



## Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?

Viljar Veebel & Illimar Ploom

To cite this article: Viljar Veebel & Illimar Ploom (2019) Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35:4, 406-422, DOI: [10.1080/14751798.2019.1675947](https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1675947)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1675947>



Published online: 23 Oct 2019.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 107



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



# Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?

Viljar Veebel<sup>a</sup> and Illimar Ploom<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Strategic Studies, Baltic Defence College, Tartu, Estonia; <sup>b</sup>Department of Strategic Studies and Leadership, Estonian Military Academy, Tartu, Estonia

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study is to discuss which particular factors Russia considers as sufficient deterrent capabilities and whether the national defence models implemented in the Baltic countries have the potential to deter Russia's military planners and political leadership. Whilst the existing conventional reserves of NATO are sizeable, secure, and rapid, deployment is still a critical variable in case of a conflict in the Baltic countries because of the limited range of safe transportation options. However, whilst the Baltic States are developing their capabilities according to the priorities defined by NATO in 2010; which were updated after the invasion of Crimea in 2014, Russian military planners have meanwhile redesigned both their military doctrine and military forces, learning from the experience of the Russo-Georgian war, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and other recent confrontations. Accordingly, there is a risk that the efforts of the Baltic countries could prove rather inefficient in deterring Russia.

## KEYWORDS

NATO; deterrence; Baltic countries; Russia; national defence forces

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the Baltic States have concentrated their efforts on the improvement of their respective national defence models to respond to security threats stemming from Russia's aggressive behaviour in the international arena. The reforms have largely relied on NATO strategies, concepts, requirements, and assessment criteria, which the three Baltic countries have sought to integrate into their individual defence models. As a result, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have focused on fitting into the solidarity-based deterrence model of NATO, which includes the readiness of the Baltic countries to receive allied forces, to provide the defensive aspect of the alliance with relevant niche capabilities, and to assure the local population that the best choices has been made in terms of creating credible defence and deterrence.

To counter the security threats stemming from Russia, NATO has, mostly from the Wales 2014 Summit until now, enhanced its deterrence and defence posture. That said, the priorities, strategies, and assessments of the alliance remain outdated in many aspects. For example, whereas over the last decade, Russia has in a constant manner updated its defence postures – and cardinally reformed its defence forces to achieve

advantages in terms of high-level readiness, agility, and other critical aspects – the most recent strategic concept of the NATO Alliance, “Active Engagement, Modern Defence,”<sup>1</sup> still originates from 2010. Since then, the strategic concept of the alliance has been supplemented by several political declarations, but all of them have remained relatively superficial in encountering security threats stemming from Russia. Furthermore, although the alliance’s decision from September 2014 to launch large-scale military exercises to demonstrate NATO’s determination and readiness could in principle only be welcomed by the Baltic countries, the exercises which had taken place also in Spain, Portugal, Norway and Iceland do not signal full determination of NATO to defend its easternmost allies directly threatened by Russia.

Accordingly, an intriguing question arises whether the efforts the Baltic countries have undertaken in recent years to improve their national defence systems may prove useless in deterring Russia, in the hypothetical case of aggression against member states. Could it be that whilst the Baltic States are improving their defence and deterrence capabilities according to the priorities last defined in 2010, Russian military planners have redesigned both their military doctrine and military forces, clearly learning from the experience of the Georgian war, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and other recent confrontations? So, there is a risk that despite the efforts of NATO to increase a tripwire effect with added battle groups, the efforts that the Baltic countries themselves have made to improve their national defence forces and capabilities could prove useless and inefficient in deterring Russia. In other words, the steps that the three neighbouring countries are taking might appear insignificant to Russia in the calculus of its decision-making. As a result, admitting that reasonable limits exist that the three small countries could undertake on their own, should the above be nevertheless the case, we might miss some possible alternatives to increase deterrence in the Baltic region with reasonably low additional financial costs. Of course, there is an alternative view that next to the absolute limits set by their GDP for defence, Baltic reforms and development efforts are mainly meant for the eyes of NATO allies in order to convince them that solidarity-based deterrence in Baltic area against Russia is worth their additional investments and efforts. Thus, this study presumes that the way the Baltic States build and develop their independent defence capabilities can make a difference.

The intriguing aspect of this research is that one Baltic country seems to be better prepared for a potential conflict with Russia than the others, based on strategic strengths and deterrent capabilities in the eyes of Russia. Additionally, the existence of three rather different approaches, and the lack of co-operation cannot be considered as effective defence in a situation where threat perceptions are overlapping and collective solidarity expectations to NATO allies are similar.

Drawing on the above, the aim of this study is to discuss which particular factors are considered as strategic strengths and noteworthy deterrent capabilities in the eyes of Russia, and what difference the particular choices made by the countries in building their national defence models are making in deterring and discouraging Russia. The military reforms initiated by the former Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov from 2008 and the article based vision of General Valery Gerasimov about Russia’s major military capabilities are at the core of our discussion, representing the prevailing understandings of the Russian military leadership of what their country sees as its main strengths and capabilities in a potential conflict. However, in order to provide a more comprehensive

picture of the factors that could potentially deter Russia, the current article also discusses visions that academics and military experts have suggested, based on the lessons learned from Russian-Georgian war, the annexation of Crimea, and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

