate our own vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience at home as it is to make sense of the potentially ambiguous behavior of adversaries.

Taking this argument further, it matters less that all Baltic Sea states share similar views on the sources of insecurity. It matters more that all Baltic Sea states agree on what is worth protecting: the stability of the BSR, Europe’s security order and the normative principles underpinning it.

In this regard, the priority areas discussed at the Baltic Sea Security Initiative workshops<sup>3</sup> remain relevant: maritime security, protection of critical infrastructure, information sharing, military mobility, and, especially in the German case, efficient arms procurement and strategic long-term thinking and planning (see previous chapter). The latter also includes competitive personnel management and recruitment in times of demographic change.

Information sharing is a precondition to detect, attribute and counter attacks, particularly, but not exclusively, in the maritime domain. This starts with the regular exchange of information between authorities at the local, subnational and national level and ends with common risk assessments and a recognized maritime picture at the supranational level. Even though multinational formats—e.g., Sea Surveillance Cooperation Baltic Sea, Maritime Surveillance—contribute to the free (and secure) flow of information, the reliance on national systems hinders their most effective use.

Further, the unrestricted movement of military personnel and assets throughout the BSR is crucial in times of heightened tensions. Military mobility is a top priority of cooperation between the European Union

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<sup>3</sup> The author participated in expert workshops co-organized by the Baltic Security Foundation on defense, deterrence and resilience in the BSR in Berlin (October 23, 2019), Lublin (January 31, 2020) and Helsinki (December 3, 2020; online).

and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Thus, in 2018, NATO's Joint Support and Enabling Command was established to strengthen Germany's function as a logistics hub in Europe. Recently, the United States—together with Canada and Norway—requested to join the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project on military mobility, which was received positively. Thus far, however, “military Schengen” is a vision that has yet to become a reality, and it requires more streamlined coordination and cutting of red tape.

Despite the renewed activism post-2014 at EU, NATO, Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO) and nation-state levels to enhance crisis responsiveness, a latent sense of insecurity has not disappeared in the BSR.

Alliance cohesion is of utmost importance to manage the simmering escalation potential. NATO membership in particular has a reassuring effect; it also acts as a deterrent. Besides NATO's Article 5 commitment, the EU has legal mechanisms in place to show solidarity (Art. 222 TFEU) and provide assistance “if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory” (Art. 42.7 TEU).<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that all of the BSR's Euro-Atlantic states are covered by treaty-based and/or informal security guarantees, steering documents reflect a considerable sense of uncertainty about (non-)allied decision-making in times of crisis.

For instance, the Polish Defense Concept considers “adopting a common position regarding an outbreak of a regional conflict in NATO's close vicinity”<sup>5</sup> as a key challenge for the Alliance. In turn, the Swedish Defense Commission expects that “it will take a relatively long time before the necessary decisions on international support for

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<sup>4</sup> On top of this, a decade ago, NORDEFECO issued a declaration of solidarity.

<sup>5</sup> “The Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland,” Polish Ministry of Defense, (May 2017): 32.



Sweden have been made. It will take even longer for the international support to make a practical difference. Meanwhile, Sweden must have the capability to defend itself and endure the hardships unaided.”<sup>6</sup> The decision-making process might be further delayed by inconsistent, inaccurate or incomplete information, especially in “hybrid” scenarios.

While this paints a rather gloomy picture, it also illustrates that Baltic Sea security is not only about major players—it involves manifold security arrangements down to the local level. Awareness is growing that the management of Baltic Sea security requires transnational cooperation “above” the state as well as societal awareness and commitment “below” the state.

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<sup>6</sup> “Resilience: The total defence concept and the development of civil defence 2021–2025,” Swedish Defense Commission, (December 2017): 2.

# Tools for Enhanced Energy Security

*Dr. Sigita Kavaliūnaite*

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) includes nine Euro-Atlantic partners—the three Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), four Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark), as well as Poland and Germany. Enhancing cooperation among these nine partnering BSR countries could contribute to improving Baltic regional economic security by strengthening joint monitoring of ongoing activities as well as coordinating joint measures in the energy sector. The latter requires bolstering effective decision-making processes, building up adequate infrastructure for the effective transfer of resources among regional partners, as well as improving the protection and resilience of critical infrastructure on a regional level.

The European Union’s Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) proved to be an important tool for improving decision-making processes in the energy sphere among the BSR states as well as developing regional critical infrastructure. BEMIP is contributing to all aspects of energy security: physical security (supply security), price security (economic aspects) and geopolitical security<sup>1</sup> at the regional level through the development of a functional and integrated internal energy market and the elimination of “energy islands.” The BEMIP initiative is implemented through a BEMIP Action Plan, which is periodically amended and renewed as a result of new political guidelines. The BEMIP Action Plan is open to further updates, in

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<sup>1</sup> “Research Report: Nuclear energy and the current security environment in the era of hybrid threats,” NATO Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, October 2019, [https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Nuclear-Research-Report-2019\\_web.pdf](https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Nuclear-Research-Report-2019_web.pdf), 13.

particular to take into account relevant developments in the energy sector, following agreements between the EU member states of the Baltic Sea Region and the European Commission.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to improving regional energy security by utilizing instruments provided by EU membership, including the BEMIP sub-regional cooperation format, developing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) role in energy security, as part of the Alliance's modern toolkit, should also be taken into account.<sup>3</sup> A credible deterrence posture implies *inter alia* logistical enablement,<sup>4</sup> which includes the ability to ensure a resilient supply of energy to both the civilian and military sectors. This is a part of seven baseline requirements for civil preparedness, as declared during NATO's 2016 Warsaw Summit, where Allied leaders committed to enhancing member state resilience.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the nine Baltic Sea partnering countries are members of both the EU and NATO, with the exception of Finland and Sweden (only EU members) and Norway (only a NATO member). Therefore, it might be useful to explore the option of operationalizing EU and NATO policies related to security at the regional level, if the issues

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<sup>2</sup> "PA Energy – BEMIP Action Plan (for competitive, secure and sustainable energy)," European Commission, 2015, [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/BEMIP\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2015.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/BEMIP_Action_Plan_2015.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Julijus Grubliauskas, "NATO's energy security agenda," *NATO Review: opinion, analysis and debate on security issues*, May 2014, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/05/09/natos-energy-security-agenda/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "Deterrence and defence," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, accessed March 17, 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_133127.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm).

<sup>5</sup> "Commitment to enhance resilience," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, accessed March 17, 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133180.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133180.htm?selectedLocale=en).

with differences in memberships can be overcome. Further strengthening NATO-EU cooperation<sup>6</sup> on security issues might facilitate this process. It is, therefore, relevant to refer to ongoing expert discourse related to the possibilities of modernizing NATO's defense infrastructure with EU funds<sup>7</sup> as well as expanding the Central Europe Pipeline System (CEPS)—a part of the NATO Pipeline System—to the eastern flank countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia).<sup>8</sup> The latter is seen as an opportunity to improve energy security for NATO's eastern flank (by using CEPS to expeditiously provide military commanders with fuel),<sup>9</sup> and for Europe more generally (by using CEPS to mitigate challenges emanating from growing European dependence on imported refined oil products).<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the implementation of this project could contribute to reaching EU strategic goals such as decarbonization<sup>11</sup> through

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<sup>6</sup> “EU-NATO cooperation – Factsheets,” *EEAS*, accessed March 17, 2021, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/28286/eu-nato-cooperation-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/28286/eu-nato-cooperation-factsheet_en).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Fiott, “Modernising NATO's Defence Infrastructure with EU Funds,” *Survival*, 2016, 58:2, 77–94, DOI: [10.1080/00396338.2016.1161905](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161905).

<sup>8</sup> Dominik P. Jankowski, “The NATO Pipeline System: a forgotten defence asset,” *NDC POLICY BRIEF*, April 2020, No. 08, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=639>.

