

1. SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS

HOW COULD THE BALTIC STATES BETTER COOPERATE TO IMPROVE THEIR CAPABILITIES AND FACILITATE THE EXTENDED DETERRENCE?

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ABSTRACT

Credible extended deterrence should prevent aggression against smaller countries. NATO's defense and deterrence depends not only on the possession of nuclear weapons, but also on the credible ability to avoid potential aggression. However, conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, the "Zapad 2017" exercise during which Russia used a combination of conventional and nuclear weapons, meant that the concept of extended deterrence became once again important for NATO countries. Considering the current cooperation between the Baltic countries, their perception of external threats and comparing existing capabilities to stop all aggression against them, it is visible that the extended deterrence mechanisms are still solid. Nevertheless, the Baltic States should focus their efforts on improving gaps in military capabilities and on facilitating Host Nations Support (HNS) effort in order to create an enhanced deterrent effect that will function efficiently. The article contains author's consideration on the conditions of military deterrence as a response to aggressive attitude of the Russian Federation toward the eastern flank of NATO.

KEY WORDS

Baltic states, military cooperation, defense and military deterrence.

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Introduction

Since 2004, NATO protection, including nuclear deterrence, has allowed the Baltic states to focus most of their attention on achieving individual stability and economic growth. However, the conflicts in Georgia

and Ukraine, the "Zapad 2017" exercise, during which Russia used its currently military concept which 'rely primarily on a mix of conventional precision (non-nuclear) weapons and nuclear weapons which

are designated collectively as strategic weapons'(Johnson, 2018 p. 24) triggered real concerns. It caused the concept of extended deterrence to be important again for NATO countries.

Between 2014 and 2015, the experts and researchers from the American RAND Corporation examined the probability of short-term Russian penetration of the Baltic states. According to the study, the longest time for 'Russian forces to reach Estonian and Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga is 60 hours, and NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its members'(Shlapak, et al., 2016 p. 1). If extended deterrence will not work, the conflict would be bloody and costly and the nuclear exchange would become very possible. NATO could collapse, as lack of timely reaction would undermine its credibility (which is the cornerstone of Western security). Thereupon, it seems very important to analyse the current cooperation between the Baltic countries, their perception of external threats and to compare the current capabilities to deter any aggression against them. The alliance and the enhanced military capabilities of each nation present that the extended deterrence arrangements are still robust. Moreover, the Baltic states can conduct successful preventive operations and counter-actions by focusing their efforts on improving military capabilities and facilitating Host Nations Support (HNS) effort to facilitate the external assistance. Although Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have adjusted their perception of threat, especially after Russia - Georgia and Ukraine conflicts, there are still a lot of improvements to be established to create the extended deterrence that will work efficiently.

Successes and shortages in the Baltic states cooperation

Deterrence credibility has no longer depended only on the possession of nuclear weapons (which was of key importance during the Cold War). It also relies on credible capabilities to prevent the aggression against the weaker countries. The definition of deterrence shows that it is nothing other than 'persuading an opponent not to initiate a specific action because the perceived benefits do not justify the estimated costs and risk'(Mearsheimer, 1983 p. 14). The deterrence, to achieve the desired effect, has to consist of three elements, such as the sufficient military capabilities, the credibility of using them against external aggression and the manner to clearly, publicly communicate about political will to act (Mazarr, et al., 2011 p. 10). One of the deterrence types is the extended deterrence, where great power extends security guarantees to smaller powers(Huth, 1988). Taking into consideration NATO and U.S. participation in deterrence posture, one can see 'a package of security assurances that has been pledged by the United States to its European allies with the goal of deterring potential threat and adversaries'(Hlatky, 2015 p. 1). In this sense NATO's joint capabilities seems to be credible enough to deter potential aggressors toward the Alliance.