## 2. What can be regarded as strategic strength for Russia?

There are two key concepts that both academics and military experts base their understanding on when defining and debating the strategic military strengths and priorities needed in the eyes of Russian decision-makers and military planners. These are the articles written by Army General Valery Gerasimov from 2013 and the reforms started in 2008 by former Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov. First, the vision of Valery Gerasimov (in some cases referred to as the “Gerasimov Doctrine”) refers to an article “The Value of Science is in the Foresight” published in 2013.<sup>2</sup> To quote Gerasimov, the underlying logic of the article sees the boundaries between war and peace as blurred and the “rules of war” as changing. This leads to a situation where the role of non-military capabilities might exceed the power of actual weapons in achieving political and strategic goals and, thus, asymmetrical actions may enable nullification of an enemy’s advantages in armed conflicts. In the article, Gerasimov lists some changes in the current security environment, stressing the role of mobile, mixed-type groups of forces as strengthening; military actions are becoming more dynamic, active, and successful; that tactical and operational pauses are disappearing; that informational gaps between forces and control organs are reducing; that long-distance and contactless actions against enemy forces are becoming the main tool of achieving the goals, and so on. He also points to the importance of special operations forces, particularly the quick movement of these forces, and of internal political opposition within an enemy country, all of which would be used to create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state. These aspects are also stressed in the more recent declaration of Valery Gerasimov from March 2019,<sup>3</sup> stating that the main component of the implementation of “limited actions strategy” is the creation of the self-sufficient groupings of troops that are highly mobile and capable of contributing to the achievement of a set of objectives. These combined factors constitute the main preconditions for a successful campaign by gaining and maintaining dominance in the information sphere, by guaranteeing the readiness of both the military leadership and supply channels, and by being able to use these grouping of troops covertly, if necessary.

In this light, high-readiness, experience, and professionalism of the military forces constitute Russia’s central strategic strengths and hence can be construed as deterrent capabilities in their eyes. Over the recent decade, Russia has also made numerous efforts to achieve these objectives. The military reforms suggested by the former Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov from 2008 on (referred also as “the Serdyukov Era” or “the ‘New Look’ reforms,”) have clearly focused on changes in the structure, command and control, and the quality of military personnel to increase the combat-readiness of Russian Federation armed forces. To illustrate the magnitude of these reforms, it has been stated that Serdyukov’s reforms were the most significant reforms made in the Russian military forces since the 1920s, or at least from the communist period onward.<sup>4</sup> Serdyukov’s reforms were intended to modernise the armed forces after the Russian-

Georgian war revealed large-scale military failures of the Russian military forces.<sup>5</sup> It included cutting military personnel from 1.2–1 million people, reducing the number of troops, condensing former six military districts into four, making changes in command and control, converting the division structure into a brigade system for ground forces (including converting 203 partially staffed divisions to 85 modular maneuver brigades consisting of 3000–5000 soldiers), eliminating all “cadre units,” and designating all existing units as “permanent readiness units.”<sup>6</sup> Although there have been further reforms made in Russian military forces later on after General Sergey Shoigu was appointed to the position of the Minister of Defence in 2012, especially concerning the building of a new platform on a divisional level for planning and executing independent hybrid missions, Serdyukov’s reforms are highly important as far as the logic of an immediate conventional attack and the possibility to deter it from the perspective of the Baltic countries are concerned. This logic appears to draw primarily on the new effective mid-level structures of the Russian army. Thus, it can be said that, for example, professional well equipped motorised battalions are the product of Serdyukov’s reforms.

The transition from a division structure into smaller military units (i.e. the brigade system or even battalion tactical groups) is particularly important in the current context. Before the Georgian war, Russia had relied on a division-level approach, whereby both planning and training were exercised, but divisions were typically only partially manned, supplied at low levels, and lacked practical experience in real combat conditions. Although this approach allows using larger quantities of human resources, they are much slower to mobilise and employ, not to mention that they (including their leadership) are less experienced in real combat situations because the peace-time task of such divisions is not to practice fighting but to mobilise and manage resources. Another weakness of such approach is related to support and sustainability: everything from transport to communication and air-defence is not organic to the organisation. Finally, an additional disadvantage of the then Russian division-level approach was related to its potential inability to mobilise conscripts with sufficient speed without harming the functioning of society. This risk would be realised only when important human resources were withdrawn from the economy. The post-reform approach, i.e. setting up the brigade/battalion system with planning activities taking place at the level of smaller military subunits, offers many advantages. The combat readiness of such units is high, they consist of fully combat-ready subunits that are able to attack, defend themselves, move, supply, and communicate independently. Furthermore, their leadership is more experienced as they command and lead their forces on a daily basis. Finally, the opportunity to test subordinate units in close-to-reality conditions is much higher. Thus, it takes less resources and requires no specific preparations. Furthermore, the expectations will be more foreseeable at the level of professional subunits as they are organic to the higher formation. It must be admitted though that Russia has made moves to reestablish divisional headquarters in the Western districts. This could be a sign to gain greater control of the brigades and battalions in peacetime, or it could equally be a worrying indication that the size of forces anticipated for any operation needs to be larger than brigade size. At the same time, it can also be supposed that the brigade level has proved itself insufficient as an autonomous platform to conduct self-sufficient hybrid operations. The divisional level, therefore, could offer a solution. As an interim conclusion, Russia’s recent military operations carried out in Ukraine and Syria have made it visible that the country has taken a big step forward in increasing

the professionalism and high-readiness of its military forces, i.e. the use of fully combat-ready, highly mobile, and experienced professional composite units; short and clear chains of command without significant information gaps; and the ability to conduct long-distance and non-kinetic actions.

Next to its conventional forces, Russia has also contributed to capabilities that in Western terminology are defined as hybrid. For example, during the Ukrainian conflict, Russia has in various areas practiced a wide array of measures, such as psychological operations, cyber-attacks, diplomatic pressure, agents of influence, support of anti-regime political forces, economic sanctions, suspension of energy supplies, and information operations.<sup>7</sup> This directly overlaps with the way McKew has described the basic idea of the so-called Gerasimov doctrine, calling it an attempt to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict within an enemy state.<sup>8</sup> Both the readiness to mix with the local Russian minority/majority in order to confuse the opponent and to have decisive decisions from the Kremlin seem to be particularly important in the light of Gerasimov's recent statements.