<sup>9</sup> Dominik P. Jankowski, “Transatlantic energy security: beyond Nord Stream,” *Foreign Policy Association*, *Foreign Policy Blogs*, July 2, 2019, <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2019/07/02/transatlantic-energy-security-beyond-nord-stream-2/>.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Pejřimovský and Inga Spate, “Europe and the imported refined products: A new form of dependence,” *Energy Security: Operational Highlights*, 2017, No 8, 11–17, [https://www.enseccoe.org/data/public/uploads/2017/02/esoh\\_8\\_2015.pdf](https://www.enseccoe.org/data/public/uploads/2017/02/esoh_8_2015.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> “Fourth Report on the State of the Energy Union,” European Commission, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/4th-state-energy-union\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/4th-state-energy-union_en).

facilitating the implementation of the European Green Deal roadmap<sup>12</sup> by producing positive externalities through interconnections.<sup>13</sup> If an expansion of CEPS to Poland and the Baltic States<sup>14</sup> can be regarded as a common agenda item for both NATO and the EU, enhanced BSR cooperation could contribute to the viability of this project—for example, by exploring options of its commercialization during peacetime.

Overcoming major issues and gaps related to security relies *inter alia* on research, analysis, and crisis management exercises as vehicles for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of management capabilities though capturing and correcting gaps, mistakes and deficiencies.<sup>15</sup> These tools periodically are being applied at the regional level to overcome major issues and gaps related to Baltic Sea economic security. In this respect two recent examples of combining different instruments (EU research and competence centers; NATO competence centers; an educational entity from the United States) and focused on overcoming gaps related to energy security could be noted:

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<sup>12</sup> “A European Green Deal. Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent,” European Commission, 2019–2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/priorities/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/priorities/european-green-deal_en).

<sup>13</sup> “Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action,” European Union, 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018R1999>.

<sup>14</sup> Dominik P. Jankowski, “Transatlantic energy security: beyond Nord Stream,” *Foreign Policy Association, Foreign Policy Blogs*, July 2, 2019, <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2019/07/02/transatlantic-energy-security-beyond-nord-stream-2/>.

<sup>15</sup> Antoine Got, “NATO crisis management exercises: preparing for the unknown,” *NATO Review: opinion, analysis and debate on security issues*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/02/07/nato-crisis-management-exercises-preparing-for-the-unknown/index.html>.

- The tabletop exercise Coherent Resilience–19 was organized together by the European Commission’s Joint Research Center and the NATO Energy Security Center of Excellence, and evaluated by a team led by the US Naval Postgraduate School. The goal of the exercise was to support the national authorities and natural gas transmission system operators of the Baltic States in ensuring gas supplies to consumers and mitigating disruptions within the Baltic region. The tabletop exercise specifically ran through both national plans and practiced regional cooperation capabilities.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2019, four multinational centers of excellence around the Baltic Sea produced the research report “Nuclear Energy and the Current Security Environment in the Era of Hybrid Threats.”<sup>17</sup> Each of these centers used its own focus and expertise, indicated in their titles: the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, the NATO Energy Security Center of Excellence, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence and the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence. The report examines risks stemming from the nuclear energy sector and *inter alia* suggests that potential threats related to nuclear energy should be included in training and exercise scenarios in order to counter and respond to them more effectively.

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<sup>16</sup> “JRC Technical report. Tabletop exercise: Coherent Resilience 2019 (CORE 19),” NATO Center of Excellence for Energy Security, November 2019, [https://enseccoe.org/data/public/uploads/2019/11/jrc118083\\_core\\_19\\_ttx\\_final\\_report\\_online.pdf](https://enseccoe.org/data/public/uploads/2019/11/jrc118083_core_19_ttx_final_report_online.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> “Research Report: Nuclear energy and the current security environment in the era of hybrid threats,” NATO Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, October 2019, [https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Nuclear-Research-Report-2019\\_web.pdf](https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Nuclear-Research-Report-2019_web.pdf).

The implementation of recommendations derived from such conducted research, analysis and crisis management exercises relies on further actions, such as the preparation of political guidelines and plans as well as their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A recent international expert study evaluated the BEMIP structures as highly successful.<sup>18</sup> Thus, building on the good practices and lessons learned from the BEMIP cooperation framework could be a promising direction for further improving energy security within the BSR.

Baltic Sea regional cooperation should rely on synergistic applications of different existing mechanisms with a focus on complementarity among them while avoiding duplication. If enhanced BSR cooperation within the energy security space succeeds in operationalizing both European and NATO security policies at the regional level, this could also facilitate improved cooperation between EU and NATO institutions.

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<sup>18</sup> Jorge Núñez Ferrer, Mihnea Cătuți, Cristian Stroia, Julie Bryhn, “Comparative study on the governance structure and energy policies in EU macro-regional strategies,” *CEPS*, February 2019, [http://aei.pitt.edu/98640/1/RR2019-02\\_EU-macroregional-strategies.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/98640/1/RR2019-02_EU-macroregional-strategies.pdf).

# Holistic Societal Resilience

*Dr. Viktorija Rusinaitė*

Societal resilience is a multi-layered domain engaging multiple aspects. It includes economic, educational, cultural, social, historical and, of course, communicational domains. In open and democratic societies, societal resilience should be a part of a holistic approach toward achieving overall security as well as a strategic priority of the state at the highest level and thus be transferable into the different domains of governance.

At the national security level, the most discussed issue in the Baltic Sea Region pertaining to societal resilience is disinformation and influence campaigns based on it. Currently, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is subject to countless Kremlin influence campaigns, manipulations and continuous disinformation efforts. And a critical mass of research and understanding regarding how these campaigns work already exists, enabling policymakers to design effective countermeasures both at the national and international levels.

The broader aim of disinformation and information manipulations is not to spread lies but to, step by step, create an image of the world that would be receptive for pro-Kremlin ideas and policies.

The nature of influence campaigns is decentralized. Disinformation and information manipulations are often simultaneously spread through:

- global channels (like *RT, Russia 24*),
- glocalised channels (like *Sputnik*),



- local channels,
- a plethora of sporadically established campaign-specific channels.<sup>1</sup>

Manipulative or fake messages are further amplified by social network groups and users. Influence campaign organizers exploit already occurring events or organize their own (protests, political visits, vandalism). If the conditions are right, such events might help to spread important narratives from pro-Kremlin media to national media in target countries.

Disinformation affects the population by lowering its trust in government institutions. Channels that have broken the law, spread fake information and refused to deny it have been blocked by governments in the past. But such reactive measures, unless alternatives are offered and the state's actions are clearly communicated to the audiences, can be counterproductive. Users who already do not trust their government can more easily be incited by other channels to believe that this is censorship—thus further promoting the negative sentiment toward state institutions.

Oftentimes, issues exploited by influence campaigns include preexisting problems that are addressed only to a limited extent by the local government or transnational institutions. For example, one leading and continuous focus of Moscow's influence campaigns is discrediting and lowering public trust in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Within such campaigns, various narratives are developed to emotionally affect the users. Fake stories about NATO soldiers raping children or desecrating Jewish graves prompt disgust. Assertions that the local presence of NATO forces is a barrier

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<sup>1</sup> A recent example from Lithuania included a fake Kaunas Jewish community blog, which, for several months, reposted news from the official Kaunas Jewish community page before pivoting to spreading disinformation about NATO tanks vandalizing the city's Jewish cemetery.

to economic development and a factor in Lithuania's already high levels of emigration prompt anger and a sense of injustice. Contentions that the Baltic States are undefendable prompt feelings of intimidation and injustice, rationalized by criticizing the scope of military funding.