The cooperation among the Baltic states has hitherto been based on joint efforts to achieve goals related to both sovereignty and political independence as well as economic and national security development areas. This assertion is confirmed by the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia that stated: 'co-operation among the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) is traditionally close, multi-faceted and pragmatic' and their common interests de-

pend on the foreign and security policy and they support 'economic development and membership in the EU and NATO' (Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The first joint political project of the Baltic countries, after regaining independence in 1991, was the establishment of the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers. The institutions have been successfully coordinating and consulting on foreign policy matters so far. They are focused on promoting practical cooperation by presenting their opinions, decisions or resolutions for their national parliaments, governments, international institutions or regional organizations. At the same time, having lost all military equipment withdrawn to the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic countries, thanks to the support of Finland, Sweden and Denmark, stabilized their military situation and began coordinated approaches towards achieving NATO membership. It was supported by regional cooperation within the Baltic Sea nations and the Partnership for Peace initiative. This military cooperation was 'not only developing the ability to work together, but also about sharing information, techniques and skills, and about building trust to achieve regional stability' (Aabakken, 1997 p. 23). This direction ultimately led Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to achieving NATO membership in 2004.

One of their significant joint projects was the infantry Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT), initiated in 1995 to contribute in peacekeeping operation and to implement NATO standards. It supported upgraded soldiers' professionalism and military capabilities. Next example was BALTRON project, which consisted of the Minesweeping Squadron and the Navy Training Base and served as a personnel training foundation and which has participated in the progress of naval capabilities of the Baltic states. Another

project which strengthens cooperation, has been the Baltic Air Surveillance Network and Control System (BALTNET). It is currently working not only as a part of NATO integrated air surveillance, but also as a part of weapons and command and control system. Furthermore, the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) is often considered as the best example of successful cooperation of the Baltic countries. This international Professional Military Education institution has conducted professional military education at the strategic and operational level for military officers and civil servants from the NATO members' regions and other college partners. The college is future oriented, progressive, modern and attractive military educational institution, which more than 1200 officers and civil servants from almost 40 countries have graduated from during its educational activities (Baltic Defence College, 2017).

Despite the fact that the mutual cooperation between the Baltic states seems to be complementary, after joining NATO, the BALTBAT project was closed due to financial limitations or other national priorities. Similarly, BALTRON initiative is questioned after Estonia withdrawn its contribution from the naval squadron and focused on the mine countermeasures operations with NATO. After this decision, another fully functional and mutual military cooperation project collapsed and the initiative, which could serve as a base to develop the capabilities has been wasted. In addition, as noted by Uēis Romanovs and Māris Andžāns, 'one of the most commonly referred gaps in the trilateral military cooperation is the very limited number of common procurement projects' (2017 p. 19). Moreover, the authors recognized that the Baltic states have independently started a number of very similar and expensive military projects without any cooperation.

This includes armoured vehicles, self – propelled howitzers, anti-tank assets, air surveillance and air defence systems coming from different tenderers. (Romanovs, 2017 pp. 19-20). This could be a message that the Baltic states do not see any profits from joint activities in these type of ventures. From that perspective, such actions could contribute to a positive economic outcome, stimulating national economies and even competitiveness within the military projects defined under the new PESCO initiative, giving the chance to participate in the European market. Good prospect to follow this direction was created by the agreement between Latvia and Lithuania, regarding the defence procurement synchronisation, signed in 2016 (Latvian Public Broadcasting, 2016). It will allow the exchange of information on decisions related to defence procurement, as well as to conduct joint negotiations with the defence industry for wider cooperation opportunities. Consequently, defence industry cooperation's could contribute to joint activities within the research and innovation development, to reduce separate expenses in this field, as well as to increase military capabilities of the three countries.

The perception of threat in the Baltic states

All the Baltic states are perceiving Russia as a potential aggressor and real threat for their national security. The main reason for such strategic approach was the outcome of Russian annexation of Crimea and military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Latvia's "The National Defence Concept" renewed in 2016, confirms this claim as Russia is clearly mentioned as a country, which is 'destroying the existing international order' and 'is prepared to reach its goals regarding its neighbouring countries by any means, including the use of military force' (Latvian