From Russia's perspective, other factors that could be considered as a country's key strengths in the context of today's modern warfare are linked to the way how Russia sees its role in the international arena. Both the Russian political elite and the local academic community are constantly spreading the view that Russia intends to act as a key security provider through its foreign and defence policies. Karaganov and Suslov<sup>9</sup> state that Russia's policy is to remain tactically flexible and prepared for every eventuality "but also to be more strategic than ever in building a world order that is stable, peaceful, and comfortable for Russia." They also heavily criticise the United States and argue that no major improvement in relations with the United States is in sight "because of the situation within both Western societies and the Western international community itself." Last, but not least, they argue that "Russia's resolute swift takeover of Crimea" as well as the "support of the rebellion in the Donbass" have prevented the further expansion of the Western bloc. The idea of Russia as a leading power in the internal arena is expressed also in the "Gerasimov Doctrine," as he states that Russia should not copy the experiences of other countries and not chase after them but to outstrip them and occupy leading positions itself. Additionally, respect in the international diplomatic arena and country's decisiveness to take quick actions to surprise and shock the opponent could be considered as a strategic strength in the eyes of Russia. Although independent Russian military experts such as Aleksandr Goltz<sup>10</sup> have pointed out the serious shortcomings in the idea that Russia could dominate the international arena, the Russian current political and academic elite is keen on spreading this view worldwide. Russia's idea of its dominant role is also linked to the way how it humiliates its neighbours, in, for example, bullying Sweden (via unspecified threats if it even aspires to join NATO), regular incursions into the airspace of the Baltic countries, regular Zapad exercises, and other measures that Russia uses in order to put pressure on its neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

In summation, high-readiness, experience, and professionalism of military forces combined with a variety of hybrid capabilities, dominance in the international arena, and fearlessness in carrying out its activities at all costs seem to be three main strategic strengths Russia values the most. Should the Baltic countries be Russia's next "targets" in the near future, it could be assumed that Russia intends to realise these strengths first and foremost.

Accordingly, if Russian military planners are assessing Baltic capabilities by a similar methodology as their own, it might also mean that measures that are targeted at increasing high-readiness, professionalism, and decisiveness of the military forces of the Baltic countries, or are focused on increasing the political and military weight of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and decreasing that of Russia might be working in favour of the Baltic countries when deterring Russia.

### 3. Are the Baltic countries potentially in danger in the near future?

Security threats associated with Russia have gained a lot of attention recently among the military analysts and researchers, most of them suggesting that the Baltic countries could potentially be in danger. The study by David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson<sup>12</sup> provides the results of a series of war simulations conducted by the RAND Arroyo Center in 2014–2015. They investigate the outcome of a hypothetical Russian invasion of the Baltics at some point in the near future and conclude that the alliance cannot successfully defend the Baltic region. The report indicates that the longest it would take Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals is 60 hours. However, simulations also suggest that it would require about seven brigades, including three heavy armoured brigades to prevent rapid overrun of the Baltic countries and to change the strategic picture as seen from Russia's viewpoint. In this way, the report by Shlapak and Johnson indirectly underlies the interim conclusion of our study that Russia is making its strategic decisions to a large extent based on the balance of military capabilities between opponents.

A study by Andrew Radin<sup>13</sup> confirms the results of the report by Shlapak and Johnson that the Baltic countries are vulnerable in terms of imbalances in conventional forces. Radin differentiates between three types of Russia's aggression, such as non-violent subversion, covert violent actions, and conventional warfare supported by subversion, and concludes that Russia will most likely have difficulties in using both non-violent tactics and covert violent action to destabilise the Baltic countries. However, the study argues that the Baltics are still vulnerable as regards Russia's local conventional superiority. The article suggests that a large-scale conventional Russian incursion into the Baltics which is legitimised and supported by political subversion would rapidly overwhelm NATO forces postured in the region, despite the deployment of international tripwire forces. Flanagan<sup>14</sup> argues that Estonians and Latvians are mostly concerned about the potential for largescale conventional attacks due to their long common borders with Russia, but also with the expansion of Russian hybrid threats, particularly given the sizable Russian-speaking population living in Latvia and Estonia. Lithuanians are more focused on the threat of Russian offensives from Belarus and Kaliningrad. Finally, Luik and Jermalavičius suggest that Russia's posture and capabilities could allow the country to seize its Baltic neighbours, establishing a relatively quick *fait accompli* that it then could defend by issuing nuclear threats.<sup>15</sup>

The authors of the present article also intend to support the view that the Baltic countries might be in danger. On the one hand, by neighbouring the North-West military district of Russia, the Baltic countries are one of the few areas where options in terms of resupplying, logistical support and regrouping of military forces are very promising for Russia in terms of safety and alternative logistical means compared to similar needs



and options of the NATO Alliance.<sup>16</sup> For Russia, the advantage of attacking the Baltic countries could be even increasing should Russia believe that there exists a reliable regional strategy to win the conflict with NATO, e.g. as a result of the rapid improvement of its anti-access/area-denial capabilities near the Baltic borders. In the case of a theater-level nuclear blackmail or escalation scenarios in the Baltic area, once again, Russia might be both better prepared and ready to go further than NATO nuclear powers when supporting the Baltic States.<sup>17</sup>

However, it seems so that there is nevertheless no realistic need to prepare for an all-out war in the Baltic countries. Tony Selhorst, who has already investigated the implementation of “the Gerasimov Doctrine” in Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine, concludes that although Russia uses conventional force in its operational concept that is superior and with which victory is almost certain, it does not want to employ its forces as such for its near-abroad policy. To quote Selhorst,

Major combat is an undesired escalation as Russia seeks a psychological victory, not a physical one. / ... / The culminating psychological effects of the reflexive control approach, like disorientation, suggestion and concealment need to overcome the provocation. At the end, it will cause exhaustion, paralysis and a perception of despair among the political and military leadership. These created perceptions and misperceptions set the leadership up for the final phase of the Gerasimov doctrine: resolution.<sup>18</sup>

In this light, low-intensity hybrid scenarios including purchasing or bribing local political elite and political parties, gaining favourable law changes, and large intrusive business contracts that interlink Russia ever closer to the three or less but differently prepared fighters and systemic “surgical strikes” against Russia’s small neighbours seems to be more likely than large-scale conventional attacks.

### ***3.1. What have the Baltic countries achieved so far: an overview of the national defence models of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania***

The research question of whether the Baltic countries are heading in the right direction in terms of designing and reforming their national defence systems presumes an overview of the national defence models in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Markedly, all three countries have adopted different approaches to their national defence.

