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**Strategies and Doctrines  
of the Armed Forces  
in the New Security Environment**

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## **The Role of Reserve Forces in Strengthening National Defence: Lessons from Latvia**

### **Abstract**

*The strategic utilisation of reserve forces is increasingly recognised as a critical element in strengthening national defence. This essay explores the role of reserve forces in Latvia, a nation that has effectively integrated reservists into its military framework to enhance operational capabilities and readiness. Through a detailed analysis of Latvia's reserve forces development and maintenance, the study identifies key strategies and best practices that can be applied by other countries to bolster their national defence. The discussion emphasises the critical aspects of effective training, integration of reservists with active-duty forces, and flexible deployment strategies. Additionally, the essay addresses the challenges faced by Latvia in implementing these measures, including budget constraints, recruitment difficulties, and the need for continual modernisation. Through this analysis, the essay aims to provide valuable insights and lessons that can guide other countries in enhancing their defence posture through the strategic use of reserve forces. The Latvian model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how reservists can be leveraged to provide a robust and adaptable national defence system.*

**Key words:** Reserve forces, training and development, deployment, mobilisation, challenges and strategies.

## Introduction

Imagine a nation where every citizen is a potential defender, ready to rise to the occasion at a moment's notice. This is a reality in Latvia, where the strategic utilisation of reserve forces has become a cornerstone of national defence. Reserve forces, comprising trained military personnel who can be mobilised rapidly in times of need, play a crucial role in enhancing a nation's military capabilities and readiness. As noted by military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, 'the best strategy is always to be very strong,' and reserve forces provide a flexible and cost-effective solution to bolster active-duty troops, ensuring that a country can respond effectively to various threats and emergencies.

In the context of Latvia, the integration of reserve forces into the national defence framework has been particularly significant. Latvia, a Baltic nation with a strategic geopolitical position, has faced numerous security challenges over the years. To address these challenges, Latvia has developed a robust military structure that heavily relies on the strategic use of reserve forces. This approach not only enhances the operational capabilities of the Latvia military but also ensures a high level of preparedness and adaptability.

The role of reserve forces within Latvia's military framework is multifaceted and strategically significant. During peacetime, reservists provide essential support in various operations and contribute to national and international missions, thereby reducing the operational burden on active-duty personnel. In times of crises, they serve as a strategic reserve, ready to be activated to reinforce national defence or respond to emergent threats. This dual role underscores Latvia's commitment to maintaining a robust and resilient defence posture, where the reserve forces are not merely supplementary but integral to the nation's security strategy.

The essay analyses the development and maintenance of Latvian's reserve forces, highlighting key strategies and best practices that have contributed to their success. By examining Latvia's reserve forces as a model for strengthening national defence, this study aims to offer valuable insights and lessons for other nations seeking to strengthen their national defence through the strategic use of reserve forces.

## Overview of Latvia's Reserve Forces

### *Historical development*

The development of Latvia's reserve forces is deeply rooted in the nation's history and reflects the country's efforts to rebuild its military capabilities following decades of Soviet occupation. The foundation of the current Latvian armed forces can be traced back to the establishment of the Latvian National Guard,

or Zemessardze, on 23 August, 1991, soon after Latvia regained independence. [1] This marked a newly independent nation's first organised defence force, emphasizing the urgent need for national self-defence and security.

A key milestone in the evolution of Latvia's reserve forces was the formation of the unified Latvian army on 24 November 1994. This unification merged the National Guard (NG) with the Defence Forces, creating a cohesive structure capable of effectively addressing national security threats. [2] The NG was established as a voluntary public military organization, mobilising civilian support for national defence and reinforcing the country's defence posture during a critical transition period. [3]

Today, the Latvian reserve forces are an integral component of the NAF, comprising active-duty personnel, reservists, and the NG. It remains the largest segment of the reserve forces, highlighting Latvia's emphasis on community involvement in defence. Volunteers undergo regular training and participate in national and international missions, supporting active-duty forces during peacetime and crisis operations.