Parliament, 2016 p. 3). Also Lithuania, after Russia's aggressive actions, updated its National Security Strategy in 2017. It pointed out Russia as the country 'violating the security architecture based on universal rules and principles of international law and peaceful co-existence' (Lithuanian Parliament, 2017 p. 4). The Estonia's Foreign Intelligence service characterised Russia as 'the only country that could potentially pose a risk to the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Estonia' (Estonian Information Board, 2017). In 2017, during the presentation of the new National Security Concept to the Estonian Parliament, the Prime Minister Ratas emphasized 'Russian military activity and aggression', stressing the low risk of a direct military confrontation with Russia (Estonian Government, 2017). Contrary to other countries, Lithuania is also afraid of disintegration of NATO and EU, but Latvia emphasizes the problems with the espionage, the identification of the migration population and the large Russian-speaking minority that can enable 'a scenario broadly similar to the one that was played out in Ukraine' (Rostoks, et al., 2016 p. 88).

The good examples of perceiving threat by the Baltic states are the Centres of Excellence (COE), established in each country. NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence COE (CCDCOE) was founded in Estonia after the cyber-attack in 2007. Nowadays, this centre is sponsored by 17 countries 'in the field of cyber defence, research, training and exercises' (Allied Command Transformation, 2016 p. 10) as the leader in the region. Lithuania is the framework country of NATO Energy Security COE (ENSECCOE) established in 2012 to support NATO's capabilities and development on all aspects of energy security. Lastly, Latvia's NATO Strategic Communication COE (StratCom COE) was accredited in 2014 to contribute to

positive and successful image of NATO operations and missions, build public awareness and understanding NATO policies in all relevant audiences (NATO STRATCOM COE, 2018). The Baltic states as the host nations of all these centres have real influence on gathering information concerning possible threat, sharing warnings, evidences and data about incoming dangerous situations. They have also improved their countries capabilities by conducting analyses, expertise and researches concerning security aspects as well as by incorporating strategic communication among the NATO alliance, partners and contributing participants. The participation of Finland and Sweden in two COE is significant, as it offers wider opportunities to identify threats, but also to increase the scope of cooperation with Scandinavian countries.

Recently, the most visible result of the NATO nations' commitment (with great involvement of the Baltic countries) was the strengthening of the eastern frontline during the NATO Summit in Warsaw and the deployment of multinational battalions in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Although they are not powerful enough to face the potential Russian aggression, they have improved NATO's deterrence posture, showing joint decision of all NATO countries. The rapid deployment to protect the Baltic countries, the participation of as many as 16 NATO member states, including 3 nuclear powers (Rostoks, et al., 2016 p. 83) have been important. It also seems that because of rotational troops in the Baltic countries, they will not fall into the so-called Thucydides trap. The metaphor was described as a cause of Peloponnesian War more than 2,400 years ago, stating that 'It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable' (Allison, 2015 p. 2). It reveals a situation, where the reasons of the war were 'rapid shift in the

balance of power between two rivals' and 'the fear, insecurity, and determination to defend the status quo' (Allison, 2015 p. 2). In April 2018, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told the reporters that 'NATO is not planning to boost its military presence in the Baltic states which have called for extra protection from their Russian neighbour' (The Baltic Times, 2018). He confirmed that NATO, having established rotational forces in the Baltic countries, should not increase its potential to mitigate the possibility of Russian aggression. To this end, NATO should avoid the perception of being influenced by 'local Russian speakers that NATO is not deploying forces against them' (Radin, 2017 p. 7).

The common power of the Baltic countries

The Baltic States are not strong enough to face an open aggression of Russia. During war-games conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2015, the land forces of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, 2 infantry battalions, 5 light infantry battalions, 2 mechanized infantry battalions and 2 motorized battalions were used for comparative analysis. Total 11 battalions, 7 of which are light and poorly equipped infantry units, were considered. On the opposite side, there were 25 battalions (armour, mechanized, motorized, airborne and naval infantry) supported by 10 artillery battalions, 5 surface – to – surface missile battalions and 6 attack helicopter battalions (Shlapak, et al., 2016 pp. 4-5). Comparative conclusions left no illusions that the Baltic states are able to defend themselves. Furthermore, the analysis showed that NATO could be able to defend its allies by reinforcing the forces by deploying as many as seven brigades. It should include 3 armour-heavy brigades with organic artillery, air assault units, attack helicopters, airborne

infantry, rotary-wing aviation, engineering, logistics, and other enablers, and with adequate headquarters for planning and command and control (Shlapak, et al., 2016 p. 9). Nevertheless, taking into consideration NATO membership of the Baltic states, the protection under the nuclear umbrella and collective response provide the guarantee of security from external aggression. Additionally, being supported by so-called trip wire forces as a trigger to launch the additional forces from the depth of the Europe territory, the Baltic countries should feel relatively calm.

The NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battalions are to supplement the missing national capabilities and necessary advanced military equipment of the Baltic forces. The diversity of countries participating in eFP forces means that it is difficult to control it, because the escalation will be spread over several fronts, especially that the participating countries will defend not only their own citizens, but also the ones coming from the Baltic countries. Furthermore, the multinationalism of eFP battalions will cause them to defend themselves for a long time until they are strengthened first by the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and then by the NATO Response Forces (NRF). Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are planning to increase the number of their troops, but goals have not been achieved yet. The Baltic states have understood the need of military modernization to counter Russian advantages, so they have revised their priorities concerning military capabilities. Thanks to the increasing defence budget, the Baltic states have strengthened their own national armed forces through the procured armoured personal carriers, combat reconnaissance vehicles or anti-tank missiles like Spike and Javelin. The nations are also trying to improve the electronic war-

fare and air defence system. Nevertheless, there are still some visible gaps to close. The researchers from RAND Corporation noticed e.g. the lack of radars, which can effectively prohibit the access to the territory, or the need to develop greater ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) capabilities that could be useful in monitoring potential developing crisis, especially near the border area. Very 'useful might be small, manned aircraft, as well as small UAVs, which could be useful in the event of an unconventional or developing hybrid crisis' (Chivvis, et al., 2017 pp. 267-268). Similarly in cyber security domain, which is very heavily related to technology, more attention is required. Estonia, having been affected by a cyber-attack in 2007, has become the leader in the region in this area. However, to be a step ahead of Russia, the Baltic states 'must combine the resources and the knowledge of both the private and the public sector, guaranteeing more flexibility when countering cyber threats' (Veebel, 2017). This effort should be continued in the Baltic countries by developing the procedures and structures of cyber defence units, exchanging the best practises in critical situations on the civilian and military level and testing their own abilities during international exercises.

HNS and exercises facilitate extended deterrence

The key to deter Russia is the Baltic states contribution to harmonize and facilitate Host Nation Support effort, as well as the exercises and trainings on large and local scale. The RAND report highlighted that they should be 'able to rapidly receive allied ground forces and operate in support of allied air superiority forces, for deterrence in peacetime as well as in a crisis situation' (Chivvis, et al., 2017 p. 267). This means that in addition to improving their

military capabilities, they must create appropriate conditions as the HNS, so that expeditionary forces could augment on-site forces quickly and without any obstacles, to achieve full operational capability to operate in a new battlespace. In addition, an important factor is the permanent sustainment of all types of supplies for the fighting troops. It includes the whole spectrum of logistics infrastructure, such as railways, roads and sea transport, loading and unloading facilities, storages and warehousing, service, technical evacuation and repair shops for vehicles, provision of telecommunications equipment and lines, social and living services, municipal services, accommodation and communal services. The challenge is that major NATO's defence infrastructure is located in southern Germany, too far to logistically support the FP battalions or other units in the Baltic states during possible operations.

In his testimony, David Shlapak noticed that U.S. and European nations need to make 'extensive investment in revamping and revitalizing NATO's ability to receive, move, and support large combat formations along its eastern boundary, and especially in all three Baltic states' (Shlapak, 2017 p. 5). The practical reflection of logistic problems was noticed during the deployment of battalions of the eFP to the Baltic nations. Lt. Gen. Benjamin Hodges, the former commander of the US Army Europe, many times reminded about problems associated with the military logistics. He commanded preparation and movement of US forces to exercise areas in 2015 and 2016 and later, when establishing eFP battalions in Central-Eastern Europe. He recognized that troops struggled with legal regulations related to the movement of military units, transport infrastructure and its capacities, and also to the lack of experience to monitor the movement of military convoys

through respective security forces. He repeatedly argued that NATO forces need a 'military Schengen Zone' to improve the mobility of troops, when crossing NATO nations' borders (Hodges, 2015).