In contrast, successful narratives inside the region about the multidimensional benefits of NATO's presence or of being part of the Transatlantic alliance are rarely developed or widely distributed. Communication to the public is done in a formal manner by PR departments reporting on dry facts (i.e., about the scope and locations of new deployments, times, themes and locations of important visits, acquiring equipment, etc.). Additional efforts to explain the meaning and benefit of such developments for the security of the population, economy, critical infrastructure, education and so on would help the populations in the region better understand the role of NATO in the Baltic Sea Region.

No mandatory media literacy courses exist in Lithuanian schools. Since some of the countries in the BSR already have such initiatives working, regional cooperation frameworks between schools would be a great opportunity to learn from each other.

A key incentive for regional cooperation in this sphere is that Kremlin propaganda uses similar or at times even identical tactics, narratives and stories across different target countries. But perhaps the main motivation for finding regional regulatory solutions for the online information space is that social networks and other network services are global in nature. Collective regional initiatives for advocacy, lobbying and legal means to press service providers to introduce necessary regulation are, thus, viable options. Moreover, Baltic Sea countries can lobby within the EU for implementing the European Code of Practice on Disinformation as well as for improving other measures. Social networks covered by the Code of Practice already implemented stricter measures by targeting users and online groups

that act as amplifiers of malign messages and going beyond just screening for political advertising.

A growing trend exists in anti-disinformation research and activism to focus not on fake messages themselves but on amplifiers. Amplifiers are the users and groups on social networks that help to spread fake and biased news and incite arguments between other users. Research has shown that debunking fake news can actually have an adverse effect. First, users who were not aware of such news before will suddenly be acquainted with these disinformation narratives through the very channels that seek to debunk them. Second, users who already tend to believe such news will most likely not read the sources that work to debunk it.

With radical and disinformation groups moving to social networking sites not covered by the Code of Practice, a strategy is needed on whether and how to address these developments.

A regional approach would also be conducive to introducing sustainable media alternatives for Russian speakers spread throughout the BSR. A long-standing need exists for quality news, culture and entertainment channels in the Russian language that would not be operated by the Kremlin and its allies. The Estonian television channel *ETV+*, which is broadcast in Russian, is a good example of what other BSR countries may want to collectively support or emulate. Regionally funded initiatives could, thus, improve the situation of quality Russian-language news and entertainment, via traditional and online media. Supporting and diversifying Russian- as well as Ukrainian-language cinema, music, theater, literature and other cultural imports would improve access for consumers to diverse information available in their language. And indeed, with the influx of Ukrainian migrants to the BSR, this need will only grow and expand.

The rising numbers of migrant workers from Ukraine coming to the Baltic region is an increasingly important issue for local governments and societies to tackle. Currently, in all three Baltic States, there are over 45,000 Ukrainian migrants. In 2019, Lithuania alone issued 31,000 temporary work permits for Ukrainians. A large proportion of Ukrainian migrants is unaccounted for because of various employment schemes (for instance, until the summer of 2018, Lithuanian trucking companies were employing inside Ukraine and then sending workers on lengthy business trips to Lithuania or Europe). Lithuania has no strategy at the moment for integrating these newcomers into its society; there is a lack of fair jobs for immigrants, and various forms of exploitation are widespread. This, together with the fact that most local media channels available for Ukrainian migrants are channels with known track records for spreading disinformation, will increase and amplify already existing division between pro-Kremlin swing groups and the local population. First and foremost, employers in the Baltic countries need to follow European Union Labor Law and follow the lead of the Commission on inclusion of non-EU migrants into the labor market and provide them with necessary social guarantees and services.

The intersection of social and physical infrastructure security also requires greater attention at both the national and regional levels. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, urban resilience<sup>2</sup> as a concept was largely abandoned across the Baltic region, and the work of institutions that *de facto* operate in this field has never been fully integrated. Yet due to the fact that Belarus is building a nuclear power plant (NPP) in Astravets, only 50 kilometers from Vilnius, urban resilience topics have regained a certain level of momentum in Lithuania. Even so, institutions at the municipal and national levels still fail to agree on their functions during a time of crisis. Lithuanian

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<sup>2</sup> Urban resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities and systems of a given city to survive and absorb shocks as well as prepare for future shocks. See OECD definition <https://www.oecd.org/regional/resilient-cities.htm>.

politicians continue to warn society about the grave consequences that could be expected in a crisis situation, such as a reactor malfunction at the Astravets plant, but offer no outlets for how to prepare for one. Except for Poland and Lithuania, other BSR countries ignore the threat due to short-term economic and political considerations. Failure to understand the effect of an NPP disaster on the whole region is impeding BSR cooperation to ensure the safety of the Astravets NPP.<sup>3</sup>

A possible accident at the Astravets NPP would affect all of Europe but especially the Baltic Sea Region (in the wake of the Chernobyl explosion in 1986, for instance, the escaped radiation most strongly affected Norway, Sweden<sup>4</sup> and Finland<sup>5</sup>). Consequently, efforts to ensure security and safety at the Belarusian nuclear plant as well as preparations for crisis scenarios should be collective and regional.

In the short term, regional cooperation on the broad spectrum of societal security and resilience issues is limited by a combination of a lack of national interest and, at times, limited shared understanding among BSR partners about the inherently similar nature of the problems they face. National or regional efforts are often undermined by politicians looking to score quick points or ways to mobilize their electorate. In Lithuania, for instance, one can point to repeated

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<sup>3</sup> “Fundamental problems of the Astravets Nuclear Power Plant under construction in Belarus,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania*, March 29, 2018, updated April 13, 2018, <https://www.urm.lt/default/en/news/fundamental-problems-of-the-astravets-nuclear-power-plant-under-construction-in-belarus->.

<sup>4</sup> David Nikel, “Chernobyl: 33 Years On, Radioactive Fallout Still Impacts Scandinavian Farmers,” *Forbes*, June 8, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidnikel/2019/06/08/chernobyl-33-years-on-radiation-still-impacts-scandinavian-farmers/>.

<sup>5</sup> Anssi Auvinen et al., “Chernobyl fallout and cancer incidence in Finland,” *International Journal of Cancer*, 134(9), May 1, 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24135935>, 2,253–2,263.

instances when local politicians maligned any groups that opposed their interests as “Kremlin agents.”<sup>6</sup> Such inflammatory charges—particularly when made without any evidence—cloud and misappropriate the meaning of the term. Moreover, they incite further polarization between rival groups within society and undermine efforts by analysts working to understand the Kremlin’s actual disinformation and subversion efforts.

At the regional and national levels in the BSR, both politicians and initiatives working to strengthen societal resilience became accustomed, in recent years, to their Western partners providing significant financial allocations and innovations to fight disinformation. On the other hand, regional seed initiatives for civil society and grassroots education are scarce, and the contribution of local governments is limited.

National strategic communication departments cooperate to some extent (though this is also limited, as is evident by the lack of a regional policy and advocacy initiatives); however, their work often focuses on sharing experience between government institutions and experts. Civil society organizations that engage and educate the population have even fewer opportunities to cooperate and share experiences on the regional level.

Efforts that place too large a role on societal resilience in the overall defense effort during a crisis might prove counterproductive in the long term, however. They might frighten populations off and lower public trust in NATO’s reliability. For example, the 2019 RAND

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<sup>6</sup> In one telling example, in late 2018, Skirmantas Malinauskas, an advisor to then-Lithuanian prime minister Saulius Skvernelis, accused teachers protesting against low wages of being influenced by agents of the Kremlin. See: Benas Brunalas, “Skirmantas Malinauskas streikuojančius mokytojus palygino su Putino smogikais okupuojant Krymą,” *Delfi*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/skirmantas-malinauskas-streikuojancius-mokytojus-palygino-su-putino-smogikais-okupuojant-kryma.d?id=79776087>.

