

Viljar Veebel,
Illimar Ploom

DOI: 10.33179/BSV.99.SVI.11.CMC.21.3.2

15 LET ČLANSTVA V NATU IN EU: ALI SO SI NACIONALNE VARNOSTNE STRATEGIJE IN OBRAMBNI MODELI BALTSKIH DRŽAV PODOBNI ALI SE RAZLIKUJEJO

15 YEARS OF NATO AND EU MEMBERSHIP: ARE THE BALTIC COUNTRIES SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF THEIR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES AND DEFENCE MODELS

Povzetek Čeprav je baltskim državam varnost zagotovljena v okviru Nata in z aktivnim sodelovanjem na ravni EU na področju varnostne ter obrambne politike, kar krepi varnost v baltski regiji, so Estonija, Latvija in Litva še vedno zelo ranljive za ruska dejanja ter posredovanja. Rusiji predstavljajo neposredno točko za stike z Natom in EU, zaradi česar so med najpomembnejšimi državami, v katerih Rusija preizkuša vzajemne zmogljivosti in čeznje pošilja strateška sporočila svojim »nasprotnikom«. Članek omogoča poglobljeno primerjavo varnostnih groženj, nacionalnih varnostnih strategij, obrambnih modelov, značilnih za zadevne države, in pričakovanj strateškega partnerstva baltskih držav.

Ključne besede *Baltske države, Nato, Rusija, obramba, varnost.*

Abstract Although the Baltic countries are granted security guarantees within the NATO framework, as well as through active cooperation at the EU level in the field of security and defence policy, enhancing security in the Baltic Sea region, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are still very vulnerable to Russian actions and interventions. They constitute Russia's direct point of contact with both NATO and the EU and are, therefore, among the primary subjects to the interests of Russia to test mutual capabilities and to send strategic messages to its "opponents". This article offers an in-depth comparison of the security threats, national security strategies, country-specific defence models, and expectations of strategic partnership of the Baltic countries.

Key words *Baltic States, NATO, Russia, defence, security.*

Introduction The Baltic States enjoy security guarantees directly within the NATO framework, and indirectly through membership of the EU and active cooperation in the field of security and defence policy. Despite the existence of these guarantees, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are still very vulnerable to Russian actions and interventions. As they constitute Russia's direct point of contact with the West, they are among the primary subjects for Russia to test mutual capabilities and to send strategic messages to its "opponents". Although during the past decades military conflict between Russia and one of the Baltic countries was mostly considered an unlikely event, this situation has changed and transformed into a relatively likely threat. This has prompted the Baltic States to take all measures to defend themselves against potential Russian aggression.

Besides the renewal of national security concepts, this should also involve revisions to defence-related research at the national level, paying greater attention to a broad range of topics such as hybrid threats, Russia's "Anti-Access/Area Denial" concept around the Baltic States, and tensions related to the massive Zapad-2018 exercise in the region. This can only be done based on a full picture of the potential security threats and how the national security models of the Baltic countries are expected to work in times of crisis.

Since their vulnerability concerns the wider NATO, a comprehensive overview of the potential threat scenarios in the Baltic countries, their national defence models, country-specific vulnerabilities, and the potential of strategic cooperation to diminish regional security threats stemming from Russia are also useful to the wider Euro-Atlantic community.

1 SECURITY THREATS IDENTIFIED IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS

The multitude of global security threats in various domains are pointed out in the key strategy documents of all three Baltic countries. They range from traditional conventional military threats to threats in the cyber domain, including the economy and the coherence and resilience of society. The national security concepts point out regional issues such as the unity of the Euro-Atlantic community (National Security Strategy of Lithuania, 2017, pp 4-6; (National Security Concept of Estonia, 2017, pp 3-6), and also global issues such as the possible threats of international terrorism (The National Security Concept of Latvia, 2015, pp 6-28).

The National Security Strategy of Lithuania highlights a few dozen of these threats and risk factors which must be given particular attention, such as conventional military threats, covert military and intelligence threats, threats to the unity of the Euro-Atlantic community, regional and global instability, terrorism, extremism, radicalization, information threats, cyber threats, economic and energy dependence, economic vulnerability, the development of unsafe nuclear energy projects near the borders of the country, social and regional exclusion, poverty,

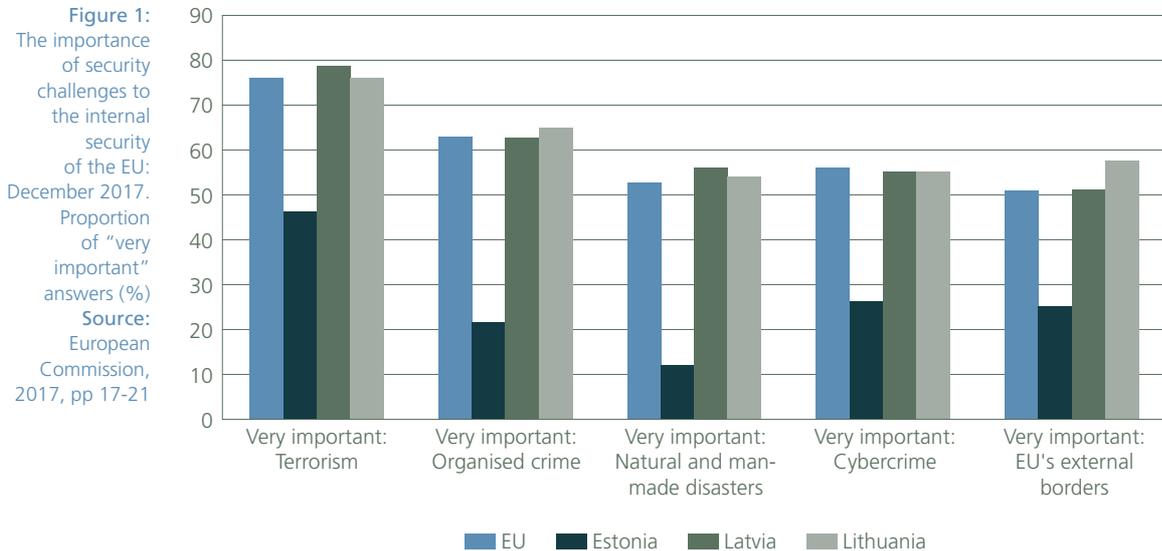
the demographic crisis, corruption, organized crime, emergency situations at the national or international level, and a crisis of values (National Security Strategy of Lithuania, 2017, pp 4-6). Similar threats and risks associated with the uncertain security situation in the Euro-Atlantic region, the uncertain state of the global economy, political radicalization and the polarization of politics, ideological and religious extremism, globalization, migration flows, developments in cyberspace, technology-related threats, organized crime and corruption, and so on are also mentioned in the National Security Concept of Estonia (National Security Concept of Estonia, 2017, pp 3-6).