Estonia has followed a total defence approach with a strong focus on territorial defence, compulsory military service, and a large reserve army.<sup>19</sup> Since the restoration of independence in the early 1990s, Estonia has not given up the principle of territorial defence and from particularly the 2000s onwards has focused on the development of country’s initial independent defence capabilities, alongside of its NATO membership. More specifically, Estonia uses a mixed model of a professional military contingent, conscript army, and reservists. As of 2018, the professional military contingent includes about 3.4 thousand active servicemen.<sup>20</sup> The only unit which is comprised solely of professionals is the Scouts Battalion under the composition of the 1st infantry brigade, which stands out as the main component of the Estonian land forces. The Scouts Battalion has a rapid response capability and is prepared for independent combat. It also has a high-readiness to participate in international operations led by NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union<sup>21</sup> and has considerable experience of doing so with repeated company deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other battalions under the composition of the 1st infantry



brigade are partially comprised on the basis of reservists with recent conscripts' experience. The 2<sup>nd</sup> infantry brigade was established in August 2014 and the main task of the brigade is expected to offer immediate resistance to the enemy during wartime. However, considerable efforts in planning, resource management, and so on are needed to achieve the level of professionalism that has been attained by the 1st infantry brigade.<sup>22</sup> The 2nd infantry brigade is to a large extent also formed on the basis of conscript training battalions during the training year, but with the capacity to develop these further into reserve units. The 2nd infantry brigade is expected to be in full-combat readiness by 2026 at the latest.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, the average size of personnel in the regular armed forces in Estonia in peacetime is about 6000 personnel, and about half of them are conscripts.<sup>24</sup> The conscript army in Estonia 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 3000 men. After mobilising reserves, the wartime structure of the armed forces is estimated to reach 60,000 personnel, of which the high readiness reserve is about 21,000. Altogether, 268,561 people were listed as reservists in the register in 2018.<sup>25</sup> What speaks of Estonian readiness for hybrid challenges is the steady policy that establishes a comprehensive approach, both in terms of wider security and in terms of traditional defence. Since 2010 new concepts have been introduced, the legal base adapted, and improving co-ordination practices at all levels have been introduced. However, despite significant efforts, there are still big steps to take for Estonia to make its comprehensive approach credible throughout.<sup>26</sup>

Next to this, 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*), which is a voluntary national defence organisation operating under the Ministry of Defence. The Defence League is organised in accordance with military principles, possesses weapons, and holds exercises. There are about 16,000 members belonging to the Defence League of which about 6000 are armed and militarily trained to varying degrees. Together with youth and women organisations, it numbers approximately 26,000 people.<sup>27</sup> Last, but not least, the country's commitment to spend 2% of its GDP on defence could be considered as one of the underlying principles of the national defence model of Estonia. Since 2012, there has been an agreement amongst political parties in Estonia to support and maintain the defence budget at 2% of GDP. That level is expected to allow the sustainable and balanced development of national defence. Recently in 2018 and 2019, respectively 2.14% of the GDP (i.e. 524 million EUR) and 2.15% of the GDP (i.e. 566 million EUR) have been allocated to defence. Furthermore, in 2019, defence expenditures also include €30 million in defence investment programme funds and €15 million in additional resources for hosting allied units, the allocation of which was decided on separately by the Estonian government.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast with Estonia, Latvia has, after the restoration of its independence, decided against the principle of territorial defence and focused instead on out-of-area international missions and operations. In this regard, compulsory military service was also abolished in favour of an entirely professional armed force from 2007 onwards.<sup>29</sup> Thus, from that time forward, the regular forces of Latvia consist only of professional soldiers. According to the National Defence Concept of 2016, Latvia is expected to maintain a 6500 strong professional military during peace time.<sup>30</sup> In 2018, there were about 6000

professional soldiers serving in the Latvian defence forces. The number of soldiers recruited in the past increased in 2018 (640 soldiers were recruited) and 2019 (710 soldiers are expected to be recruited in 2019).<sup>31</sup>

However, more recently, Latvia has recognised the risks related to modern warfare and has also focused on developing a more comprehensive state defence system to be able to address all dimensions of hybrid warfare.<sup>32</sup> The Latvian National Guard *Zemessardze*, that was established in 1991, serves as the main component of the comprehensive national defence in Latvia and the basic land component of Latvian national armed forces. It is a voluntary territorial defence force consisting of 8000 people, including about 600 professional soldiers. It has been argued by Tupp that in its essence, the *Zemessardze* is quite similar to the Estonian national defence league *Kaitseliit*, making the Latvian *Zemessardze* as the main component of the comprehensive state defence system. The only exception is that the Latvian *Zemessardze* is responsible for the training of its own members as there is no compulsory military service as in Estonia.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, the Latvian national defence model is based solely on a professional army with a considerably smaller amount of supporting manpower than that of Estonia.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Latvian military leaders have opposed this idea by arguing that such an interpretation is incorrect because it would undervalue the importance of *Zemessardze* and would look as if members of the *Zemessardze* are not professionals in their actions although they have similar equipment, armament, and training as regular forces do.<sup>35</sup> However, it is an undeniable fact that Latvia does not have compulsory military service and does not intend to introduce it in the nearest future. Thus, many *Zemessardze* have quite limited training experience compared to their Estonian counterparts. The third component of the Latvian national defence model covers reservists. Based on changes in the legislation in 2017, a status of “reserve soldier” is given to an individual without previous military experience who has completed a suitable training course. The status of a “reservist” is separate from the status of members of *Zemessardze*. In Latvia, it is expected that a reserve force of about 3000 people will be maintained in peacetime.<sup>36</sup> Latvia’s defence budget has undergone drastic changes in the recent decade. Whereas in the early 2010s, Latvia allocated around 1% or even less of its GDP to defence, the country’s defence budget was increased in the subsequent years gradually after Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. In 2018, Latvia also fulfils the 2% of GDP commitment and spends about €558 million on national defence.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the Lithuanian national defence model seems to represent a compromise between the Estonian and Latvian models. Similarly to Latvia, Lithuania has decided to suspend mandatory military service in 2008, but, however, changed its course in 2015 and reintroduced a compulsory military service.<sup>38</sup> The decision to suspend mandatory military service in 2008 was motivated by several factors, such as Lithuania’s assessment that NATO membership requires maximising Lithuania’s contribution to international operations; a vision that at that period of time Lithuania faced no direct military threats; a tacit understanding that since most of its NATO allies were switching to fully professional forces, Lithuania had to do it, too; and so on. However, in the following years, the geopolitical situation changed considerably, and Lithuania has faced several problems, including insufficient manning of the units of the national armed forces.<sup>39</sup> To quote the Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Jonas Vytautas Žukas, “Battalions were manned at catastrophically low levels (especially at the lowest ranks), in some cases with less than 30% of the necessary manpower, and with available