Corporation report “Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance”<sup>7</sup> suggests equipping voluntary forces with expensive binoculars to wait in the woods for a conventional “NATO counterattack within weeks or months (not years or decades).” The existence of such a report, together with absence of analysis that highlights feasible plans for the defensibility of the Baltic States, lowers trust in the capability of the Transatlantic alliance.

To move forward, regional Stratcom collaboration should be encouraged both at the political and operational levels. This could be done to align not only visions but opportunities of learning from each other’s strategies and their implementation, successes and failures. Strategic Communication departments were a missing link for implementing foreign policy communication agenda. However, in the current Stratcom format, the link between the government and society is oftentimes weak while the transfer of knowledge and understanding of main communication threats from government to society and vice versa is lacking.

NATO’s StratCom Center of Excellence, in Riga, has already engaged in fascinating research projects on robotrolling, Russia’s disinformation campaigns and emerging issues in social media. It has generated important knowledge, prepared excellent speakers, and spread this knowledge to governance and expert circles. It is time to mainstream such and similar research methodologies, using digital tools, not only to experts but to the general population, school children and journalists.

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen J. Flanagan, Jan Osburg, Anika Binnendijk, Marta Kepe, Andrew Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance*. RAND Research Report 2779, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2019), <http://www.rand.org/t/RR2779>.

# Cross-Regional Information Security

*Dr. Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik*

Numerous untapped possibilities and opportunities exist for Poland and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in the field of information security, including when it comes to dealing with Russian-speaking media influenced by Moscow. Information threats to societal security come from inside and outside the state, and they have relevant impact on the state's security in areas such as sustainability, conditions for evolution of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and ethnic identity, as well as customs and values.<sup>1</sup>

While the Baltics struggle with manipulation and disinformation campaigns targeting their Russian-speaking residents, Poland is not home to a particularly numerous Russian-speaking audience. Thus, Russian propaganda in Poland is carried out and spread by local pro-Russian media. Most of these outlets have been active only since 2014. They claim no allegiance to the Kremlin, and it is difficult to prove a link between these local propaganda outlets and Russia-based entities. They are characterized by subtle promotion of anti-liberal establishment and traditional conservative values rather than openly pro-Russian agendas. Nevertheless, low literacy skills in new media,

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<sup>1</sup> They belong to societal security, which is one dimension in Barry Buzan's five-dimensional approach. See: Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Security after the Cold War," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (1997). DOI: 10.1177/0010836797032001001.



together with the combination of populism and anti-liberal narratives in Poland, increases the country's information security vulnerabilities.

### **Information Security Concerns and National Strategies in the Baltic States**

It is nothing new to say that Russian propaganda effectively absorbs the attention of Russian-speaking audiences in the Baltic States, strengthening and sacralizing narratives regarding Russia's position and its interests in the international environment. Since security threats often reach across borders, for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the fight against propaganda and disinformation has become a security priority. While the information threat is recognized as relevant for each of these countries, they have chosen differing instruments to measure the respective level of this danger domestically. Their national strategies include complex efforts that aim at counteracting immediate threats of manipulation as well as create favorable conditions for safeguarding information development. In contrast to Estonia, Lithuania suspended broadcasts of the Russian channel *RTR Planet*, for a period of three months, for inciting hatred between the Ukrainian and Russian nations; and Vilnius penalized Russian channel *NTV* in the same way for broadcasting false information about Soviet Army actions in 1991. Nonetheless, even if such restrictions on propaganda are practicable when it comes to television and radio transmissions, it is nearly impossible to implement them in social media. Apart from broadcast prohibitions, censorship and restrictions for Russian journalists, the Baltic States strive to create an open, pluralistic information environment. Media diversity and alternative sources of information are some of the solutions implemented in reaction to information threats. They allow communication content verification and access to a more varied media space. Broadcasting in the national language can exclude the Russian-speaking community from the country's media space, which makes it necessary to broaden the media platform by introducing public Russian-language outlets in countries where the

Russian minority constitutes a considerable number. While Lithuania and Latvia are considering such a solution, Estonia has already launched its new *ETV+* channel. Additionally, Lithuania has offered a workshop program for Russian-speaking journalists, with a view to create an open, fully fledged, independent media environment in the Baltics.

However, some obstacles persist. Russian-speaking media outlets can be under pressure either due to financial cuts or links to pro-Russian business interests. Moreover, public media channels influence social unity, and so the lack of access to public information can breed social exclusion. Russian-language media remains a challenge to national security since radio and TV channels broadcasting in a language other than the official one decrease diaspora communities' incentives to learn the official language, thus weakening their integration. Russian-speaking minorities existing in the Russian media space feel connected to it, adopting its point of view, ideology and values. For example, Russian-speaking *PBK* is the most popular media channel in Latvia and Estonia. Additionally, according to Kantar—a data and evidence-based agency—*PBK*, *NTV Mir Baltic* and *RTR Planeta Baltija* were the most watched channels in Latvia in 2020.<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, may generate threats to the integrity of the countries they inhabit. The question of access to information for local recipients who are members of ethnic and language minorities is often ignored in the discussions on national security.

In general, Lithuania's, Latvia's and Estonia's counter-propaganda actions focus on: 1) effective communication and promotion of national values, especially subjected to Russian influence; 2) strengthening independent media sector and social organizations; and 3) increasing social awareness about information manipulation, disinformation and falsification. Education and information about

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<sup>2</sup> “Konsolidētās TV skatītākais kanāls 2020. gadā – TV3,” *Kantar*, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.kantar.lv/konsolidetas-tv-skatitakais-kanals-2020-gada-tv3/>.

the dangers seem to be key issues, requiring coordinated long-term actions. Since 2014, officials from the Baltic States have supported the idea of establishing a joint, state-funded Russian-language TV channel in order to provide information and promote democratic values, but ultimately no decision was ever made in this direction. Additionally, the channel *European Russian TV* (proposed by Latvia in 2015), which would have created European Union-supported independent quality media in the Russian language to counter Kremlin propaganda, is unlikely to happen.

### **Regional Cooperation in the Field of Countering Propaganda— The Role of Poland**

Russian media play a relatively minor role in Poland. Apart from anti-establishment slogans, such outlets share anti-American, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-Lithuanian sentiments to inspire division within Polish society. For example, the Facebook fan page “The People’s Republic of Vilnius” exemplifies revisionist moods supported by some members of the Polish minority in Lithuania. It is characteristic of Russian propaganda in Poland to focus mostly on undermining the relations between this country and its neighbors, while a similar narrative is rarer in other Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. Poland represents a distinct case among CEE nations, as it expresses a high level of anti-Communist and anti-Russian sentiment, which brings it closer to the Baltic States’ perspectives on Russia’s information influence in the region. Furthermore, Polish society is highly homogeneous, so the scope of Russian propaganda is rather limited. According to the GLOBSEC Policy Institute’s Vulnerability Index,<sup>3</sup> Poland is the least vulnerable country among the Visegrad Four countries (V4—Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia) to

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<sup>3</sup> Katarína Klingová and Daniel Milo, *The Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe* (Budapest: Globsec Policy Institute, 2017), 5.

subversive Russian influence. Thus, the main aim of Russian propaganda is to strengthen social division as well as to deteriorate bilateral relations between Poland and its neighbors.

While Russian propaganda in the Baltic States is much more effective because of the significantly larger local Russian-speaking audiences there, Russian media's ability to influence a great number of people in Poland is rather limited. To increase its effectiveness, the media message is accompanied by virtual supporters. The message and the medium are mutually reinforcing: "parties, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], media, and the Church read the script, and the script makes more sense for being embodied [by indigenous voices]."<sup>4</sup> Proven diplomatic, economic, organizational and financial links exist between many of these coopted institutions, businesses, and politicians in Russia and Poland. A few far-right and extremist parties, such as Change (Zmiana) in Poland have been extending pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives that polarize their respective societies. While they claim to be defenders of national interests, in fact they act more like defenders of Russian politics.