However, the security concepts of all three Baltic countries sometimes reflect an understanding relatively common to the formerly occupied countries of the Soviet Union, putting forward the nation as the primary subject and object of national security. In this regard, to quote the National Security Concept of Estonia: “The objective of the Estonian security policy is to secure the Nation’s independence and sovereignty, the survival of the people and the state, territorial integrity, constitutional order and the safety of the population” (National Security Concept of Estonia, 2017, p 2). The National Security Strategy of Lithuania, in turn, states that the violation of vital interests of national security, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic constitutional order, civil society, respect for human and citizens’ rights and freedoms and their protection, and peace and welfare in the state, poses a threat to the existence of the state and society, and should be therefore safeguarded by employing all lawful means (National Security Strategy of Lithuania, 2017, p 3). The National Security Concept of Latvia stresses the need to protect the basic values established in the Constitution of Latvia, such as the independence of the state, the democratic system, territorial integrity, and the internal security of the country in terms of preventing threats to internal security (The National Security Concept of Latvia, 2015, p 6).

The Special Eurobarometer Survey on Security from 2017 indicates that there are significant differences between Estonia and the other two Baltic countries in the way that security challenges at the EU level are seen (see Figure 1).

Whereas on average, in the EU as well as in Latvia and Lithuania, all these five topics are considered to be “very important” to the internal security of the EU by at least half of the survey’s respondents, Estonians do not see it in a similar way. In Estonia, for all five topics, the proportion of respondents who think that these challenges are very important to the internal security of the EU is significantly lower. This difference between Estonia and the other two Baltic countries could potentially be explained by the tendency either for Estonians to consider the EU as a secure place compared to Latvians and Lithuanians, or for Estonians to think that other security threats are more important than those listed.

Finally, Russia is considered the main security threat to world peace and stability as far as the security concepts of all three Baltic countries are concerned. The only



slight difference between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is that Latvia and Lithuania go into more detail in describing Russia's influence in its neighbouring countries, while Estonia remains more modest in this respect (Veebel and Ploom, 2016).

Nevertheless, Russia is considered the main security threat to peace and stability by all three Baltic countries. This vision is also reflected in the country-specific results of a survey on security threats in the EU conducted by ECFR in July 2018. Besides the Baltic countries, several other EU countries, such as Finland, Poland, and Romania, consider Russia to be the main security threat. At the same time, countries such as Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Hungary do not see Russia as posing a threat to their society. The survey therefore reflects the polarization of European countries, where Eastern European countries are more concerned about Russia, and Southern European countries are mostly concerned about jihadists and terrorism. However, the views differ in detail with regard to migration, cyber-attacks, the role of Turkey, and so on. The survey also concludes that Estonia and Lithuania are especially worried about Russian meddling in their domestic politics (Dennison et al., 2018).

2 THE POTENTIAL RUSSIAN THREAT AND CRITICAL RESPONSE CAPABILITIES IN THE BALTIC STATES

Both the systematic development of the national defence forces, and the debates on national security guarantees, are clearly driven in all three Baltic countries by the fear of potential Russian aggression. The National Security Concept of Latvia is the most detailed key strategy document in this respect, drawing to an extent on the steps and policies taken by Russia in Ukraine (The National Security Concept

of Latvia, 2015, pp 5-28). The National Security Concept of Latvia makes the following observations (Ibid.): Russia has developed high readiness and mobile military units; Russia uses complex hybrid measures aimed at gradually weakening the country by instrumentalizing the potential of protests and discontent in society; its other measures include economic sanctions, the suspension of the energy supply, humanitarian influence, informative propaganda, psychological influence, cyber-attacks, aggressive influence agents, external diplomatic and military pressure, and the enforcement and legitimization of alternative political processes; creating a conflict area near its border, in which the transition from peaceful existence to crisis and later to war is very difficult to identify; and the creation of a fictional notion that NATO causes external threats due to its internal policy, allowing the Russian government to rally society and make it loyal to the current government (Šliwa, Veebel and Lebrun, 2018).

The National Security Strategy of Lithuania also stresses Russian aggression against its neighbouring countries, the annexation of Crimea, the concentration of modern military equipment in Russia, its large-scale offensive capabilities, and exercises near the borders of Lithuania, especially in the Kaliningrad Region. It also highlights Russia's capacity for using both military and economic, energy, information, and other non-military measures in combination against its neighbours, and Russia's ability to exploit and create internal problems for the neighbouring states, as well as Russia's readiness to use nuclear weapons even against states which do not possess them (National Security Strategy of Lithuania, 2017, pp 2-3).

The National Security Concept of Estonia also argues that Russia is interested in restoring its position in the global arena and is not afraid to come into sharp opposition to Western countries and the Euro-Atlantic collective security system. The strategy document admits that Russia uses political, diplomatic, information, economic, and military means to achieve its objectives, as well as the fact that Russia has strengthened its armed forces and increased its military presence on the borders of NATO member states (National Security Concept of Estonia, 2017, pp 3-5). However, the overall tone of the Russian-related statements in the National Security Concept of Estonia seems to be slightly more modest than those of Latvia and Lithuania.

The question of whether and how Russia could attack the Baltic countries has also gained a lot of attention among military analysts and researchers. Just to name a few, Shirreff (2017) predicted that in the worst case scenario, Russia would seize the territory of Eastern Ukraine, open up a land corridor to Crimea and invade the Baltic countries. Luik and Jermalavičius (2017, p 236) suggested that Russia's posture and capabilities could allow the country to seize its Baltic neighbours, establishing a relatively quick *fait accompli* which it would then defend by issuing nuclear threats. Drawing on multiple game models, Shlapak and Johnson (2016) estimated that the longest it would take Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga would be 60 hours. They

also argue that such a rapid scenario would leave the Alliance with only a limited number of options. Thus, implicitly underpinning these discussions, the threat that Russia could use its military capabilities to attack the Baltic countries appears to be a realistic consideration.