The NG plays a multifaceted role within Latvia's defense strategy. Its responsibilities include maintaining readiness for rapid deployment, supporting military and security operations, and serving as a strategic reserve force during national emergencies. The Guard also supports other security units like the National Police, Fire and Rescue Service, and Border Guard, providing workforce, expertise, and equipment when needed.

Since its formation, the NG has evolved significantly. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Latvia prioritized establishing a defense force aligned with Western values and democratic principles. The NG quickly became a trusted entity, growing to 17,000 volunteers within its first year. Early tasks included state defence, securing borders, and supporting national security forces and disaster relief efforts. [4]

Latvia's alignment with Western values included democratic civilian control over the military, with key military positions subordinated to elected officials. Early tasks for the newly established forces included supporting the National Police in maintaining public order, assisting in emergencies, and aiding the National Border Guard in securing borders with Russia and Belarus. The NG played a crucial role in these efforts, providing security and stability, monitoring Russian Army activities, and fostering international military cooperation with Western allies. It also ensured the loyalty of former Soviet military personnel before their appointment to commanding positions.

By the end of 1994, the remnants of the Soviet Army had left Latvia, coinciding with the creation of the Latvian Armed Forces. Initially, the NG and Armed

Forces operated under separate command chains. However, the NG eventually became a permanent military structure under unified command while retaining its mission and tasks specific to territorial defence. This integration ensured a cohesive defence strategy, leveraging the National Guard's community-based approach and volunteer force to address security and defence-related challenges effectively.

### ***Current structure and organisation.***

Today, the Latvian reserve forces are integral to the National Armed Forces (NAF), which comprise active-duty personnel, reservists, and the NG. The reserve forces are structured into several key components:

1. *National Guard (NG)*: The largest component is volunteers who undergo regular training. The NG plays a crucial role in both national and international missions, ensuring seamless integration with active-duty units and enhances overall operational readiness.

2. *Reservists*: These are individuals who have completed their active-duty service and are available for recall in times of need. They undergo periodic training to maintain their skills and readiness.

3. *Specialized Reserve Units*: These units consist of personnel with specific skills and expertise, such as medical, engineering, or cyber defense. They provide critical support to both active-duty and NG units.

The NG, with its community-based approach, not only strengthens national defence but also fosters a sense of civic duty and patriotism among its members. Regular training and participation in various missions ensure that the Guard remains vital to Latvia's defence strategy. The integration of reservists and specialised units further enhances the flexibility and capability of the NAF, ensuring that Latvia can respond effectively to a wide range of security challenges.

## **The utilisation of Reserve Forces**

### ***Training and Development***

The Latvian Armed Forces, through TRADOC, have developed a structured training program for reservists. The basic military training course covers essential skills, including weapons handling, legal frameworks, resource management, combat skills, navigation, and emergency medical assistance. [5] Annual training exercises ensure reservists maintain their skills and readiness for various military operations. [6]

Continuous skill development is crucial for the readiness and effectiveness of reserve forces. Regular training sessions help reservists stay updated with the

latest military tactics and technologies, ensuring they can seamlessly integrate with active-duty forces when needed. [7] This ongoing development also fosters leadership qualities and enhances the overall capability and adaptability of the reserve forces. [8] For example, the Netherlands' study on the commitment of reservists in operations highlights the importance of ongoing training to adapt to a changing security environment. [9]

To professionalise the NG, Latvia established an education and military training system for reserve forces. Training centers were set up, including the NG Infantry Training Center in Cēsis (1991), the Signal Corps Training Center in Ogre (1993), and the Reconnaissance Training Center in Dobeles (1995). These centers were later unified under TRADOC to ensure consistent national training standards. TRADOC oversees the development of military doctrines, training programs, recruitment, and candidate selection for professional and reserve soldiers. [10] This unified approach ensures all personnel are trained to the same standards, enhancing interoperability and facilitating the integration of reserve soldiers into professional units.

