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Key Points

◆ **Since regaining independence in 1991, the Baltic states' (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) foreign and diplomatic main objective has been full integration with the West.**

◆ **Each state has adopted comprehensive defense to coordinate the actions of its military, civilian government, private sector, and the general populations to deter and defeat Russian aggression.**

◆ **In applying comprehensive defense, each state has improved its armed forces, strengthened its ability to counter Russian information warfare, coordinated security measures with its neighbors, deepened its integration with European and international organizations, and worked to reduce its economic and energy dependence on Russia.**

Baltics Left of Bang: Comprehensive Defense in the Baltic States

By Dalia Bankauskaite, Janis Berzins, Tony Lawrence, Deividas Šlekys, Brett Swaney, and T.X. Hammes

Sponsored by the National Defense University (NDU) and the Swedish National Defense University, this paper is the third in a series of Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Forums dedicated to the multinational exploration of the strategic defense challenges faced by the Baltic states. The December 2017 National Security Strategy described Russia as "using subversive measures to weaken the credibility of America's commitment to Europe, undermine transatlantic unity, and weaken European institutions and governments."[1] The U.S. and European authors of this paper, along with many others, came together in a series of wargames conducted in late 2017 through the winter of 2019 to explore possible responses to the security challenges facing the Baltic Sea region. This third installment in the series highlights research and gaming insights indicating the value of a comprehensive defense for building resilience and resistance capabilities among the Baltic states.

The paper starts by defining comprehensive defense, then looks at the primary threats facing the Baltic states and the resulting strategic situation. Then each national author outlines how that state is responding to the threat. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for Baltic state governments.

Comprehensive Defense

Modern comprehensive defense, also known as total defense, is a whole-of-society approach to national security involving the coordinated action of a state's military, civilian branches of government, private sector, and the general population, thus enhancing conventional defense and deterrence measures. Comprehensive defense is well suited to counter hostile information operations, provide for the psychological defense of the population, build the resilience of critical

Baltic Sea Region

services and infrastructure, enhance military defense, and respond to crises.[2]

This comprehensive approach is particularly beneficial in situations where there is no clear threshold for the start of hostilities, making it useful in deterring and defending against Russian hostile measures and hybrid warfare.[3] Furthermore, the commitment to resilience, civil preparedness, and civil-military readiness was reinforced at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in July 2016 during the meeting of the North

Atlantic Council.[4] It is with this reinforcement in mind that the Baltic states have increasingly looked to concepts of comprehensive defense in an effort to deter and defend against Russian aggression.

The Threat

With a shared Russian border, historic economic and energy linkages, and concentrated Russian-speaking populations, the Baltic states are among the most vulnerable NATO members to hostile measures and hybrid warfare. Russian aggression in Ukraine, military exercises along the borders of the Baltic states, and consistent information and cyber operations have all converged to raise fears about threats to the security and territorial integrity of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Russia has instrumentalized local agents of influence, namely nongovernmental organizations, informal groups, criminal organizations, journalists, academics, artists, opinion leaders, and government officials who may or may not be aware they are being used. These agents channel inflammatory narratives such as the "resurgence of fascism," "rampant Russophobia," "the ethnic cleansing of local Russian populations," and "drunk NATO soldiers" to slander Baltic governments.[5] The ultimate objective is to create and strengthen discontent about the current political, cultural, and economic model, thus ultimately discrediting Western values.[6]

Russia's attempts to influence Baltic politics must be divided into four lines of effort. First, maintaining or even increasing its political influence over the local population—particularly ethnic Russians, Russian-speakers, and others who might identify in some way with Russia; second, influencing politicians and civil servants, mainly at the regional level; third, supporting political organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals who favor closer alignment with Moscow or otherwise question the Baltic states' Euro-Atlantic orientation. The primary instruments of disinformation include the propagation of articles in Russian and national language media and the use of social media trolls to spread fake news or opinions that usually emphasize discrimination

against Russian speakers and the decadence of Western society. Finally, Russians regularly conduct major military exercises near the borders of the Baltics states that serve as pointed reminders of its potential use of force.