In the event of a conventional conflict, the early stage of resilience is mostly based on the local military forces of Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania. Here, their disproportional conventional capabilities come to the fore. In peacetime, the Latvian National Armed Forces should consist of 6500 professional soldiers, 8000 home guards and 3000 reserve soldiers. Alas, the number of combat-ready home guards and reserve soldiers can be estimated as only half that, given the still relevant conclusions of the State Audit Office in 2015 and the high rate of no-show of reserve soldiers for training (State Audit Office, 2015). The Estonian Armed Forces include about 6000 personnel (including active conscripts), 37,800 conscripts registered for compulsory military service, and 15,000 members of the voluntary Estonian Defence League. The wartime structure of Latvia's Armed Forces is considered to be approximately 17,500 men and women, whereas in reality only approximately one-half to a maximum of two-thirds of that number is correct. The wartime structure of Estonia's armed forces is estimated to reach 60,000, whereas its high readiness reserve is 21,000 personnel (Estonian Defence Forces, 2018). The Lithuanian Land Forces are comprised of around 3500 regulars and civilians, about 4800 volunteers and about 4000 conscripts (Lithuanian Armed Forces, 2019). In this respect, the conventional balance in the Baltic area is not achievable for the Baltic countries, either in total or even with the pre-positioned battalions of other NATO member states. The one and only argument which could partially speak in favour of credible deterrence in terms of conventional forces is that NATO has a much higher capability of additional long-term deployment when sufficiently mobilized (Veebel and Ploom, 2018).

3 THE ROLE OF NUCLEAR THREATS AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE FOR THE BALTIC STATES

The situation becomes even more unbalanced if the nuclear capabilities of the "opponents" are compared. In principle, it is expected that the nuclear weapons capabilities of NATO ensure that any kind of aggression against its members is not a rational option (NATO, 2010). The Alliance's Strategic Concept states that the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, but also the independent strategic forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contributing to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies (NATO, 2015).

To this effect, some arguments have been highlighted in analyses and reports that refer to the overall vulnerability, if not outright weakness, of the idea of nuclear capabilities being taken as a supreme guarantee of NATO's credible deterrence. Firstly, the Alliance itself does not possess nuclear weapons and so it cannot provide

either legal or political assurances to its member or other states on how nuclear weapons belonging to specific member states might be used (Chalmers, 2011, pp 55-56). Moreover, among the owners of nuclear capabilities in NATO there is only partial consensus about the extent to which nuclear forces are “assigned” to NATO. Whereas the nuclear weapons of the United Kingdom have been formally assigned to NATO, and the country has confirmed that the weapons could be used for the purposes of international defence of the Atlantic Alliance in all circumstances, the nuclear weapons of France are not assigned to NATO and are aimed at contributing merely to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies. Secondly, nuclear issues are politically highly sensitive. Russia has used increasingly intimidating rhetoric, which creates concerns that it may lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons (Rathke, 2016). The purpose of such rhetoric could be interpreted as preparing not only the international audience, but also its own population, for a situation where there would arise a need to find a handy justification. It is noteworthy that Russia has already conducted some large-scale military exercises that included a simulation of a limited nuclear strike against the Alliance. The country has also invested in nuclear modernization and exercises involving nuclear forces in order to send signals to NATO, thereby pushing the overall vision of a nuclear disarmament deal into the background. This could seriously endanger the respective international norms, or amount to a no lesser deed than breaking the taboos currently preventing the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, several countries are attempting to gain nuclear weapons capability. This causes political tensions and imbalances in the international arena, and refers to the potential escalation and counterbalancing of nuclear weapons. Thirdly, in practice the role of nuclear weapons in the NATO doctrine has gradually decreased over the past two or three decades. The number of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in the early-1990s was about 2500, but the figure has decreased since then and was only 180 in 2016. Thus, should the United States want to use these weapons, it would take weeks or even months to be actually able to do it (Sauer, 2016).

In the light of this, it is justified to ask for a revision of policies and strategies related to nuclear deterrence in the Alliance. This issue has also been addressed in the most recent Nuclear Posture Review of the US Department of Defense from February 2018, referring to the rapid deterioration of the current threat environment and asking for the initiation of the sustainment and replacement of the US nuclear forces (Department of Defense, 2018, p 2). This step is extremely important for the Alliance in general, because the nuclear capabilities of the United States make an essential contribution to the nuclear deterrence capabilities of the Alliance as a whole. Furthermore, the Review states that the United States will apply a tailored approach to effectively deter across a spectrum of adversaries, threats, and contexts, as well as sustaining and replacing its nuclear capabilities, modernizing NC3, and strengthening the integration of nuclear and non-nuclear military planning (Department of Defence, 2018, p 4). However, it definitely takes both time and resources to achieve this. Under current circumstances there may not be enough time for that, as Russia is already using a consistent strategy of “testing the preparedness”

of its neighbours, and initiating regional conflicts with an interval of only a few years (i.e. in the Baltic region in 2007, in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine in 2013, and so on).

The question of whether nuclear weapons could be used in possible warfare scenarios, and whether the Baltic countries could be in particular danger in that regard, have been also addressed in both political and military circles, as well as being discussed in many studies and reports. For example, Luik and Jermalavičius (2017, pp 237-238) emphasised that Russia's political rhetoric includes nuclear threats towards the Baltic countries, making them particularly vulnerable. A report published by the RAND Corporation in 2016 argued that Russia's next likely targets were the Baltic countries, and that the nuclear forces of NATO do not have enough credibility to protect them (see, Shlapak and Johnson, 2016, p 7). Thompson (2016) suggested some reasons why the greatest danger exists with regard to the Baltic countries, from their high strategic significance, to the future disposition of the Baltic countries, to the incorporation of new technologies in the forces of both Russia and NATO.