Poland may play an important role and support the Baltics' efforts to increase information security in the region collectively. For instance, as a member of the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (StratCom), Poland contributes to finding challenges in the information environment and improving strategic communication between the states of the Baltic Sea Region. Moreover, it participates in multilateral initiatives such as Nordic-Baltic-Polish cooperation, the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (as of 2017), and regional projects aimed at strengthening the independent media sector and social organizations as well as increasing civil awareness through education and media literacy skills. Furthermore, Poland has recognized the need for

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Wilson, "Four Types of Russian Propaganda," *Aspen Review* 4 (2015): 15–25.

greater strategic communication and partnership between CEE governments and agreed to launch a joint *Visegrad TV* informational channel (though, the decision has yet to be implemented).

### **Recommendations**

To reinforce state efforts to combat disinformation and manipulation, several attempts to deal with the problem of propaganda have been taken in the non-governmental sector, both at the national and regional levels. Namely, independent think tanks, NGOs and civil society activists in the Baltic Sea Region have supported the legal remedies employed by their national governments. Other activities in the non-governmental sector include workshops, roundtables, and meetings devoted to identifying and defending against asymmetrical threats from Russia within the informational space. Several sessions have already been arranged to increase cooperation in training and education. Additionally, to counter the information risks, regional researchers and experts continue to identify, analyze and expose the Russian propaganda methods along with the individuals and organizations behind the websites or messages spreading pro-Kremlin disinformation.

So far, the Baltic States have made several efforts to come up with an effective narrative to counter the Russian propaganda and those attempts should continue. The wider social and political environment also needs to be analyzed. More attention needs to be paid to education and public awareness because present-day schooling in the Baltics remains overwhelmingly focused on memorizing facts rather than on the ability to think critically and in context. A strategic approach should, thus, include not just the skills but the inclination to detect and discard disinformation. Moreover, more regular workshops, meetings and conferences should arguably be organized for journalists, civil servants, and teachers to acquaint them with the variety of propaganda methods and tactics.

Among the recommended methods and instruments against propaganda and disinformation, a few of them deserve to be underlined:

1. **Methods of operation:** Previous means of counteracting informational threats have proven ineffective. It is necessary to develop effective offensive procedures to fight propaganda in the media and promote democratic values. Such strategies should be realized by both public and private sectors as well as the civil sector so as to cooperate in information complementation and exchange. A restoration of confidence in the media and development of professional journalism are essential.
2. **Values:** The openness of Western societies makes them vulnerable to informational threats. Ensuring informational security should not, however, incur rollbacks to basic liberal-democratic norms: human and civil rights, freedom of speech, law and order, pluralism and privacy.
3. **Levels of cooperation:** The need for a coordination of actions at the domestic, regional and European levels is growing. An increase in informational security is possible with more effective regional cooperation and EU support.
4. **The role of civil society:** Undertaking actions aimed at strengthening civil societies and improving communication and cooperation between the society and the government is crucial.
5. **Alternative sources of information:** The need for media diversification and information verification is evident. Individual states should broaden their national media spaces by including indigenous or independent Russian-language outlets that offer an alternative to Kremlin-dependent ones.

# The Maritime Responsibilities of Involved Stakeholders

*Capt. (ret.) William “Bill” Combes*

Maritime security is a complex endeavor, requiring capabilities in and cooperation between naval forces, maritime constabulary (law enforcement, coast guard), and other government agencies (such as a maritime administration agency).

In order to respond to threats in the maritime domain, countries require enabling activities: maritime situational awareness, an information/operations center to act on that awareness, plans to implement actions, and legal authority to execute those plans. Even if all of these enablers are in place, the aforementioned capabilities will still need to be associated with the threat being responded to. The Estonian Navy (like those of Latvia and Lithuania) is a niche naval force that focuses on mine countermeasures—a tiny subset of all the capabilities required for comprehensive maritime security.

This is mirrored in the Estonian Navy’s public-facing website: the “Estonian Navy’s duty is to protect the territorial waters of Estonia. In case of crisis, [the] Navy defends harbour areas, sea lines of communication and by-sea approaches to the coastline. Co-operation with allied units will be done if deemed to be necessary.” This is followed by, “The top priority for the Navy is the development of mine countermeasures capability.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the latter is not sufficient to deliver the former—additional capabilities are required.

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<sup>1</sup> “Navy,” Republic of Estonia Defence Forces, accessed January 28, 2020, <http://www.mil.ee/en/navy>.

Admittedly, some of the non-military capabilities (in the case of Estonia) are provided by the Police and Border Guards. The Border Guard is not a military organization and does not have military legal authorities. This will complicate the response to modern military threats, particularly in the realm of “hybrid” or gray-zone warfare.

To respond to these threats, maritime security-enabling activities need to be reinforced or established. Contingency plans need to be developed, preferably in coordination and cooperation with the other Baltic States, other Baltic Sea basin countries, and strategic security partners, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union. NATO membership alone does not offer the required capabilities—particularly in light of sentiments such as, “Cooperation with allied units will be done if deemed to be necessary.”

In order to mature these enablers, the Baltic States should:

1. **Review Legal Authorities.** Firstly, and at a minimum, they should ensure that both agency and interstate cooperation as well as legal and policy regimes are all enabled to respond to hybrid maritime threats.
2. **Develop a Maritime Security Strategy,** and acknowledge their need to do so. The needed “ends” would best be included in a maritime strategy document. Without knowing what it wants to achieve, a country or military cannot determine its “ways” and “means.” Developing such a strategy in cooperation with the other Baltic States would not only increase cooperative efforts in the maritime domain, but it could also lead to increased maritime awareness and capabilities as well.
3. **Establish Combined Baltic State Maritime Forces.** The Baltic States should invest in the same maritime vessel types to reduce acquisition, operations and maintenance, and



training costs. An example of successful naval cooperation in Europe that could serve as a model for a combined Baltic States' navy is the cooperation of the Belgian and Dutch navies.

It is difficult for the small Baltic States to, individually, express and coordinate solutions for their own priorities within all of the above Baltic regional security arrangements. If all three Baltic governments approached these bodies with “one voice,” their impact and effectiveness in each would be greater. This should be a priority for trilateral cooperation that occurs at the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic Council of Ministers and regular meetings between the defense ministers of the Baltic States.

This cooperation would additionally be enhanced in the maritime domain via the adoption of a joint Baltic State maritime strategy. Likewise, it would be enhanced across all security domains by a joint Baltic State security strategy. Further trilateral cooperation (along with inputs and commitments to regional security arrangements) of the Baltic States in the maritime domain and elsewhere would also be enhanced through a strategic commitment to the endeavor by synchronizing their separate budgeting and national defense planning as well as management timelines and policies. This, accompanied by competing bilateral security arrangements and partners, may be the largest obstacle to increased cooperative security and deterrent options.

At a minimum, it may be worthwhile for each state to rank its regional cooperative goals and work together to produce a similar list of prioritized trilateral cooperative goals to use as a planning tool for their international engagements.

Baltic State trilateral cooperation and Baltic Sea regional cooperation demonstrate to the Baltics' NATO and EU allies that they are serious about their own security. Moreover, such intraregional initiatives

resist the perception that the Baltic States' membership in these organizations is solely to gain a low-cost security umbrella at the expense of the other members. This is one reason NATO is encouraging "regional" security. It also could provide significant capability on those organizations' eastern border—capabilities that the other members will no longer need to provide or fund at their own expense. Since these capabilities would be local (or regional), they would also be permanent and ready to respond to today's current maritime, or other, security threats.