mobilisation reserves having shrunk next to nothing.” All of this has contributed to a decision on the reintroduction of compulsory military service in 2015. Today, Lithuania maintains the largest armed forces among the Baltic countries with a bit less than 19,000 authorised (regular force and active reserve) personnel. The newly introduced conscription service is expected to bring an annual cohort of 3500–4000 troops. Next to that, national defence volunteers have a full-time component of 500 professional soldiers and 4800 volunteers. The country has also pushed towards meeting the 2% of GDP commitment; in 2018, the country spends €873 million on national defence which is some 2.01% of GDP.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4. Are Baltic efforts convincing to Russia? An analytical assessment of the national defence models of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania**

Both the Estonian and Latvian defence models constitute a particularly intriguing pair, as far as the discussion on security choices of a small country bordering an aggressive and resurgent neighbour is concerned. It is considered of vital importance in Estonia to maintain its initial independent defence capabilities should a military conflict occur. Hence, Estonians appear to be strongly convinced that conscription is essential and, as such, keep training large-scale reserve units in order to mobilise them in case of a potential conflict. Conscript service also enjoys significant public support in Estonia.<sup>41</sup> Latvia, on the other hand, abolished compulsory conscription in 2007 and is the only country in the Nordic and Baltic region to rely solely on professional armed forces. Furthermore, Latvian top-ranking military officials have also strongly rejected the idea of reintroducing conscript service arguing that it could lead to the dissolution of the professional army and the loss of country’s short-term combat capacity.<sup>42</sup> Overall, the Estonian model of national defence enables the mobilisation of a large number of people whereas the Latvian model does not. However, the Latvian model is built on, and fully oriented towards, professional military staff, whereas the Estonian model includes a limited number of professionals supported by volunteers and conscripts. Once again, Lithuanian model is a compromise between Estonian and Latvian models.

Drawing on Russia’s own strategic preferences, the existence of units with high readiness, experience, and strong motivation might be key components to increase the deterrence credibility in the Baltic region. This appears especially so in circumstances when there is no option to go for larger quantities, or reach a balance in terms of conventional capabilities. In this respect, there are mainly two types of units that Russia could be mostly interested in, and potentially deterred by. These are, first, fully combat-ready professional battalions (like The Scouts Battalion in Estonia) and, second, paramilitary voluntary units (like the Estonian Defence League, or Latvian *Zemessadze*). Of course, one could argue that due to unsurmountable advantage that Russia has because of differences in scale, any reform in the Baltic states’ militaries, save a total militarisation of these societies, is bound to fall short of making any decisive factor in Russia’s calculations. Still, the authors are convinced that the quality and characteristics of defence systems of those small countries matter nonetheless. If not, in a final calculation of Russia, then for its picking its enemies. In the end, the better the defence arrangements of the Baltic states are, the better are their societies at large prepared for a potential attack. In the context where the most likely dangers are hybrid in nature, the overall resilience and the

specific readiness of a society to counter an enemy makes it both more difficult and more expensive to achieve the planned results. In this context, it is not difficult to notice that the similarity between those two otherwise remote types of units – professional battalions and paramilitaries – lies in their readiness and motivation to act immediately, combined with situational awareness about assets they have and tasks which they may counter. The main difference is that paramilitary units are regional and accordingly located already in an area where they are expected to fight against an enemy. To be sure, they are also extremely vulnerable to conventional forces, being mainly limited to light infantry weapons and with no armour protection, mobility, and limited combat support. What they do possess is more knowledge of local circumstances and the support of the local population, which would be vital in becoming also a liaison to the NATO reinforcement units who have limited knowledge of the terrain. These qualities would also allow them to convert into partisan units if necessary.

Thus, Russia's position after the Serdyukov's reforms holds that the use of conscript- and reserve-based skeleton units manned with only a small group of professionals (and expected to achieve full readiness only after the mobilisation) would cause the units to face soon the lack of experienced and battle-ready units. Also, this composition of forces would easily reveal the incompetence of cadre unit officers. In this context, following the Russian assessment methodology, Latvia would seem to be the most professional and closest to the Russian post-reform model, as Latvia would have more professional soldiers than Estonia. Intriguingly, Estonia's current approach; despite its relative success, is more similar to the Russian pre-reform model and thus would have less deterrence value. In this context, questions also arise as to the choice of Lithuania away from the professional and closer to the reservist army.

What is clear in this context is the dilemma between having either strategically big (in terms of operational size) but rather unexperienced and necessarily delayed forces, or small (in tactical terms), but immediately available and professional forces to be formulated as two extremes or ideals. Although other combinations amongst the types of forces are in principle also conceivable, the Lithuanian experience demonstrates that in real terms it is impossible to apply both models simultaneously in an efficient manner. It is simply too expensive for a small country. Accordingly, military reform is more like a choice between two options. A professional army may offer us an illusion of a final assurance although in real terms, it will sooner or later lack some capacity. In turn, the model relying mostly on conscripts may offer us an illusion that a big military force has the same quality as a small (but more professional) one. The most likely conclusion in this respect is that whilst, for example, Estonians are yearning for quantity (i.e. big number of unexperienced conscripts in real war situations), Russians might in case of certain scenarios (hybrid conflict or surgical regional strike) be more deterred by motivated, well-equipped, suitably located, more mobile, and highly experienced smaller military units, especially when vital logistical circumstances tend to support more battalion than brigade-level manoeuvres.