However, the idea that the Baltic countries could be under a potential nuclear attack that could evolve to a nuclear war still seems a bit unrealistic and irrational. This conviction relies on the argument that, although both potential conflict parties, i.e. NATO and Russia, have the striking capability, there exists no rational reasoning to execute a nuclear strike even as a measure of last resort. In fact, it is hard to believe that Russia has any rational motivation to use nuclear weapons in the Baltic countries while a large proportion of the population of the Baltic countries are Russian-speaking. Likewise, its territorial proximity and Russia's most likely further ambition to legitimate the annexation come into play. From a rational choice perspective, it is rather unlikely that Russia would use its nuclear capabilities in a potential conflict with the Baltic countries. While this can be called good news, the bad news is that the nuclear deterrence that is considered a core component of NATO's credible deterrence strategy could not provide any additional value for the Baltic countries either. There will arise questions of morality, disproportionality, and escalation for the Alliance, should NATO weigh up using nuclear attack as a preventative measure.

Furthermore, several logical gaps exist in the chain of argument justifying the Alliance's authorization of the use of nuclear weapons against Russia in the event that the latter had fully or partially invaded the Baltic countries. Firstly, there is the question of how the strategic use of nuclear weapons against Russia could become believable as a rational choice in the context of a regional conflict with low intensity. Secondly, how would it help to solve a conflict that had already started or serve the interests of the regional NATO member states? Thirdly, what would be the possible positive outcome for NATO having initiated a full-scale (or tactical) nuclear attack against Russia to stop the occupation of the Baltic countries?

Intriguingly, it must be acknowledged that, contrary to the arguments outlined above, the Baltic countries appear to be strongly convinced that NATO is ready to

use nuclear weapons to protect them. According to a survey conducted by Veebel (2018) in Estonian and Latvian military circles in December 2017, there was a relatively strong belief in Estonian and Latvian military circles that NATO was ready to use its nuclear weapons. The main argument consisted of a belief that without an appropriate response the Alliance would end its existence as a collective security network. Besides this, the respondents shared an understanding that the Russian leadership is convinced that NATO, and particularly the political leaders of the United States, are determined to use nuclear weapons to defend the Baltic countries. At the same time, the Russian leadership was seen as not having a rationale to use nuclear weapons against the Baltic countries and the prepositioned NATO units there. Equally, it was assumed that Russia is not ready to conduct a tactical nuclear strike in the region in order to avoid an escalation of threats and retaliation, and has other, more reasonable conventional options. These views appear to testify that, at least for the Estonians and Latvians, nuclear deterrence remains quite an abstract concept without any profound strategic perception of how nuclear deterrence would work in practice, in terms of the expected effects, targets, damage and risks. From this angle, it seems to be a sign of “self-deterrence,” referring to deterrence by figments of the imagination (Veebel, 2018).

From Russia’s perspective, its nuclear forces serve as a tool to achieve political objectives by intimidating its neighbouring countries and their NATO allies, referring to the combination of the country’s evolved nuclear doctrine and increasingly intimidating rhetoric (Rathke, 2016). After Russia received a clear message from the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016, and having thereafter witnessed the Alliance taking a significant step back in its nuclear language (see Andreassen et al., 2016), it cannot be excluded that the country interprets this as a message stating that the Baltic countries are not strategically important to the Alliance.

4 THE KEY FEATURES OF THE NATIONAL DEFENCE MODELS IN THE BALTIC STATES

Considering the fact that the three Baltic States are attempting to protect themselves against the same potential threat – possible aggression from the Russian side – and are hoping for the same allies from the EU and NATO, it is definitely intriguing that they seem to have chosen different approaches in developing their respective national defence models. However, it should be noted that these three countries do not constitute pure examples of fundamentally different approaches when choosing between a professional army and a conscription service.

Although the potential threats from Russia are similar for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the countries have adopted different national defence models. While Estonia has followed a total defence approach with a strong focus on territorial defence, a compulsory military service and a reservist army, Latvia has opted for a solely professional army with a considerably smaller amount of supporting manpower, and Lithuania has used a mixed system. As far as discussing the security choices of

a small country bordering an aggressive and resurgent neighbour is concerned, the Estonian and Latvian defence models constitute a particularly intriguing pair while Lithuania represents a compromise between them.

After the restoration of independence in 1991, NATO membership and the principle of collective defence based on Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty became the main foreign policy objectives for the Baltic States, as local political elites were convinced that the Organization would have a pivotal and strategic role in strengthening their independence and sovereignty, as well as in confronting potential existential threats from the Russian side. NATO membership, combined with EU accession, was also strongly supported by the public. After successful reforms and relatively smooth accession negotiations, all three countries joined NATO in 2004. Paradoxically, this main strategic achievement left the Baltic States without a clear long-term vision of what should be the future goal of the countries' security and defence policies. This is mainly because over the decade when the Baltic States were preparing to join NATO, the Alliance transformed. The same applies to the visions and perceptions of the organization (and of the so-called Western world as a whole) towards Russia. During this time, NATO repositioned itself from an organization committed to the principle of collective defence to a multi-tasking body dealing with issues beyond the original collective defence, e.g. anti-terrorism activities, peacekeeping missions, and crisis management. Similarly, in the early 2000s Russia was rather considered as a partner, not as an adversary (Veebel and Ploom, 2018b). Thus, in 2004 the Baltic States did not, in fact, join the same organization that they were expecting to join in the early 1990s, i.e. an organization with a primary focus on the principle of collective defence, as well as an organization with the capability and willingness to defend its member states in response to a military attack by an external party.