Another important factor facilitating the deterrence and strengthening defence capabilities is the extended number of exercises and joint trainings in the Baltic States. This applies both to large NATO multinational exercises as well as to the local ones, carried together by the Baltic states. Eoin McNamara claims that 'large exercises would serve to demonstrate NATO's credible commitment to deter one of the core aspects, namely the use of the presence of large-scale conventional forces close to the border' while smaller exercises brings 'better interoperability with non-professional force components' (McNamara, 2016). Bearing in mind that in Estonia and Lithuania the territorial defence forces include both professional soldiers as well as conscripts and volunteers, such cyclical exercises may prove decisiveness in maintaining high readiness of troops and personnel reserves. It is parallel to improving units' cohesion and skills in using military equipment allowing executing tasks in line with NATO standards. These exercises can also contribute to strengthening cooperation in the region at the tactical and operational levels. It is important, as Baltic countries' armed forces will be the first to react to the potential attack. Their preparation for quick reaction may prove to be crucial to deter enemy by denial, limiting spreading aggression into other NATO countries. Taking it into consideration, all NATO countries should possess not only self-defense capabilities, but also adjust the national law to facilitate the undisturbed movement of the units, without any formalities delaying their deployment. They should be able to develop and support the active assistance

of the reinforce forces, but also to implement common exercises of coalition forces with the national armies of the Baltic countries and to involve the civil components at governmental and non-governmental level in order to show sustained deterrence, and maintain the credibility of the Baltic states' capabilities in the implementation of joint defence projects of the member states.

Conclusions

Identifying the factors which could improve the cooperation between the Baltic countries is relevant, because in recent years Russia strategic activities have been focused on re-establishment of its dominance over neighbouring countries, which Russia sees as its legitimate "sphere of interest" and to undermine NATO and the Western community.

Although the cooperation of the Baltic states is very diverse on all levels so far, its true strength is particularly evident in moments of insecurity, when uniting in a joint pursuit of goals, or establishing well-functioning projects such as the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic Council of Ministers, BALTBAT (BALTFORCE), BALTNET, BALTDEFCOL or BCJSE. However, there are many options that should be considered in the future, such as a joint multinational division that would facilitate operational activities for both the Baltic countries and the NATO. It is linked with clear recognition of armed forces modernization, necessary to close the capacity gaps and succeed in a battlespace; it includes the improvements of fire support areas and the armoured protection to raise target acquisition, developed short-range armament and defeat enemy fighters in close fight.

After resolving the challenges concerning the HNS problems, next civil and military level cooperation should be improved through mutual mass exercises in each

Baltic countries. It would create many opportunities to practice both at the political level, through intergovernmental coordination, and cooperation, combined with military operations engaging international and national entities. An essential stimulating factor would be the NATO Centres of Excellence in the field of cybersecurity, strategic communication or energy security of the Baltic states. These CoEs will contribute to the improvement of contingency plans, regulations and legal aspects regarding security, as well as the dimension of the tactical level of the implementation of tasks in the field for eFP forces. Certainly, BALTDEFCOL should be an organizer of such exercises and would employ its HCSC and JCGSC students as a part of political and operational staff. BALTDEFCOL could develop its capabilities, becoming a NATO university as a leader in Professional Military Education, sharing its analysis and studies on regional security, carrying out research and expertise on security.

In the near future, Russia probably will not change its aggressive policy towards its closest neighbours, especially the former Soviet Union republics, striving to rebuild its former empire. Thanks to the presence of NATO troops in the Baltic countries, this process has certainly been postponed for some time. It is a period during which the Baltic states should re-examine the possibilities of the trilateral Baltic cooperation to strengthen their; current initiatives and develop cooperation with others parties. Cooperation is the best option to succeed in the future battlespace, and the way to this will be the cooperation among the governments, industries, research and development institutions.

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