# From Political to Military Deterrence

*Glen Grant*

The key challenge for all the Baltic regional states and both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union is to move deterrence from a political to a military framework. The recent NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) reinforcements into the region are valuable, but they do not represent a coherent fighting force. Their purpose is to “deter Russia and to demonstrate to the potential aggressor the readiness to trigger the 40,000-strong rapid-reaction force and a full-scale NATO counter-assault.”<sup>1</sup>

Having a political focus comes with many strengths, and one could argue that the eFP multinational battalions’ deterrence value works, although only Russia can really say whether such an assumption is true or not. However, this political deterrence approach also has many glaring weaknesses—highlighted of late by the appalling sycophancy toward Russia from some politicians in the United States, Germany, and France. In addition to this, the political weakness, or perhaps national culture, shown by Sweden and Finland in their attitudes toward NATO raise strong questions about how they see themselves acting in any Baltic conflict.

Why this all matters is that today, in the current political climate, Russian President Vladimir Putin could be rightly understood to

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran, “Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defense,” Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, July 9, 2018, <https://cepa.org/securing-the-suwalki-corridor/>.

believe that he is being given a green light to play even more games with the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and that major players will not intervene. Also, the focus by many writers on Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (B3) often ignores the fact that political deterrence is not simply a problem for the B3 countries. The likely responses of the United States, NATO, NATO eFP reinforcing countries, Finland, and Sweden, as well as (last by a long way) the EU may also cause issues to all of them. On the one hand, this complexity may be good, but it also means delay and perhaps operational failure in some national cases, leaving Russia with the initiative at crucial moments. The danger is that Putin has a much different understanding of the West from our understanding of ourselves, so we must find a way to send unambiguous signals. At present, they are far from unequivocal.

Deterrence by military strength is currently simply absent, both within the B3 states and the region in general despite the eFP reinforcements. Too much political focus is upon “self-congratulation,” on heroic stories about “2 percent of GDP,” and grand plans, and too little attention is devoted to facing the stark reality of a battle with Russian forces. Perhaps this is best illuminated firstly by the bizarre “Divisional Headquarters” to be set up half in Latvia and half in Denmark. In this configuration, it cannot be called a divisional headquarters by any definition of the term. It has no operational mobility and no divisional military strength or fighting ability at all. But it serves to convince politicians something is being done.

Moreover, “all four multi-national groups are under the command of the Headquarters Multinational Corps North East (HQ MNC-NE), based in Poland’s Szczecin, while another Polish city—Elbląg—hosts the Headquarters 32 Multinational Division North East (HQ MND-NE), which coordinates and supervises training and preparation

activities of these forces.”<sup>2</sup> This complex organizational mess both hides the stark reality of regional operational weaknesses and stops any potential development in a proper military direction for war.

Strategically, at the political level, there is much more work to be done bringing together NATO, the EU, the B3, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the eFP countries into something politically stable, militarily coherent and that can fight effectively. Some positive steps have been taken already, with the US having reached agreements with Sweden and Finland as well as exercising with them more seriously than at any time in history. The United Kingdom has also been exercising an infantry company in Finland with the Helsinki Jaeger brigade—this with half an eye on crisis reinforcement for Estonia. These are militarily significant actions and laudable, but they are primarily bilateral acts, mired in secrecy, and they lack the coherence and regional public focus to add much to the political deterrence that already exists.

A need exists for rethinking the B3 as an entity and accepting that, in terms of land warfare, they are not a coherent whole and should not be seen so. Lithuania is inside the Polish/US sphere of influence. Its position, sandwiched between Belarus and Kaliningrad, makes crisis cooperation for land forces with the other two Baltics both unlikely and totally unrealistic. The reality of land geography needs to be accepted without basing operational logic upon historical and political niceties. But this unreality also has significance for Congressional allocations of US assistance to the Baltics that may, by unknowing design, create multinational military solutions that are

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Czulda “Enhanced Forward Presence: Evolution, Meaning and the End Game”, (NATO at 70: Outline of the Alliance Today and Tomorrow, 2019)

Accessed 8 April 2021,

[https://www.academia.edu/41177082/NATO\\_Enhanced\\_Forward\\_Presence\\_Evolution\\_Meaning\\_and\\_the\\_End\\_Game](https://www.academia.edu/41177082/NATO_Enhanced_Forward_Presence_Evolution_Meaning_and_the_End_Game).

illogical or do not fit NATO's command-and-control (C2) structures and are, thus, unworkable in practice.

The two northern Baltic States are as linked in terms of battlespace to Finland and Sweden as they are to Lithuania, arguably more so, and it makes sense that any B2<sup>3</sup> single land division should be more linked to them than far-away Denmark, even if Denmark provides a NATO construct. But any Northern Division must be able to fight coherently and effectively, not just to exercise and plan for the US cavalry to arrive. It is inconceivable that Russia would allow NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) to reach Estonia easily. And even if it did, the VJTF would likely be ill-suited in terms of equipment and training to master the complex local environment, especially in winter.

The eFP troops are politically vital for deterrence, but the continual turnover, small contributions of some states and disparity of standards and equipment will create as many problems for any battle commander as they solve. Added to this, there is still no regional NATO land commander at the right level who can realistically take joint battlespace responsibility for both peace and war. The MND-NE in Poland is in a totally different geographic space from Latvia and Estonia and cannot really influence proceedings as they are needed. This vacuum leaves the two states playing self-commanding and self-political war games within a quasi-NATO context that is fundamentally flawed. These games are even more flawed when considering that a joint multinational crisis would bring a multitude of international political uncertainties and a battlespace that is likely to be both wider and deeper than the current Baltic landmass.

Leaving Lithuania aside for a moment, the first act of change should be to create in Latvia a proper operationally mobile MND HQ,

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<sup>3</sup> Only Estonia and Latvia are taking part in this Divisional HQ with Denmark, Lithuanian choosing to align with Poland.

including the divisional enablers like artillery, air defense and logistics. It then makes operational sense that instead of dividing the eFP troops between the two home forces, they should be gathered into a proper NATO-commanded armored brigade acting as a mobile divisional reserve.

Additionally, it is needed to encourage Latvia and Estonia to create stronger, more coherent national brigades themselves, using their volunteer troops in a similar fashion as Lithuania does today. Neither country obtains the best military effectiveness deal from its available manpower resources. The reality is that social and political defense constructs, when used for defense without artillery or air defense, fool only the politicians—not the enemy. Whilst the bravado of suggesting that every patriotic Baltic man will fight to the death sounds good in the media, a hard look at past battles in Grozny, Donbas and Syria shows that Russia would not give the opportunity. They would destroy the environment from a distance well beyond rifle range.

When families are the target, then the motivations soon change and survival, not patriotism or heroics, drive the majority. Effectively, what is needed is a one army concept across Latvia and Estonia that looks to use every service person to best effect, especially single volunteers who have arguably less strong family obligations during the early period of war. In this regard, volunteers will always be more effective than hastily organized units based upon mobilized reserves who may have a family back home to worry about. They also have limited training based upon allocated time rather than trying to be professional from their own personal energy.

Finland is showing the way with this, and like the UK and US is tapping into the energy of the volunteer resource as a key part of the main operational structure. The isolated small pockets of *Kaitseliit* and *Zemessardze* infantry may look good on paper when facing “little green men,” but if confronted by a balanced Russian war-fighting force heavy with artillery, these Baltic formations would soon be

defeated. Volunteers, men and women, need to be allocated long term to a unit that contributes to the national brigades, such as logistics and artillery, and in the future possibly to man the air-defense equipment allocated from US Congressional funding.