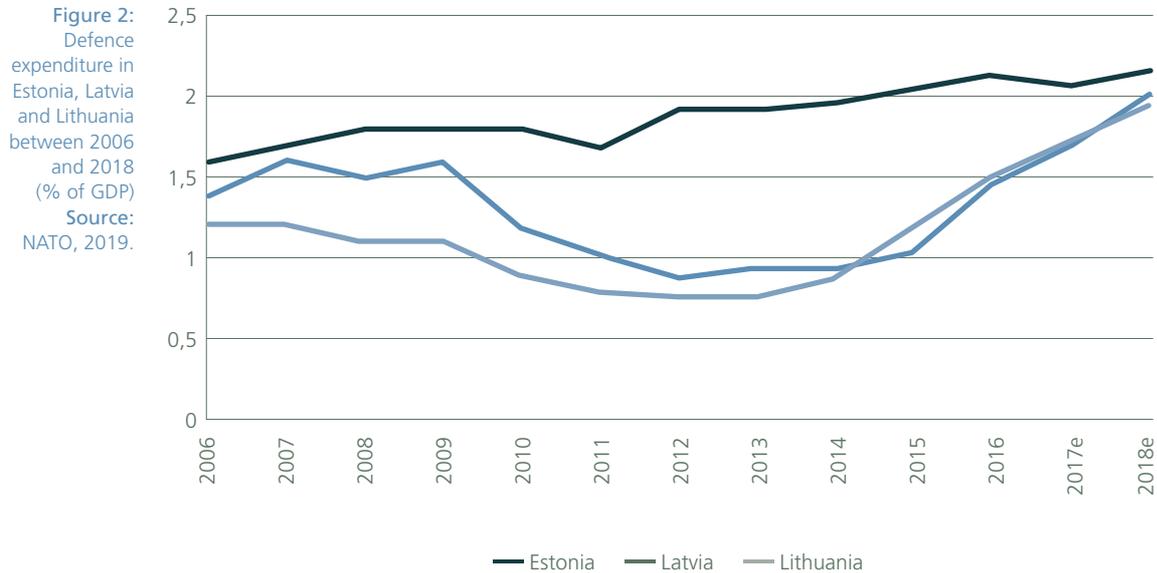
This fundamental shift has left visible traces, particularly in the evolution of the Latvian national defence model. The country has linked its security to NATO membership and Article 5. This has also been reflected in the subordination of national defence activities to the global role of NATO, supplemented by cooperation efforts between Russia and NATO. In practice, this has resulted in greater attention being paid to expeditionary capabilities. Moreover, participation in international missions and operations (particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq) became the central axis of Latvian defence activities (Andžāns and Veebel, 2017). Symbolically enough, the former camouflage of Latvian uniforms was changed to a desert pattern (though a new pattern, closer to the domestic terrain, was presented in December 2015). Therefore, due to the greater focus on out-of-area international missions and operations, the principle of territorial defence was fundamentally neglected in the Latvian defence model.

Subsequently, compulsory military service was abolished in favour of entirely professional armed forces, from 2007 onwards. In the 2000s, Latvian defence expenditure amounted to a maximum of 1.6% of its gross domestic product

(GDP). The defence budget was considerably reduced from 2009 onwards, due to the economic and financial crisis. The lowest point of defence expenditure was reached in 2012, when it amounted to 0.88% of GDP (i.e. 232 million USD; see, NATO, 2017, p 7). The further decrease in defence expenditure from 2009 onwards is yet more remarkable bearing in mind that the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 had exacerbated threat perceptions in Latvia. However, no action was taken to increase the defence budget. Among the reasons were the recent outbreak of the economic and financial crisis, and the United States' attempt to "reset" its relationship with Russia.

A significant change occurred only after Russia's intervention in Ukraine. This event indubitably changed the threat perceptions of both the Latvian political elite and society at large. In the light of these developments, the defence budget was increased from 1.04% of GDP (295 million USD) and further increased in the subsequent years (see Figure 2). This increased defence budget has therefore only recently allowed Latvia to strengthen its national armed forces. For example, it was only agreed in 2014 to procure armoured vehicles (123 used reconnaissance combat vehicles, namely Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) – the CVR(T)) for the first time since independence was regained. Up until then, the Latvian National Armed Forces were the only NATO armed forces without armoured vehicles. Since then, there have also been procurements in small arms, trucks, Carl Gustavs (man-portable reusable anti-tank rocket launchers), Spike guided missile systems, and so on. Recently, in 2017, an agreement was reached to buy 47 second-hand self-propelled M109 howitzers and Stinger man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS). Military personnel were also expanded from 4600 in 2014 to 5700 in 2017, and the training of reserve soldiers was resumed in 2015. Additionally, the number of volunteers willing to serve in the Latvian National Guard (Zemessardze) reached 7900 in 2017 (LETA, 2017).

Similarly to Latvia, the dynamically changing global security environment and the shift in the main goals of NATO has put significant pressure on the rationale of staying true to Estonia's national defence model. However, Estonia's response was substantially different from Latvia's. Although NATO and Article 5 constitute a core element of the Estonian national defence model, and the country actively contributes to the Alliance's international operations, Estonia did not neglect the territorial defence principle at any stage during the observed period. From the 2000s onwards, along with NATO membership, particular attention was devoted to the development of its initial independent defence capabilities. Estonian territorial defence is based on the following principles: a) the defence forces are divided into two parts: general units and territorial defence units; b) the country's territory and units are divided into military-territorial formations; and c) on the basis of the military-territorial formations, management is organized in a way that would allow it to function even after the collapse of the national defence system in crisis situations, e.g. when the political or centrally-coordinated military leadership is interrupted, or NATO assistance is delayed (Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2017a).



In more detail, Estonia uses a mixed model of a professional military contingent, a conscript army and reservists (as does Lithuania). The average number of personnel in the regular armed forces in Estonia during peacetime is about 6500, half of them conscripts. At the end of 2016, there were 3200 active servicemen (professional soldiers) (Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 2017, Figure 4). The conscript army is compiled based on compulsory military service for men between 18 and 27 years of age. After completing conscription, draftees join the reserve forces. In recent years, the number of individuals annually entering the conscript service amounted to roughly 3300 men (Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 2017). The planned size of the operational (wartime) armed forces personnel is 21,000. After mobilizing the reserves, the wartime structure of the armed forces is estimated to reach 60,000 personnel, of which the high readiness reserve is about 25,000 strong (The Estonian Defence Forces, 2016). Altogether, 269,586 people were listed as reservists in the register by the end of 2016 (Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 2017 p 7).

Since the 2000s, Estonia has undertaken to develop its initial independent defence capabilities, which are reflected in its defence expenditure. All incumbent governments have sought to gradually increase (and, later on, maintain) defence expenditure close to or at least equal to 2% of GDP. However, due to the economic crisis, a setback in the defence budget was also manifest in Estonia, and defence expenditure was cut three times in 2009, by an overall amount of 37.63 million EUR. However, the magnitude of the decrease in defence expenditure was significantly lower in Estonia than in Latvia. Even during the crisis years, in Estonia defence expenditure was maintained at least at the level of 1.68% of GDP.