Because of the limits imposed by its size, the available financial scale, and military capabilities, the Baltic States face paradoxical risks. These consist especially in the yearning for bigger quantities of military formations, whilst these same units will automatically become "valuable" targets to the enemy, both in the symbolic and quantitative terms. Due to the Baltic's geographical circumstances, they would most likely be located in a severely limited

area where, because of the lack of experience and sufficient mobility, they cannot conduct any considerable manoeuvres. As a result, larger military formations might lose most if not all of their kinetic and surprise-based effects while being seen as relatively “soft targets” locked in the landscape.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in the eyes of Russia, they may also simply be ignored, i.e. left in place and manoeuvred around. Finally, even when in the best-case scenario bigger formations of the Baltic countries could hold certain positions and block the forward assembly of Russian forces, their ability to retaliate and inflict losses is low and quite clearly would not reach Russia’s “political pain” threshold. Thus, in real terms, the best solution would be to have these units located already in their war-time areas of operation; they could fight well in conflicts similar to the East Ukrainian type of low-intensity position war with partial territories already occupied, although without a significant ability to win back the areas already lost, or to leave the conflict. However, the latter is more comfortable for Russia than for the Baltic States. Although under particular circumstances this could be considered as success in the eyes of the Baltic countries, it would obviously not deter Russia from making its “initiative taking first move” to achieve its aims. Last but not least, in terms of the strategic depth of the Baltic States, it is not realistic either.

What makes the situation even more complicated in deterring Russia is that the current priorities of certain Baltic countries are basically the final outcome of the preferences and beliefs that both local military and political leadership share. More troops are seen as better than less troops, and raw human resources are seen as a solution to the existing imbalance and hybrid threats. The reasons for preferring such an approach are fully rational. Overall, the current model is more comfortable and secure for the current leadership to fight today’s security risks compared to some kind of hypothetical new model. Besides, their daily jobs are mostly associated with providing necessary supplies and equipment for these armed forces, as well as preparing and implementing long-term development plans in accordance with NATO standards and so on. Also, the existence of NATO reinforcements somehow politically validates the existing structures and makes fundamental changes unlikely. In this light, the current national defence models of the Baltic countries offer generous funding while simultaneously producing limited (or even minimum) real-time additional assets in terms of deterrence. For example, Estonia spends in total about 2.14% of its GDP to national defence, whilst possessing no tanks, airplanes, air-defence, or actual warships; there are no plans to acquire such capabilities. All finances go for planning and maintenance of a huge reservist army and any serious technical support has to come from NATO reinforcements.

Another important feature of the national defence models of all three Baltic countries is that all three models are, by their nature, fully non-aggressive and defensive. In short, they are without any room for responsive or retaliatory initiatives, extra territoriality, or asymmetrical tools, not to mention the difference in scale and numbers, compared to the Russian military forces. In this light, the Baltic countries also enjoy no strategic advantages over Russia either in terms of conventional rebalancing, or dominance and fearlessness. Considering Russia’s previous military experiences in conducting regional military operations in Georgia and Ukraine, two potential scenarios could in principle come into consideration in the Baltic countries. The first situation would be a full-scale or a geographically limited direct conventional attack that could involve various military domains, including air and sea like the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. The second

would be an asymmetrical and formally unannounced conflict, involving land and cyber domains and fuelling intra-state tensions between local Russian speakers and Baltic nations. In the former case, the defence of the Baltic countries would almost entirely depend on the allied reinforcement capabilities, keeping in mind the three supporting countries and the United States. Local indigenous armed forces could only assist the allied forces in various operations like ground operations or supportive actions. If Russia, however, intends to employ the second scenario, then the national capabilities of the Baltic countries would play a much more significant role as the capabilities of antagonists would be levelled by the absence of formidable military capabilities in the air and sea domains.

In summation, the national defence models of the Baltic countries have significant limitations. The models are oriented towards guaranteeing territorial defence, whilst their territorial sizes do not offer any strategic depth, or room for unexpected manoeuvres. In addition, practical questions remain of whether the models are in real terms aimed at: (a) defending the geographical territory of countries 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 perspectives of the national armed forces of the Baltic countries, the preferred option would surely be the third one. However, the credibility of the current models in providing reliable deterrence against Russia remains questionable. The models applied today in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania do not contain, or are not planned, to contain any independent retaliation capabilities (even in the cyber domain), which would entice Russia to opt for painless risk-taking. Furthermore, despite the advantages of some national defence models in the Baltic countries, the existence of three rather different approaches to national defence in a situation where threat perceptions are overlapping and collective expectations to all NATO allies are very similar actually shows how lost the Baltic countries are in their strategic culture and understanding of deterrence.

## **5. Conclusions: what should be the priorities of the Baltic countries in convincing Russia?**

As far as the national security concepts of the Baltic countries are concerned, to improve the credibility of deterrence against Russia seems to be the key objective of the military officials and planners in the Baltic countries. All three countries expect Russia to be deterred by NATO's collective defence posture, as well as the alliance's presence in the Baltic region and Poland, with a small tripwire of allied reinforcement troops. However, the military officials of the Baltic countries clearly seem to have a "second level" aim in this respect, which is the ability of the national defence forces of being able to stop, or at least delay, the advance of Russia to a sufficient degree in order to allow NATO allies to resupply and support the region. How credible those expectations are, especially in terms of NATO European member states, is a separate question deserving additional analysis.