In 1992, the Latvian Cadet Force organization (Jaunsardze) was established under the auspices of the NG. Its purpose is to prepare young people for service in the NAF by developing and strengthening their physical fitness and posture and instilling and enhancing moral qualities such as willpower, a sense of duty, love for the homeland, camaraderie, and discipline. Today, this organization is the largest independent National Voluntary Youth organization that serves the same purpose as in 1992. Jaunsardze collaborates closely with similar youth organizations in Lithuania, Estonia, and the UK. It serves as a platform for introducing young people to military affairs and promoting military service as a profession of choice. After graduating from programs at Jaunsardze, many young people choose professional service as their profession. [11]

### ***Integration with active-duty forces/personnel***

Another step in training and developing reserve forces is to identify strategies that integrate them with active-duty personnel, which involves several strategies. Initially, any armed forces have to establish a clear vision defining the goals and objectives of integration. Secondly, it is important to create a supporting coalition to build a time to support integration. Third, developing an implementation strategy to set specific goals and measures for integration is very important. Fourth, embedding changes in organisational culture ensure that integration becomes part of the military culture. The last is to maintain momentum and continuously assess the integration process. [12]

Also, coordination and communication between reserve and active units are crucial for operations success. This important includes key components such as

establishing lines of communication, sharing vital intelligence and synchronising tactical efforts coordinating actions to achieve common objectives. [13]

### ***Deployment and mobilisation***

The deployment and mobilisation of the Latvian Reserve Forces are critical components of the nation's defence strategy. The process begins with a comprehensive assessment of the current security situation, followed by a decision from the NAF leadership to activate reserve units. This decision is based on various factors, including the nature of the threat, the required response time, and the specific capabilities needed. Once the decision is made, reservists are notified through a well-established communication network, ensuring rapid dissemination of orders and instructions.

Upon receiving mobilisation orders, reservists are required to report to designated assembly points within a specified timeframe. These assembly points are strategically located to facilitate quick and efficient organisation of personnel and equipment. At these locations, reservists undergo a series of preparatory activities, including medical checks, equipment issuance, and refresher training. This ensures that all personnel are physically and mentally prepared for their assigned roles. The integration of reservists with active-duty units is meticulously planned to maintain operational coherence and effectiveness.

The deployment phase involves the actual movement of reserve units to their designated operational areas. This phase is executed with precision to ensure that reserve forces can seamlessly integrate with active-duty units and other components of the NAF. The deployment strategy is designed to maximise the strengths of the reserve forces, leveraging their specialised skills and local knowledge. Continuous communication and coordination are maintained throughout the deployment to adapt to evolving situations and ensure mission success. The Latvian Reserve Forces, through their structured and efficient mobilisation and deployment processes, significantly enhance the nation's defence capabilities.

## **Challenges and Solutions in Managing Reserve Forces**

### ***Budget and Resource constraints***

Managing reserve forces in Latvia faces significant budget and resource constraints. The defence budget for 2024 is planned at 1.13 billion euro, which is 2.4% of GDP, with a goal to increase to 3% by 2027. [14] Despite this increase, the allocation must cover various priorities, including personnel, maintenance, and investment in capabilities and infrastructure. [14]

The Latvian NAF has historically focused on increasing the number of personnel rather than enhancing the quality and readiness of the reserve forces. [15] This

has led to a situation where the reserver system requires rapid and purposeful development to meet NATO standards. [15] The State Audit Office has emphasised the need for a comprehensive training system for reserve soldiers and modern data records to ensure quick mobilisation. [15]

After joining NATO in 2004, Latvia shifted its defence policy to focus on professionalising and modernising its NAF and improving interoperability with NATO. This led to less emphasis on reserve training and retention, causing stagnation in the reserve force training system. Viewing conscription as outdated, Latvia ended mandatory conscription in January 2007, transitioning to a professional military as part of broader defence reforms after the nation's NATO accession. in 2004. [16]