The Estonian defence budget in real terms has been higher than in Latvia since 2009, notwithstanding its smaller economy and the smaller number of inhabitants compared to Latvia (NATO, 2010, p 4; NATO, 2017, p 7). Moreover, the country managed to recover quickly and to once again refocus on the target of 2% of GDP. Since 2015, Estonia has spent more than 2% of the country's GDP on national defence (NATO, 2017, p 8).

This stable and steady increase in defence expenditure has allowed Estonia to retain very formidable territorial defence capabilities. Its Defence Forces were already better equipped in the early 2000s when, for example, in 2004 and 2005 second-hand Patria Pasi XA-180, and in 2010 Patria Pasi XA-188 armoured personnel carriers (APCs) were procured, both currently numbered at 136. As the crisis in Ukraine unfolded, further steps were taken to strengthen the land forces. In 2014 Estonia agreed to buy 44 second-hand Combat Vehicle CV 90 infantry fighting vehicles and a further 37 hulls of the same type of vehicle, along with Javelin man-portable anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) systems. In 2017, a decision to buy 12 new K9 Thunder self-propelled 155 mm howitzers was announced, among other measures. A significant part of the wartime structure of the Estonian military forces is also formed by the Estonian home guard, known as the Estonian Defence League (*Eesti Kaitseliit*), functionally a close equivalent to Latvia's Zemessardze. There are about 16,000 members of the Estonian Defence League; together with youth and women's organizations, it numbers approximately 25,000 (Veebel and Ploom, 2017), which means that the organization is about twice as big as the Latvian home guard.

The key strategy documents in national defence in Estonia, such as the currently valid version of the National Security Concept from 2017, and the National Defence Strategy from 2011 (Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2017), state that the country's defence is grounded in a broad concept of security, involving the principles of whole-of-government and whole-of-society, putting emphasis on the combination of military and non-military capabilities and resources. The same applies to the National Security Concept of Latvia from 2015, which also clearly refers to a broad concept of security (National Security Concept of Latvia, 2015). Thus, next to NATO's collective defence principle, the Baltic States recognize the role of a broad conception of security, a national comprehensive approach, progressing in this direction in their own way. The Estonians appear to be strongly convinced that conscription is essential, and hence keep training large-scale reserve units in order to mobilize them in the event of a potential conflict (e.g. Laar, 2011). Military service also enjoys significant public support (more than 90% according to recent polls; see Kivirähk, 2018). It is considered of vital importance in Estonia for maintaining the country's initial independent defence capabilities should a military conflict occur. Latvia, on the other hand, abolished conscription in 2007. One cannot discount the impact of neighbouring Lithuania and Sweden having decided to return to conscription, thus making Latvia the only country belonging to the Baltic Sea region's Nordic and Baltic countries to solely rely on professional armed forces.

The Estonian defence model enables the mobilization of a large number of people whereas the Latvian model does not, and once again the Lithuanian model is a compromise between Estonia's and Latvia's models. All three are by their nature still fully non-aggressive, without any room for pre-emptive initiatives, extra territoriality or asymmetrical tools, not to mention the difference in scale and numbers compared to the Russian military forces. In light of this, conventional rebalancing is unachievable.

Finally, yet importantly, besides the financial considerations, the way the Baltic countries understand the nature of a potential threat from Russia's point of view – i.e. coming back to the potential scenarios of aggression from the Russian side – could be of great importance when explaining the differences between the national defence systems. In principle, all three states recognize various facets of asymmetric warfare implemented by Russia, such as attacks in cyberspace, psychological warfare, propaganda, the use of intelligence services and economic instruments, and so on. It can also be assumed that their opinions converge with regard to what a direct potential conflict would look like. Considering Russia's previous military experiences in conducting regional military operations in Georgia and Ukraine, it could take different forms: a full-scale or a geographically limited direct conventional attack could ensue involving all military domains, namely air and sea among others (e.g. the Russo-Georgian War in 2008), or asymmetrical and formally unannounced warfare may result in limiting involvement to the land and cyber domains (e.g. the Russo-Ukrainian War since 2014).

In the event of the first-case scenario, the defence of the Baltic States would almost entirely depend on the allied capabilities, the United States in particular; in all likelihood, the indigenous armed forces could assist the allies in ground and support operations. If Russia, however, was to employ a kind of second-case scenario, then national capabilities would play a much more significant role, as the capabilities of the antagonists would be levelled by the absence of formidable military capabilities in the air and sea domains. Baltic security and defence models have significant limitations with regard to fundamental dilemmas in deterrence. Bearing in mind that all three models are oriented towards guaranteeing territorial defence, the practical question remains whether in real terms they are aimed at: a) defending the geographical territory of countries in order to avoid all possible losses of territory; b) defending the countries' territories to the fullest extent possible, but also accepting some losses; or c) providing sufficient deterrence to avoid any attack. From the perspective of the armed forces, the preferred option would surely be the third one; however, the credibility of the current models to provide reliable deterrence is questionable. None of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian defence models consist of independent retaliation capabilities, which would tempt Russia to opt for painless testing-risking.

5 EXPECTATIONS OF THE BALTIC COUNTRIES WITH REGARD TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH NATO AND THE EU

According to the national public opinion surveys available, the key factor in ensuring the security of the Baltic countries is clearly supposed to be NATO. Regular public opinion polls in Estonia indicate that about 55-60% of the respondents (and 75-78% of the respondents with Estonian citizenship) consider NATO to be the main security guarantee in Estonia, whereas only about 40% mention the EU or the role of Estonia's independent national defence capabilities. About 20-25% of the respondents state that Baltic cooperation is important (Kivirähk, 2018). Besides this, the Eurobarometer survey from early 2014 indicated that people in Estonia are rather undecided, as 47% of the survey respondents were in favour of the European armed forces and 44% of the respondents opposed the idea. At the EU level, this result is still slightly positive, considering that on average 46% of the respondents in the EU-28 supported the idea and 47% were against it (Eurobarometer 2014, T22).