Current Strategic Situation

Shortly after Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania reclaimed their independence, they determined their security could only be assured within NATO. There was a general recognition that the armed forces of the three states would be unable to resist a large-scale Russian invasion and that their main function was not as an instrument of national power to influence Russia directly, but as a tool of integration with NATO.[7]

While NATO has a substantial advantage over Russia in military capability globally, Russia has a considerable local advantage in the Baltic Sea region. For example, Russia has almost 2½ times the number of combat

> **the Baltic states are among the most vulnerable NATO members to hostile measures and hybrid warfare**

troops as NATO in the Baltic region (including NATO's three battalion-sized battlegroups deployed under the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative), almost 6 times as many main battle tanks, and over 10 times as many self-propelled howitzers.[8] There is widespread belief that a determined Russia could rapidly seize one or more of the Baltic states and use its extensive investments in long-range weapons—for example, the *Iskander* family of ballistic and cruise missiles, the *Kalibr* cruise missile family, the S-400 air defense system, and the *Bastion-P* antiship missile system—to threaten NATO forces, seeking to reinforce the region, with unacceptable costs. In other words, to execute an antiaccess/area-denial strategy that results in a fait accompli.[9] The final deterrent is Russia's threat of using nuclear weapons to "escalate to deescalate."[10]

It is no surprise, then, that since the Baltic states' independence in 1991, their foreign and diplomatic policies'

main objective has been full integration with the West. This objective has been pursued by joining international organizations, the most relevant being the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and NATO.

Clearly, these objectives are not aligned with Russia's interests in the region. Current Russian elites and the Russian population more generally tend to believe that small states do not have independent foreign policies but act at the behest of those Great Powers to whom they are subjugated. Russia thus believes that it is worth developing relations only with major powers with which it expects to share control over the rest. Small states are to be manipulated or, at best, ignored. Post-Soviet states are singled out for special contempt as traitors driven by their greed for Western wealth.[11]

> ## Russia's main objective is to maintain and increase its influence in the region to achieve "Finlandization"

In the beginning of his first term, Vladimir Putin proclaimed that Russia would reassert its role in a multipolar world. This vision reinforced the idea of Russia as a permanent victim of other powers. Although it was not the turning point of Russia's relationship with the West, Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference was the clearest expression of Russian discomfort with Western unilateralism, which has resulted in different levels of confrontation. By 2012, Moscow was convinced that the West, especially the United States, is at war with Russia using instruments of low-intensity conflict, with the objective of overthrowing the current regime and imposing a Western political, social, and cultural system.[12]

Having succeeded at effectively seizing parts of Georgia and Ukraine, additional occupation and annexation do not seem to be part of Moscow's current strategic objectives, but this does not mean Russia is not interested in the Baltic states. On the contrary, Russia seeks a natural sphere of influence or "near abroad," encompassing the post-Soviet space. Since the Baltic states are firmly part of the West, Russia's main objective is to maintain and increase its influence in the region to achieve "Finlandization."[13] Its strategic objective is to push Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania from the Western sphere of influence back to Russia's near abroad without a costly occupation. Russian strategy generally attempts to increase polarization in society, reduce confidence in Western institutions, alienate allies from each other, and degrade the socioeconomic condition of the target state in the hope of generating opportunities it can exploit.[14] Russia has not limited this effort to the Baltics but is applying this strategy globally, as evidenced by its interference in both the U.S. and British elections.

Understanding the resistance of the Baltic states' populations to establishing deeper ties with Russia, the Russian narrative claims the current alignment with the West is impeding the Baltic states' development. Russia's desired outcome is populist anti-NATO, anti-EU, and anti-West politicians being democratically elected.

Baltic States' Response

Size matters. The Baltic states are small. Estonia has a population of 1.32 million and a territory a little over 45,000 square kilometers (km). Latvia has 1.92 million people and 64,500 square km. Lithuania's population is 2.79 million living within in 65,200 square km.[15] They are not just small states, but very small states. While they can and do make use of the range of instruments identified by the diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) model to counter hostile Russian activities, their actions are inevitably limited by the scarcity of resources they can bring to bear and Russia's ability to quickly overmatch these actions thanks to the states' geographic proximity to Russia and the logistical challenges that NATO would face in seeking to reinforce the states if a crisis appeared.

As they are unable to compete in the realm of hard power, small states ensure their security in part through

appeals to the rights and privileges they hold through international law and ethics. They are thus compelled to complain when others act illegally or unethically because such conduct challenges the very basis of their own security. Furthermore, because their options to act alone are limited, small states seek allies with similar outlooks to their own within international organizations, often voluntarily relinquishing aspects of their sovereignty in the pursuit of shared goals. Taking positions similar to those of their allies is not the behavior of a subject state, but the self-interested behavior of a state reflecting the shared values and interests of those organizations it has elected to join.