In the last decade, deterrence in the Baltic countries has mostly relied on two cornerstones: the need to achieve long-term sustainability of the defensive/deterrence assets as well as to meet the "2% of GDP" criteria. The main question today is about the distribution of financial resources according to the "2% of GDP" principle. Which allocation of



resources would buy the Baltic countries the most time (i.e. number of hours) in the case of a realisation of the most likely attack scenario from Russia's side? This could, in real terms, lead to a final outcome that is overall sustainable and budgetary affordable for the Baltic countries, but has no value in terms of deterrence in the eyes of Russia. This brings us back to the key question of how many military units in full combat-readiness the Baltic countries are able to raise and maintain under budget limits and constraints, providing that the defence budgets of the three countries allocate only about 2% of the GDP for defence expenditures in comparison with Russia's 6%? The lessons of the Georgian war in 2008 could give us a valuable hint here: in its main phase, the war lasted for 2–3 days, and two oversized Russian motorised assault battalions were countered by two Georgian brigades, which appeared ultimately not to be sufficient. Considering the territorial size of the operational area of the Baltic region, as well as its minimalistic strategic depth, should roughly a similar size of force be used against one of the Baltic countries, definitely a more convincing response is needed to counter Russia's aggression in a more efficient manner as Georgia was able to do.

However, a significant risk from the perspective of the Baltic countries arises also from the assumption of these countries that there exists full, unwavering, and fast commitment of NATO in supporting the Baltic countries with all necessary assets and capabilities. As already mentioned, an obvious conclusion of the Baltic States seems to be that they need to survive until NATO forces come and help to solve the situation – or, as part of deterrence credibility, deploying necessary warfighting capabilities in advance when both regional and strategic tensions are rising. Unfortunately, this assumption seems to be even less valid in the light of the tweets of President Trump which show that the United States feels less committed to the security of its allies in Europe. In addition, NATO's assessment and force development priorities are still to a large extent based on the pre-Georgian and pre-Crimean understanding of how, if at all, aggression against member states might or will happen.

Intriguingly, should Russia be aiming not to attack directly the Baltic countries but to challenge and delegitimise NATO in general, one may also witness a “big gamble” depending on the abilities of the opponents to use their existing assets. For example, battalions might have advantages when used in the first stage of a conflict in a very decisive and manoeuvrable way. At the same time, brigades could have advantages if the conflict lasts longer, and the enemy allows mobilisation to take place, if there is a confrontation with a clear front line, and if high quantities of various capabilities are expected to hold the battlefield until NATO starts to provide its support. So, professional high-readiness battalions might prove efficient during the manoeuvres and “first contact” situations, whilst brigades based on mobilisation might be more useful, if the enemy misses the initiative, and there is a need to buy more time for the alliance's resupplies. In conclusion, it is critically important for the Baltic countries to find the best possible defence and deterrence combination to ensure their survival in case of conflict. While the existing conventional reserves of NATO are sizeable, secure and quick to deploy, the Baltic states' own ability to keep safe transportation options open for NATO when resupplying the region is still a critical variable in starting phase of a conflict. Thus, the particular choice made about, and the quality of, an independent defence capability can make a difference for the Baltic states.



## Notes

1. NATO, 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon', 2010, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm) (accessed September 26, 2019).
2. V. Gherasimov, 'The Value of Science is in the Foresight. New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations', *Military Review*, January–February, 2016.
3. Interfax, 'В РФ разработана стратегия ограниченных действий по защите ее интересов за пределами национальной территории – Герасимов', ['The Russian Federation has developed a comprehensive strategy to defend its national interests outside its territory'] (available in Russian only), *Interfax*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=503181&lang=RU> (accessed September 26, 2019).
4. P.K. Baev, 'Military Reform Against Heavy Odds', in *Russia After the Economic Crisis*, ed. A. Åslund, S. Guriev, A. Kuchins (Washington, DC: Pearson Institute for International Economics, 2010), 169–86.
5. D.R. Herspring and R.N. McDermott, 'Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform', *Orbis*, no. 54 (2010): 284–301.
6. L.W. Grau and C.K. Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces* (ICS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2016).
7. Z. Šliwa, V. Veebel, and M. Lebrun, 'Russian Ambitions and Hybrid Modes of Warfare', *Estonian Journal of Military Studies* 7, 2018.
8. M.K. McKew, 'The Gerasimov Doctrine', *POLITICO Magazine*, September/October 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538> (accessed September 26, 2019).
9. S. Karaganov, O. Barabanov, A. Bezborodov, A. Bezrukov, T. Bordachev, A. Vysotsky, et al., 'Report: Toward the Great Ocean – 5: From the Turn to the East to Greater Eurasia', 2018, <http://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/toward-the-great-ocean-5-from-the-turn-to-the-east/> (accessed 26.09.2019).
10. A. Goltz, 'Большие маневры или большая показуха?' [Big Maneuvers or Just Big Show?], (in Russian), *The New Times*, published on September 11, 2018, <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/169616> (accessed September 26, 2019).
11. C. Coker, 'The West and Russia: Another Front in the New Cold War?', in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, ed. A.-S. Dahl (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018).
12. D.A. Shlapak and M.W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank* [online] (RAND Corporation, 2016).
13. A. Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threats and Potential Responses* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017). [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1577.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1577.html) (accessed September 26, 2019).
14. S.J. Flanagan, J. Osburg, A. Binnendijk, M. Kepe, and A. Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance* (RAND Corporation, 2019).
15. J. Luik and T. Jermalavičius, 'A Plausible Scenario of Nuclear War in Europe, and How to Deter It: A Perspective from Estonia', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 73, no. 4 (2017): 233–9.
16. V. Veebel, 'Why It Would Be Strategically Rational for Russia to Escalate in Kaliningrad and the Suwalki Corridor', *Comparative Strategy* 38, no. 3 (2019): 182–97.
17. V. Veebel, '(Un)justified Expectations on Nuclear Deterrence of Non-Nuclear NATO Members: The Case of Estonia and Latvia?', *Defence & Security Analysis* 34, no. 3 (2018): 291–309.
18. A.J.C. Selhorst, 'Russia's Perception Warfare: The Development of Gherasimov's Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and Its Application in Ukraine', *Militaire Spectator*, no. 4 (2016).