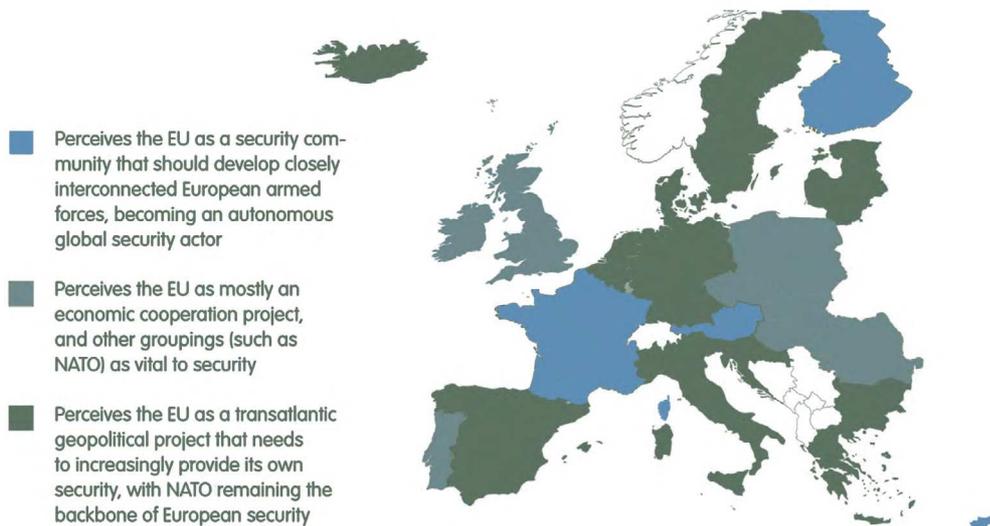
Similar evidence has been found in public opinion polls in Latvia and Lithuania. According to a public opinion poll conducted in Latvia in 2016, 59% of the interviewed Latvian residents consider that NATO contributes to Latvia's security, and the share of Latvian residents supporting NATO is stable (Latvian Ministry of Defence, 2016). Besides this, in an older survey, "The Opinion of the Inhabitants of Latvia on National Defence Issues", which was conducted in Latvia in 2015, 46% of respondents felt a NATO-backed protection from military threats. In response to the question "In which spheres do you personally feel NATO-backed protection and guaranteed security?", 35% of respondents said that they felt NATO-backed air and maritime security. The prevention of international conflicts was mentioned by 30%, while 23% mentioned the prevention of the spread of terrorism and mass acts of terrorism. When describing what should be the main tasks of NATO, 63% of respondents indicated that NATO member states must ensure and strengthen its collective security (Sargs.lv, 2015).

In a survey conducted in Lithuania in 2015, around 81% of the respondents supported or fully supported Lithuania's NATO membership. Only one in ten Lithuanian citizens claimed the opposite. About 82% of the respondents supported or fully supported the permanent presence of NATO allies in the territory of Lithuania, whereas 13% of respondents disapproved it. According to the survey, 72% of the Lithuanian population felt that NATO should send more personnel and equipment to Lithuania, while about 19% objected to it (Ministry of National Defence, 2016). According to the most recent public opinion survey in Lithuania, conducted in 2018, support of NATO by the Lithuanian people is at its highest of the last five years, as 86% of the population are in favour of Lithuania's NATO membership. About 76% of the respondents in Lithuania think that the German-led multinational NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battalion Battle Group deployed in Lithuania ensures deterrence against hostile countries (Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, 2016). In this respect, public expectations in the Baltic

countries are definitely running high as far as the security guarantees of NATO are concerned.

Besides this, a survey of the ECFR indicates that the Baltic countries are definitely interested in gaining additional security guarantees at the EU level. On the one hand, as far as the perceptions of the Baltic countries of the EU as a security actor is concerned, the Baltic countries consider the EU as a transatlantic geopolitical project that needs to increasingly provide its own security, with NATO remaining the backbone of European security (Dennison et al 2018) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3:
Perceptions
of the EU as a
security actor
Source:
Dennison et al.,
2018.



On the other hand, at the national level, all three Baltic countries support the PESCO initiatives, to a greater or lesser extent. Estonia sees PESCO as an essential initiative that could significantly contribute to national security, and is particularly interested in establishing a so-called “military Schengen Area,” which would help EU member states’ military units pass through one another’s territory (Veebel 2017). Latvia was initially reluctant to participate in PESCO. Nonetheless, as long as PESCO enhances Latvian security and supplements NATO’s role, the country will see the initiative as a useful way to strengthen relations with its European allies. Lithuania supports closer EU cooperation on security and defence, and is leading a PESCO project on cyber rapid response. It also participates in the military mobility project – which, according to the country’s Minister of Defence, is in the interests of both NATO and the EU.

Conclusion In recent decades, the military reforms and development in the Baltic States have followed the NATO preferences and assessment system, drawing on the official strategic-level documents of NATO, and priorities and needs have been defined. This has been the way to determine what is effective and what contributes best to progress and outcome in terms of sufficient defence and credible deterrence. In practical terms, the reforms in the Baltic militaries have mostly been focused on the ability to fit into the solidarity-based deterrence model, to have niche capabilities, to be able to receive allied forces and to assure the local population that the best choices have been made. This is called “collective credible deterrence”; this article has pointed out that a closer look may reveal it as mainly an exercise in assurance or reassurance.

However, NATO’s assessment and force development priorities are in many aspects still based on the pre-Georgian understanding of how, if at all, the aggression against member states might or will happen. As a result, while we are flexing our muscles according to 2009/2010 priorities, Russian military planners are redesigning and improving on their much younger 2015 military doctrine, which benefits as much as possible from the lessons of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. As a result, what might look like a mighty financial effort from the Baltic States may in some aspects prove quite useless in Russian eyes. On the other hand, we might miss some available opportunities for increasing deterrence with reasonably low additional costs.

While the existing conventional reserves of the NATO member states are sizeable, safe and quick deployment is a critical variable in the event of a conflict scenario in the Baltic States. This might be problematic considering the very limited safe transportation options available in the region. The Baltic States, neighbouring the North-West military district of Russia, are one of the few areas where, compared to NATO’s similar needs and options, Russian options in resupplying, logistical support and regrouping of military forces are very promising, especially concerning safety and alternative logistical options. The Russian advantage could actually be even growing, should Russia believe that there exists a winning regional strategy for conflict with NATO, and focuses on rapid improvement of its anti-access/area denial capabilities near the Baltic borders.

From the perspective of the Baltic States’ security, even when all of it fits well into the universal systematic force building logic according to the highest NATO standards, there is a need to consider also the alternative view. This view says that it is not NATO that needs to be convinced of our growing capabilities, but rather Russian political leaders and military planners.