Estonia. Since regaining its independence in 1991, Estonia has taken two complementary approaches to leverage its limited resources. Participating in international frameworks is one. Within these international frameworks, DIMEFIL instruments are then employed to counter Russia in two ways. First, the instruments may be targeted directly against Russia in coordination with others (for example, the sanctions imposed by the EU after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014). Second, the instruments may be used to influence allies with a view to enhancing Estonia's profile and importance within the international framework, and thereby increase the chances allies will support its own agenda and interests vis-à-vis Russia. This is an indirect use of the instruments of power, frequently seen in small states' efforts to "punch above their weight" by developing and marketing particular skill sets that may be attractive or useful to their allies. Estonia's ambition to be an example to others in the field of e-governance is an illustration of this practice.

The second, more inward-facing approach is resilience-building to insulate Estonians from hostile Russian actions—for example, programs that aim to erase uneven social and economic development across Estonia's regions and strategic communications policies that endeavor to inform and engage the population in the activities of the state.[16] In this indirect use of the instruments of power, the aim is to dissuade Russia from pursuing hostile acts by attempting to lower the chances of success should it attempt such a course of action.

Resilience-building measures are also intended to increase societies' abilities to deal with a range of risks, such as terrorism, natural disasters, or large-scale technological failures. These measures also make societies adept at countering the hostile actions that Russia has practiced against the West in recent years. Russia looks for and exploits opportunities that allow for large-scale challenges to Western security structures and cohesion, such as its 2014 (and continuing) aggression against Ukraine, its military intervention in the Syrian civil war, and, closer to home, its probable orchestration in 2007 of cyber attacks against Estonia following the relocation of the "Bronze Soldier," a statue commemorating the Russian military's "liberation" of Tallinn in 1944. These major challenges are thankfully rare, but on a day-to-day basis, Russia pursues its long-term objective by subjecting Western states to a

> **in this indirect use of the instruments of power, the aim is to dissuade Russia from pursuing hostile acts by attempting to lower the chances of success should it attempt to do so**

steady drip of low-key antagonistic actions that are tailored to achieve maximum effect in a particular local context and aimed at creating uncertainty and confusion and undermining confidence.

The primary document outlining Estonia's approach to national security and providing guidance to the agencies responsible for its implementation is the National Security Concept, first published in 2001 and updated in 2004, 2010, and 2017. The three later versions of the National Security Concept were adopted after Estonia joined NATO and the EU in 2004. All versions outlined a broader concept of a security threat, which in turn required a broader response. Much of the focus is on the use of DIMEFIL instruments to build societal resilience and

on Estonia's overriding objective of conducting security policy within international frameworks.

Successive versions of the National Security Concept have also evolved in their depiction of Russia. While the 2004 concept barely mentioned Russia, and then only to cast Estonian-Russian relations firmly within the context of NATO-Russia and EU-Russia relations, the 2010 version noted Russia's use of political, economic, military, and energy tools to achieve its goals. Nonetheless, the 2010 concept remained optimistic about relations with Russia and expressed Estonia's wish for open dialogue and pursuit of practical cooperation.[17] The 2017 concept, however, makes clear that Russia is a source of instability: "Russia's unpredictable, aggressive and provocative activity, for example, airspace violations, offensive military

> **"Russia's unpredictable, aggressive and provocative activity, for example, airspace violations, offensive military exercises, and nuclear threats, is generating instability"**

exercises, and nuclear threats, is generating instability." While it continues to advocate open dialogue and practical cooperation, this version of the concept also supports "continued enforcement of the restrictive measures imposed until their reasons have been eliminated," explicitly recognizing for the first time the value of the direct use of DIMEFIL tools to counter Russia.[18]

Of the instruments of national power that it deploys to counter Russia, Estonia probably places greatest value on the military. This is one of the few instruments that Estonia attempts to directly influence Russia with. But the defense forces are also used as a tool of influence toward allies and in resilience-building—Estonia's system of comprehensive defense aims to involve the whole of society and thus have an integrating effect. Both roles serve to counter Russia indirectly.