19. Estonian Parliament, 'National Security Concept of Estonia', 2017, [http://www.kmin.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article\\_files/national\\_security\\_concept\\_of\\_estonia\\_0.pdf](http://www.kmin.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_security_concept_of_estonia_0.pdf) (accessed May 6, 2019).
20. Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 'Aruanne kaitseväekohustuse täitmisest ja kaitseväe-teenistuse korraldamisest 2018. Aastal', [Report on State Defence and Conscript Service in 2018], (available in Estonian only), 2019.
21. Estonian Defence Forces, 'Land Forces', 2019, <http://www.mil.ee/en/landforces> (accessed September 26, 2019).
22. Public broadcasting of Estonia, 'Kolonel: et 2. Jalaväebrigad poleks lihtsalt piiritulp, on ressursse juurde vaja', [Colonel: Additional Resources Needed to Improve Second Infantry Brigade], (available in Estonian only), published on February 18, 2018, <https://www.err.ee/684190/kolonel-et-2-jalavaebrigad-poleks-lihtsalt-piiritulp-on-ressursse-juurde-vaja> (accessed September 26, 2019).
23. Estonian Ministry of Defence, 'National Defence Strategy', 2017, [http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article\\_files/national\\_defence\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_defence_strategy.pdf) (accessed September 26, 2019).
24. Estonian Defence Forces, 'Estonian Defence Forces', 2019, <http://www.mil.ee/en/defence-forces> (accessed September 26, 2019).
25. Defence Resources Agency of Estonia, 'Aruanne kaitseväekohustuse täitmisest ja kaitseväe-teenistuse korraldamisest 2018. Aastal', [Report on State Defence and Conscript Service in 2018], (available in Estonian only), 2019.
26. V. Veebel and I. Ploom. 'Estonia's Comprehensive Approach to National Defence: Origins and Dilemmas', *Journal on Baltic Security* 4, no. 2 (2018): 1–13.
27. Estonian Defence League, 'Estonian Defence League', 2019, <http://www.kaitseliit.ee/en/edl> (accessed May 3, 2019).
28. Estonian Ministry of Defence, 'Defence Budget', 2019, <http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/defence-budget> (accessed June 13, 2019)
29. Latvian National Armed Forces, 'Kārtējās un pārbaudes mācības'. [Regular and Testing Exercises] (available only in Latvian), 2017, [http://www.mil.lv/Rezerve/Kartejas\\_parbaudes\\_macibas.aspx](http://www.mil.lv/Rezerve/Kartejas_parbaudes_macibas.aspx) (accessed June 13, 2019).
30. Latvian National Armed Forces, 'Kārtējās un pārbaudes mācības'. [Regular and Testing Exercises] (available only in Latvian), 2017, [http://www.mil.lv/Rezerve/Kartejas\\_parbaudes\\_macibas.aspx](http://www.mil.lv/Rezerve/Kartejas_parbaudes_macibas.aspx) (accessed June 13, 2019).
31. Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, 'National Armed Forces', 2018.
32. Latvian Ministry of Defence, 'Defence Policy. Comprehensive Defence', 2018, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/nozares-politika/comprehensive-defence> (accessed September 26, 2019).
33. E. Tupp, 'Zemessardze – KASP-i ja Kaitseliidu vääriline partner', [Zemessardze – A Proper Cooperation Partner for Estonian Home Guard] (available only in Estonian), *Kaitse kodu*, no. 1/2018 (2018): 34–7, [https://issuu.com/kaitse\\_kodu/docs/kaitse\\_kodu\\_01\\_2018\\_veeb](https://issuu.com/kaitse_kodu/docs/kaitse_kodu_01_2018_veeb) (accessed September 26, 2019).
34. M. Andžāns and V. Veebel, 'Deterrence Dilemma in Latvia and Estonia: Finding the Balance between External Military Solidarity and Territorial Defence', *Journal on Baltic Security* 3, no. 2 (2017): 29–42.
35. State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia, 'Qualitative Training of Home Guards is Vital to State Security', (available only in Latvian). <http://www.lrvk.gov.lv/vk-zemessargu-kvalitativa-apmaciba-ir-vitali-svariga-valsts-drosibai/> (accessed May 18, 2019).
36. LETA, 'Zemessargu skaits palielinās, bet nav sasniedzis maksimālo iespējamo', [The Number of Home Guards Increases, Though Has Not Reached the Maximum Possible Level], (available only in Latvian), 2017, <http://apollo.tvnet.lv/zinas/zemessargu-skaitis-palielinas-bet-nav-sasniedzis-maksimalo-iespejamo/789634> (accessed May 6, 2019).
37. Defence24.com, 'Latvia Expands Its Defence Budget by 27%', 2016, <https://www.defence24.com/latvia-expands-its-defence-budget-by-27> (accessed May 8, 2019).

38. Lithuanian Parliament, 'National Security Strategy of Lithuania. Version of the Resolution of 17 January 2017', <https://kam.lt/download/56659/national-security-strategy-2017-01-17> (accessed May 6, 2019).
39. T. Jermalavicius, *To Draft or Not to Draft: Defence Policy Choices in Lithuania and Latvia* (ICDS, 2017). <https://icds.ee/to-draft-or-not-to-draft-defence-policy-choices-in-lithuania-and-latvia/> (accessed May 13, 2019).
40. Lithuanian Armed Forces, 'Military Service', 2017, [https://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/military\\_service.html](https://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/military_service.html)
41. Turu-uuringute AS, 'Public Opinion and National Defence', *Report to the Ministry of Defence* no. 3 (2019).
42. Public broadcasting of Latvia, 'Conscription Would Make Little Sense, Says Defence Ministry', 2017, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/defence/conscription-would-make-little-sense-says-defence-ministry.a217588/> (accessed May 6, 2019).
43. V. Veebel, 'NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States', *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 1–23.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Viljar Veebel* is a researcher with the Department of Political and Strategic Studies at the Baltic Defence College. He also works as national researcher for European Council on Foreign Relations. He holds doctoral degree in political science from the University of Tartu. He has worked as an academic advisor for the Estonian government in the European Future Convention and as a researcher for OSCE, SIDA, the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute and the Eurasia Group.

*Illimar Ploom* is researcher of the Department of Strategic Studies at the National Defense Academy of Estonia. He works also as researcher for the Tallinn University of Technology. He holds a doctoral degree in political science (PhD) from the University of Oxford's St. Hugh's College. His main research interests include resilience and comprehensive defense approaches, European security and defense initiatives.