Bibliography

1. *Andreasen, S., Lunn, S. and Williams, I., 2016. Post-Warsaw analysis: what NATO said (or didn't say) about nuclear weapons. NTI Analysis. <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/post-warsawanalysis-what-nato-said-or-didnt-sayabout-nuclear-weapons/>.*
2. *Andžāns, M. and Veebel, V., 2017. Deterrence Dilemma in Latvia and Estonia: Finding the Balance between External Military Solidarity and Territorial Defence. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 3(2), pp 29-41.*
3. *Chalmers, M., 2011. Words that matter? NATO declaratory policy and the DDR. NTI Analysis. http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/NTI_Framework_Chpt2.pdf?_=1322701473.*
4. *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries, 2010-2017. NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Press Release. http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_06/20170629_170629-pr2017-111-en.pdf.*
5. *Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 2017. Aruanne kaitseväekohustuse täitmisest ja kaitseväeteenistuse korraldamisest 2016. aastal (available only in Estonian; Translation: Report on the number of active servicemen and organization of the service in 2016). <https://www.kra.ee/kodanik-ja-riigikaitse/uuringud-ja-aruanded/>.*
6. *Dennison, S., Franke, U. E. and Zerka, P., 2018. The nightmare of the dark: The security fears that keep Europeans awake at night. European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2018.*
7. *Department of Defence, 2018. Nuclear posture review: February 2018. <https://media.defence.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872877/-1/-1/1/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY.PDF>.*
8. *Estonian Defence Forces, 2016. Estonian Defence Forces. <http://www.mil.ee/en/defence-forces>.*
9. *Estonian Defence Forces, 2018. Estonian Defence Forces. <http://www.mil.ee/en/defence-forces>.*
10. *Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2017. National Defence Strategy. http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_defence_strategy.pdf.*
11. *European Commission, 2017. Special Eurobarometer 464b. Europeans' attitudes towards security. Fieldwork June 2017, publication December 2017. <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/1569>.*
12. *Information on defence expenditures, NATO, 2019. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm.*
13. *Kivirähk, 2018. Public opinion and national defence. A survey ordered by the Estonian Ministry of Defence. Autumn 2018. http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2018_october_0.pdf.*
14. *Laar, M., 2011. Reserv on Eesti kaitse selgroog. (available only in Estonian; Translation: The reservist army is the backbone of Estonian defence). Database Riigikaitse.ee. <http://riigikaitse.lehed.ee/2011/05/05/reserv-on-eesti-kaitse-selgroog/>.*
15. *Latvian National Armed Forces, 2017. Kārtējās un pārbaudes mācības (available only in Latvian; Translation: Regular and testing exercises). http://www.mil.lv/Rezerve/Kartejas_parbaudes_macibas.aspx.*
16. *LETA, 2017. Zemessargu skaits palielinās, bet nav sasniedzis maksimālo iespējamo (available only in Latvian; Translation: The number of home guards increases, though has not reached the maximum possible level). <http://apollo.tvnet.lv/zinas/zemessargu-skaits-palielinas-bet-nav-sasniedzis-maksimalo-iespejamo/789634>.*
17. *Luik, J. and Jermalavičius, T., 2017. A plausible scenario of nuclear war in Europe, and how to deter it: a perspective from Estonia. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 73, pp 233-239.*
18. *Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, 2016. Lithuanians are particularly positive towards NATO allies, polls suggest. http://kam.lt/en/news_1098/current_issues/lithuanians_are_particularly_positive_towards_nato_allies_polls_suggest.html.*
19. *National Security Concept of Estonia, 2017. https://www.riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failed/national_security_concept_2017.pdf.*

20. *National Security Strategy of Lithuania, 2017. The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, version of the Resolution of 17 January 2017. Accessed on 28 May. <https://kam.lt/download/56659/national-security-strategy-2017-01-17>.*
21. *NATO's new strategic concept, 2010. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_68986.htm?selectedLocale=en.*
22. *NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces, 2015. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm.*
23. *Rathke, J., 2016. NATO's nuclear policy as part of a revitalized deterrence strategy. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-percentE2-percent80-percent99s-nuclear-policy-part-revitalizeddeterrencestrategy>.*
24. *Sauer, T., 2016. Just leave it: NATO's nuclear weapons policy at the Warsaw summit. Arms Control Association. <https://www.armscontrol.org/print/7439>.*
25. *Shirreff, R., 2017. War with Russia: an urgent warning from senior military command. London: Coronet.*
26. *Shlapak, D. A. and Johnson, M. W., 2016. Reinforcing deterrence on NATO's eastern flank: wargaming the defence of the Baltics. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.*
27. *Šliwa, Z., Veebel, V. and Lebrun, M., 2018. Russian Ambitions and Hybrid Modes of Warfare. Estonian Journal of Military Studies, 2018 (7).*
28. *State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia, 2015. VK: Zemessargu kvalitatīva apmācība ir vitāli svarīga valsts drošībai (available only in Latvian; Translation: State Audit Office: qualitative training of home guards is vital to state security). <http://www.lrvk.gov.lv/vk-zemessargu-kvalitativa-apmaciba-ir-vitali-svariga-valsts-drosibai/>.*
29. *The National Security Concept of Latvia, 2015. <http://www.mepoforum.sk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Latvia-security-concept-2015-en.pdf>.*
30. *Thompson, L. B., 2016. Why the Baltic States are where nuclear war is most likely to begin. The National Interests. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-the-baltic-states-are-where-nuclear-war-most-likely-17044?page=2>.*
31. *Veebel, V. and Ploom, I., 2016. Estonian perceptions of security: Not only about Russia and the refugees. Journal on Baltic Security, 2(2), pp 35-70.*
32. *Veebel, V. and Ploom, I., 2018. The Deterrence Credibility of NATO and the Readiness of the Baltic States to Employ the Deterrence Instruments. Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review, 16(1), pp 171-200.*
33. *Veebel, V., 2018. (Un)justified expectations on nuclear deterrence of non-nuclear NATO members: the case of Estonia and Latvia? Defence & Security Analysis, Vol. 34, Issue 3, pp 291-309.*
34. *Veebel, V., 2017. Estonia: On the way to a European army. In: Bartels, Hans-Peter (Ed.). Strategic Autonomy and European Defence: On the way to a European army? J.H.W. Dietz.*