The overall C2 of the region needs a complete rethink by the North Atlantic Alliance. The reality is that if Sweden and Finland are attacked, then NATO and especially the EU will be involved for economic, social, and moral reasons. These two countries must be pulled full time into the political and military team as a matter of both political and military urgency. It is too late to negotiate when a conflict starts. This will need new thinking and risk taking both from the two countries and especially from within NATO. To bring them into the fold, much more political work is needed than is being done now, both at the institutional and bilateral level, and especially by the Latvian and Estonian governments. It is also a fact that if any or all the B3 are invaded, then neither Sweden nor Finland will be able to escape the financial and political fallout. They have a fundamental reason to be involved, as their increasing relationship with the US shows. It is of massive deterrent value against Russia if both countries operate and exercise in and around Latvia and Estonia as often as possible. But to do this means totally rethinking the NATO communications and secrecy policies and embarking on political work to create a Baltic Sea area military Schengen encompassing maritime and air spaces as well as land.

In terms of maritime control, there is a need to see the Baltic Sea Region as a multinational common battlespace for all countries surrounding it. It makes sense to have a full-time NATO standing naval presence, perhaps based upon a recreated Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON). Additionally, there needs to be a realistic understanding that if a regional war breaks out, Kaliningrad becomes a key naval chokepoint. This means that until Kaliningrad is subdued by NATO, what is in the Northern Baltic is likely to be all that is available immediately against the Russian Baltic Fleet. It also means land



reinforcement for the northern Baltics may have to come overland or by air, via Sweden and Finland. This then means ferries across the Baltic Sea. The only naval vessels permanently stationed in the Baltic of war-fighting capability and capable of protecting cross-Baltic ferries are Swedish and Finnish. Thus, if NATO, or the US and UK, see rapid reinforcement as a requirement, there is no choice but for the two easternmost Nordic countries to be fully involved. The question is what political leverage is needed to make this happen. It is clear, given the current antipathy among Swedes and Finns against NATO, that the EU must be involved somehow in the political enabling process. However, there seems little drive today within the supine EU defense structures to grasp this nettle to the degree needed to break the current political logjam.

To help promote this, Finland or Sweden should be asked to provide the commander for a Baltic naval force. But deterrence by capability also means creating a Baltic-wide, and not just NATO B3, all-involved maritime surveillance picture and a working naval concept and doctrine. Latvia and Estonia should consider opening their ports full time to the navies of Sweden and Finland in Schengen fashion without requiring diplomatic clearances. Harboring costs should be waived. This again means new political thinking, a different operational approach, and a different focus on spending from all involved.

The same logic should apply to the airspace. NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission is just a tripwire and insufficient for war. No surety exists of strong reinforcement if the conflict is wider, which would pull air resources to elsewhere. There is always a risk that *in extremis* a political delay could occur when it came to moving from air policing to air defense. A combined air group with both Finland and Sweden, one common air picture, and a common Baltic airspace would create a deterrence paradigm that Russia could not ignore. Sweden and Finland should be encouraged to take a formal part in air policing of at least Latvia and Estonia and to join in openly when a rapid response is needed. Again, there would be considerable political work needed

to achieve this. Real military deterrence demands one common air commander, rethinking NATO secrecy rules, and diplomatic work to open the Baltic airspaces. Command would again need to come from Finland and Sweden to ensure their involvement and to acknowledge their true potential value to Western defense. This would be a real political challenge to NATO and NATO countries, not to mention an EU challenge if the C2 pieces are to be fitted together in a coherent whole. But the resultant military power increase and the contribution to real defense, especially for NATO, makes the prize doubly worthwhile. The statesman-like activity from all sides is currently missing and needs much more political time in the sauna and socializing in bars together, as opposed to formal opposite-sided table meetings and business-as-usual politics. To gain this battle coherence also means a much stronger strategic communications (STRATCOM) campaign toward Finland and Sweden from NATO and Alliance member countries to win public trust. Without this, there will be no progress; and equally, the real risk is that if deterrence fails, war fighting in the region fails also.

Lithuania cannot be neglected in these arguments but should be viewed in a different way. It is well placed within the MND NE, where there is a coherence with the Polish geographic battlespace and US reinforcing units. It is naive to suggest that any help will come from the northern Baltic neighbors. They neither have the resources nor the mobility and logistic support to move south easily. Moreover, there is no coherence within the eFP formations in Latvia and Estonia to do so, as most rely totally upon host nation support. The need for cooperation within B3 still exists, especially for sea and air, and possibly also ground-based air defense; but realistically, as the military configuration stands today, fighting a B3 ground war cannot be conducted in a coherent fashion

The major failing is the lack of full-time NATO operational commanders focused purely on the region to pull together all the failings and opportunities. No experienced commander could accept

the current divisional HQ nonsense suggested for Latvia. NATO still sees the region in terms of politics, process and plans rather than as an operationally based force designed to do damage to Russia. This is witnessed by the way they have accepted the splitting up of the eFP forces, creating the three separate forward presence HQs and the lack of a coherent relationship with the US in terms of spending the Congressionally allocated money. This vital financial and equipment support is still being organized separately at the individual US Office of Defense Cooperation level rather than being driven by a single NATO commander. The Alliance is too focused upon reinforcement rather than on warfighting first. This creates a form of passivism and negativity along the lines that Russia will win the initial stages and NATO will have to come and rescue the countries. This should be reshaped both conceptually and doctrinally to where NATO is both willing and able to defend against Russia in the early stages and that Russia will be beaten before it can gain its own operational battle flow.

Talking shops amongst the B3 and regional allies are plentiful, and it is hard to judge how to improve these unless they are all refocused upon the same aim of deterrence by military capability rather than deterrence by political coherence. Thus, to use them properly needs a clear plan written and directed by an organization or country that has both credibility and political strength. This means either NATO as an organization or the United States. No others are strong enough to reshape the agenda in the way suggested.

At the same time, instead of more institutions that merely meet on a regular or irregular basis, there is a need for a proper, full-time regional defense secretariat led by a senior international politician, with full political and military representation of all those involved in the likely defense of Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the B3. This should likely be central, but somewhere in Finland or Sweden, with good communications—Turku would be a sensible compromise. The aim would be simple: to create a common defense picture for NATO, the EU and US and to staff problems and solutions, while removing

the current fragmentation and turning the current NATO, EU and bilateral initiatives into something both strategically coherent and militarily powerful.

The key implication is the need for a greater focus upon defending the region militarily from the outset by a capable fighting force rather than playing public relations games that fool no one, especially not Russia. A true defense of the region would mean giving up some elements of national sovereignty and for NATO breaking down some long-held institutional rules to further embrace Finland and Sweden. However, these acts pale into insignificance when placed against the cost of regional deterrence failing. It would be hardest for Finland and Sweden to step out of the mindset they have placed themselves in. The reality is that there has been little if any mature political dialogue with the populations of these two countries not based upon the cost of NATO membership or of disturbing Russia; they need to have their own internal debates about the overwhelming cost to them of NATO failing because they do not join. Finland certainly would head back into a long, dark financial winter if Russia did the same to Finnish shipping as the delays Russia creates for Ukrainian and other international vessels in the Kerch Strait. Additionally, there are implications and real opportunities for the EU defense system to play a more strategic role in the region alongside NATO and the US. But in the end, the real initiative and drive for improvement must come from Washington, backed by the two institutions and the positive energy of the UK.

# Conclusions

## *Olevs Nikers and Otto Tabuns*

This report has outlined the current state of cooperation between the Baltic Sea partnering countries in multiple aspects of security. Beyond the different national perspectives and various international arrangements, the work of the experts show significant regional and sectoral issues that overstep the boundaries of national policy and the current limits of mandates given to international organizations such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Further cooperation between the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries is necessary to decrease the potential of a conventional conflict in this corner of Europe. The mentioned cooperation needs to be extended beyond the current *status quo* to deal with the ongoing “hybrid” warfare challenge from which the Baltic region is not sheltered. Simultaneously, a coordinated balancing between key stakeholders—NATO, the EU, the United States, the United Kingdom, Baltic Sea littoral countries and others—is needed to avoid the risk of overgoverning. All BSR countries have undertaken efforts to strengthen and develop their military capabilities in both national and collective frameworks. Simultaneously, however, additional non-military security issues require the closing of gaps in the fields of economic and societal security. This is crucial, not only because the opponent can seek to ignite these during a conventional conflict but also because they have the potential to become an existential problem for the regional countries even without the military element put in play. As noted by the experts, the complexity of hybrid warfare requires broader regional intelligence cooperation in the form of a regional intelligence fusion center.