In the wake of the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, the notion of establishing and upholding an extensive reserve force training system began to slowly resurface in the realm of political discourse. However, it was not until after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2022 that Latvia reinstated compulsory military conscription for young males aged 18-26. Following eleven months of new military training, integrated reserve units are allocated to the NG based on the territorial principle. Subsequently, the NG assumes responsibility for the coordination and implementation of periodic military refresher training for these reserve units. [17]

The latest discourse revolves around the potential implementation of provisions allowing females to voluntarily enlist in the State Defence Service. The recent proposal of CHOD to also consider female enrollment in the State Defence Service has sparked heated debate. This proposal allows female volunteers with the same benefits currently exclusive to male citizens who volunteer for and complete the State Defence Service, such as state-funded university education. Proponents argue that this change would significantly contribute to the strategic objective of maintaining a reserve force of at least 60,000 personnel. However, public opinion on this initiative is divided, with a substantial portion of society viewing it as an impractical means of bolstering the number of reservists. [18]

### ***Recruitment and retention***

Recruitment and retention of reserve forces in Latvia present a unique challenge. The introduction of the mandatory State Defence Service aims to bolster the number of troops, but sustaining and operational reserve components demand committed reservists. [18] The Latvian government has reinstated conscription *to address these challenges, reflecting a broader trend in the Baltic region in response to changing security environments.* [19]

Efforts to attract and retain reservists include offering flexible service options and improving the overall appeal of military service. However, economic



pressures and challenges in employment stability pose significant hurdles. [20] The Latvian military must also compete with civilian industries for talent, necessitating innovative recruitment strategies and retention programs. [20]

One of the main challenges in Latvia is the rapidly declining and aging population. State institutions and services need to compete with the private sector for an ever-declining pool of young professionals. [21] Population data shows that the age structure in Latvia is not promising. In the future, this competition for young professionals will unavoidably increase, putting more and more stress on labor-intensive branches, including LNAF. [22]

The Latvian military must also compete with civilian industries for talent, necessitating innovative recruitment strategies and retention programs. One of the unique recruitment sources is the voluntary Latvian Cadet Force (Jaunsardze) organisation composed of approximately 8000 youngsters. This organisation introduces youth to basic military disciplines like weapon management and shooting, survival skills and navigation, and other disciplines. After completing fourth-level training, these youngsters are seamlessly offered the chance to continue their service in the NG, ensuring a smooth and continuous recruitment process. [23] Transition to military service in the NG is seamless as Cadet Force 4th-level training programs align with military basic training standards for NG soldiers. [24] Another unique recruitment source for professional military service is the State Defence Service. After completing mandatory service, many members choose professional military service as their future profession. [17]

### ***Modernisation and Technology Advancement***

Modernisation and technological advancements are crucial for enhancing the capabilities of Latvia's reserve forces. The defence budget is set to grow significantly, reaching nearly 1.7 billion \$ by 2028. [25] This increase will fund the procurement of modern equipment, such as UH-60M helicopters, armored vehicles, and tactical communication systems. [25]

Latvia's modernisation efforts are driven by the need to replace outdated Soviet-era equipment and improve overall military readiness. [26] Investments in military infrastructure, including the development of new training areas and facilities, are also planned. [27] These advancements are essential for maintaining a capable and responsive reserve force in the face of evolving security threats.

The main budget priorities of the Ministry of Defence for 2024 to strengthen national defence capabilities include the enhancement of the combat capabilities of the NAF by developing medium-range air defence, acquiring coastal defence and long-range missile artillery systems, as well as ensuring full support for the national defence service for Latvian citizens and improving the NAF reservist

system. Equally important is the development of military infrastructure and a comprehensive national defence system, which also includes the initiation of work on the creation of the 'Sēlija' military training area and the military fortification of the country's eastern border. [28]