For the Euro-Atlantic Baltic countries, turning political deterrence into a working military deterrence should be the top priority. The most significant variables likely to affect this process include the United States' involvement in the region and the future of European defense cooperation. The third key variable concerns Nordic security strategies: the Swedish and Finnish relationship with NATO, as well as the Danish involvement with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU.

Sweden, Finland and Denmark can strengthen their national security and the regional stability by continuing the political dialogue that covers not only the costs of joining NATO or CFSP and the possible reaction of Russia, but also the costs to them of NATO and the EU defense failing because they will not have joined.

The future strategy of the BSR's Nordic countries must be on the minds of all defense stakeholders with regard to the Baltic basin, since the only local permanently stationed naval vessels of war-fighting capability and able to protect cross-Baltic ferries are Swedish and Finnish. Yet the Swedish and Finnish standing navies are not enough in terms of maritime control: securing the Baltic Sea for military and commercial safety purposes would require the BSR to be transformed into a multinational common battlespace for all the Euro-Atlantic countries surrounding it. The intensity of human activity in terms of traffic, infrastructure, environment and military legacy makes the Baltic Sea manageable only in a comprehensive and collective fashion. A regional maritime strategy could indicate the preferable level of international maritime cooperation and integration. At the same time, a NATO standing naval presence in the Baltic could prevent a situation whereby the resupply and reinforcement of the Baltic States is limited to a single road-and-rail link across the narrow Suwalki gap or by air (which itself would be highly contested in a military crisis).

Gaps in air defense create the foremost risk of uncertainty. For the Euro-Atlantic partnering countries, a multinational combined air

group—involving both Finland and Sweden and providing one common air picture and a common Baltic airspace—would create a deterrence paradigm that Russia could not ignore. Finnish and Swedish participation in the Baltic Air Policing mission could be a first step.

In the Transatlantic perspective, the credibility of the Baltic States' deterrence would benefit from an operationally mobile multinational divisional headquarters that would include divisional enablers like artillery, air defense and logistics. Furthermore, instead of dividing the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence troops between several national forces, they should be gathered into a NATO-commanded armored brigade acting as a mobile divisional reserve. Apart from making better operational sense, this would avoid spreading defense cooperation resources too thinly by trying to achieve the same objective in three similar yet separate ways. A stronger conditionality of defense assistance on better integrated solutions may help to overcome national political conditions that have made the operational structures more complex than absolutely necessary.

Informational security plays a key role for all BSR countries, but especially in the eastern Baltic. The Baltic States and Poland are more vulnerable to information warfare. Resilience against disinformation goes hand in hand with keeping the educational standards up to date to raise critical thinking skills. Optimal societal awareness of disinformation issues also needs a wider involvement of non-governmental organizations to efficiently implement national and multinational media-literacy strategies, including the distribution of verified information. Developing and strengthening professional journalism as well as alternative channels in contested language-defined information spaces should be a concern for many Baltic Sea countries during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, providing opportunities for regional solutions and a role for the EU (such as establishing a unified Code of Practice for the ways to respond). This concerns the established Russian-speaking communities, recent

migrants from Ukraine and Belarus, but also the members of Baltic diasporas beyond first-generation migrants. Trust in NATO among local societies is being challenged continuously by Russian disinformation and propaganda, something that neither the Alliance's member states nor the organization itself should forget.

The role of critical infrastructure is showcased by ongoing efforts toward enhancing regional energy security. The elimination of regional energy islands will limit the risks posed to the increasing number of governmental functions exercised via e-services as well as defense logistics. Increased regional preparedness to issues of not only physical security of supply but also price stability on the energy markets will benefit both economic and societal security fields. As the resilience of energy infrastructure affects both military and civilian institutions, EU support for NATO defense infrastructure should be addressed within the broader scope of EU-NATO cooperation.

Regional security developments since 2014 have led to more intense security cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region. While different formats of such cooperation have emerged over the years, a more strategic regional approach is still to be found. Success in this endeavor could open avenues for broader defense and security synchronization, as well as provide a foundation for additional security- and defense-related regionally focused projects.



# Author Biographies

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**Mr. Olevs Nikers** is President of the Baltic Security Foundation, a senior analyst at The Jamestown Foundation and a member of the Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies. He is an army and defense professional since 2001. A Fulbright alumnus, Nikers earned his Master's degree in International Affairs at the Bush School of

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**Mr. Otto Tabuns** is Director of the Baltic Security Foundation, a visiting lecturer at the Riga Graduate School of Law, as well as the co-host of the current affairs podcast "Latvia Weekly." He has previous experience in strategic communication and defense planning. Tabuns is an author of articles on Latvian and European security in fields such as regional military cooperation and societal security. He is the Executive Director of the Baltic Security Strategy Project and a member of the Latvian Association of Political Scientists, Latvian Japan Alumni Association, and the Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies.

# About the Baltic Security Foundation

The editors of this book founded the Baltic Security Foundation (BSF) to promote Baltic security and defense. This is an international non-governmental organization based in Riga, Latvia, since 2019. The Foundation gathers experts on Baltic regional security from Europe, Asia and the Americas. The Foundation's team provides situational assessments and recommendations on regional security that serve the public awareness and policy debate, decision-making and evaluation.

The primary focus of the BSF's activities is the Baltic Sea Region within the Euro-Atlantic framework. The most recent project carried out by the BSF team, the Baltic Security Strategy Project, resulted in two international publications—"Baltic Interoperability Report" and "Baltic Security Strategy Report." Both works are available online to contribute to research and debate.

Furthermore, the BSF has facilitated Baltic field visits of regional security researchers and experts from the United States, Brazil and Japan. The BSF has also provided guest lectures, seminars, research guidance, internships and networking for young leaders across the world seeking to specialize in Baltic regional studies.

# BALTIC SEA SECURITY

The report ***Baltic Sea Security: Regional and Sectoral Perspectives*** offers a multifaceted discussion of the complex security issues affecting the Baltic region that have important implications for the cohesion of the wider Transatlantic alliance. The Baltic littoral countries have chosen to respond to similar security concerns using differing approaches, keeping the region's strategic situation a challenging puzzle for the future.

In 2019 and 2020, scholars Olevs Nikers and Otto Tabuns, the founders of the Riga-based Baltic Sea Security Initiative, gathered together regional and international experts and security professionals to provide an in-depth analysis of the current levels of defense and security cooperation among the Western countries in the Baltic basin. This series of discussions focused on 1) military cooperation and interoperability in maritime and air defense, 2) societal resilience in resisting information warfare and other hybrid threats, as well as 3) a joint approach to dealing with economic, financial and critical infrastructure threats. In addition to elucidating the variety of national perspectives in the region, the work of the experts spotlights the significant regional and sectoral issues that overstep the boundaries of national policy. Moreover, the study identifies the current limitations of international organizations such as NATO and the EU to respond to the threats faced by their Baltic littoral member states.

Long-term strategic coordination among the Baltic partnering nations should be on the minds of all regional security and defense stakeholders. This report is intended to aid in that endeavor and to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, professionals and scholars seeking to address the challenges facing the West in the Baltic Sea region.

**Olevs Nikers** is the president of the Baltic Security Foundation and a senior analyst with The Jamestown Foundation. He has worked on defense and security policy for 20 years and is a graduate of The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

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