## **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

A broad population must gain essential skills for handling national threats and crises to ensure robust national defence and preparedness. Since joining NATO, Latvia has overlooked creating and maintaining reserves, a critical issue given its limited labor pool. Mandatory conscription is one of the few tools to sustain necessary reservist levels. Abolishing conscription in 2007 and neglecting reserve training in favor of a professional military was a political misstep that will take years to correct. [15]

### ***Key takeaways from Latvia's Experience***

The Development and operation of the Latvian Reserve Forces offer several key insights:

*First, integration with professional forces:* The Latvian NAF reserve system is designed to complement the professional military and the NG. This integration ensures a comprehensive defence strategy that leverages the strengths of both professional and reserve personnel. [29]

*Second, training and skill maintenance:* One of the critical aspects of the Latvian reserve system is the emphasis on continuous training. Regular training sessions are essential to maintain the military skills and readiness of reserve soldiers. [29]

*Third, data management:* Efficient management of reserve personnel data is crucial. Latvia has focused on creating modern data records that allow quick and easy access to reserve staff, ensuring that the reserve force can be mobilised when needed. [29]

*Fourth comprehensive defence approach:* Latvia's defence strategy includes a comprehensive approach involving societal resilience and protecting the state during conflicts. This approach ensures that a significant portion of the population is trained and prepared for national defence. [30]

### ***Applicability to other nations***

The Latvian experience with reserve forces can provide valuable lessons for other nations:

*1. Tailored training programs:* Different countries the size of Latvia can adopt its model of regular and targeted training programs to ensure that reserve forces remain skilled and ready for deployment. [29]

2. *Integrated defence systems*: The integration of reserve forces with professional military units and national guards can enhance the overall defence capabilities of a nation. This model can be particularly useful for countries with limited resources. [29]

3. *Efficient data management*: Implementing modern data management systems for reserve personnel can improve the efficiency and responsiveness of reserve forces. This is a critical aspect that other nations can replicate to enhance their military readiness. [30]

4. *Comprehensive defence strategies*: Adopting a comprehensive defence strategy that includes societal resilience and public involvement in national defence can strengthen a nation's overall security posture. [29]

### ***Recommendations for Future Developments***

To further enhance the effectiveness of the Latvian Reserve Forces, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Enhanced training programs*: Latvian NAF should develop more advanced, specialised training programs to keep pace with evolving military technologies and tactics. This will ensure that reserve forces are well-prepared for modern warfare scenarios. [15]

2. *Improve data system*: It is very important to invest in the development of more sophisticated data management systems to ensure real-time tracking and efficient mobilisation of reserve personnel. [15]

3. *Increased public engagement*: The government should focus on and continue to promote public awareness and involvement in national defence initiatives. This can be achieved through educational programs and community engagement activities. [30]

4. *International collaboration*: Strengthening collaboration with NATO and other international allies to share best practices and enhance the capabilities of the reserve forces through joint training exercises and knowledge exchange. [31]

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, Latvia's reserve forces are pivotal in bolstering national defence, drawing from a rich historical background and a well-structured current organisation. The evolution of these forces highlights the importance of adaptability and resilience in the face of a changing geopolitical environment. The integration of reserve forces with active-duty personnel, coupled with rigorous training and development programs, ensures a seamless and effective defence mechanism. Deployment and mobilisation strategies further underscore the readiness and versatility of these forces.

However, managing reserve forces is not without its challenges. Budget and resource constraints, recruitment and retention issues, and the need for modernisation and technological advancements are significant hurdles. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions and sustained investment to maintain a robust and capable reserve force.

Latvia's experience offers valuable lessons for other nations. Key takeaways include the importance of continuous training, effective integration with active-duty forces, and the need for a flexible and responsive organisational structure. These insights can guide other countries in enhancing their reserve forces, ensuring they are well-prepared to meet future defense needs.

Recommendations for future development include increased funding, targeted recruitment strategies, and embracing technological advancements. By learning from Latvia's successes and challenges, other nations can strengthen their reserve forces, contributing to a more secure and resilient global defence environment.

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