The prevalence of military thinking in society is evident in the requirement for all men to serve as conscripts from 8 to 11 months before entering the reserve, where they continue to have training obligations for several years (although in practice, only around one-third of the annual cohort is conscripted). The voluntary Estonian Defence League has a membership of 16,000, with an additional 10,000 in its affiliated organizations, the Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation, the Young Eagles, and the Home Daughters.[19]

There is a strong public consensus on defense matters in Estonia. The October 2018 biannual polling showed the defense forces are seen as trustworthy by 75 percent of the population. A significant majority of the population—60 percent—is ready to participate in defense activities if Estonia is attacked, while 91 percent of the population believes that conscription is necessary.[20]

There is an expectation that the Estonian defense forces should at least be able to buy the time necessary for allied reinforcement. Hence the statement of principle in Estonia's National Defence Strategy that "Estonia's military defence relies on NATO's collective defence and an initial independent defense capability."[21] Estonia's aim in using the military as a tool to directly influence Russia is to ensure that its independent defense capability is credible. This emphasis on independent defense also resonates domestically with a large fraction of the population—47 percent—that does not believe NATO would provide direct military assistance if Estonia was exposed to a military attack.[22]

The aim of building credibility for independent defense may be seen, for example, in Estonia's emphasis on the size of its military once mobilized and in recent attempts to take mobilization more seriously, including through the introduction of unannounced call-ups for additional reservist training exercises.[23] It is also demonstrated in Estonia's consistent (since 2015, according to NATO figures) defense expenditure above 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and in the use of this funding to acquire capability intended to support hard defense (for example, self-propelled howitzers, large-

caliber ammunition for war stocks, the mechanization of the 1st Infantry Brigade, and intelligence and early warning assets).[24]

It is also evident in Estonia's official declarations of its determination to fight to the end. The first paragraph of the National Defence Strategy states, "Estonia will defend itself in all circumstances and against any adversary, no matter how overwhelming. Should Estonia temporarily lose control over part of its sovereign territory, Estonian citizens will still resist the adversary within that territory."[25] Later, reflecting the considerable difficulties created for the Soviet occupiers by the Forest Brothers, a guerrilla movement active between 1944 and 1953, it adds that "Military defence planning will incorporate paramilitary operations, such as guerrilla activity and resistance movements."[26] And in case any adversary believes it might be possible to invade by stealth, using a Ukraine-style "little green men" hybrid attack, the military command has an answer: foreign undercover operators will be considered terrorists and simply be shot.[27]

A second role of the military as an instrument of national power is in signaling to allies through Estonia's involvement in international crisis response operations. Estonian and other Baltic officials strongly believe that this indirect use of the military instrument has been important in giving them the confidence to pursue their own agenda in the Alliance and to steer NATO policies in directions favorable to their own interests in countering Russia.[28]

Diplomatic relations between Estonia and Russia are cool, but they are at least stable. Unfortunately, Russian diplomats are not ready to take Estonia seriously; if Moscow thinks about Estonia at all, it does so largely in the context of the alleged—and thus allegedly broken— promises of NATO not to station troops there.[29]

Estonia's diplomacy toward its allies and partners has been considerably more successful as evidenced by its joining NATO and the EU in 2004. Alongside traditional state-to-state diplomacy, Estonia strives to employ what is variously characterized as public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, or soft power. In this area, Estonia's greatest success is its self-promotion as a digital state. Software products of Estonian origin, such as Skype and Transferwise, are globally known. Russia's 2007 cyber attacks prompted Estonia's development of institutions such as the Defence League Cyber Unit, a voluntary organization aimed at protecting Estonian cyberspace, and as a host to the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, which conducts research and provides training in the technological, strategic, operational, and legal aspects of cyber defense.[30] As an exercise in soft power, it has been successful and has been paralleled by Estonian efforts to advise and lead in the broader digital discipline of e-governance, where it has promoted ideas such as the e-state, e-voting, and e-residency.

Global awareness of the importance of the information domain has grown in recent years as high-profile

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cases of Russia's use of information tools to pursue its objectives in other states, such as its interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign and in the British referendum on leaving the EU. Estonia faces a somewhat different challenge from most other Western states in that it has a large (25 percent) Russian-speaking population that many observers believe could be manipulated by Moscow's propaganda to act against it. Such concerns were amplified after Russia's annexation of Crimea, where the Russian-speaking population was persuaded by television messaging that they would be treated as second-class citizens in Ukraine and should rather favor secession and joining Russia.[31] Given the resonance of this messaging with frequent Russian attacks on the Baltic states' purported discrimination against, or even oppression of, Russia's "compatriots" in their countries, it is understandable

that analysts and the media have fretted over the question: "Will Narva be next?"[32]

While the Balts may worry about military intervention in their Russian-speaking areas and beyond, a scenario that involves Moscow activating Russian-speaking populations seems more a concern to states outside the Baltic region rather than a concern for the Baltic states themselves. RAND researchers have found, for example, that while Estonian and Latvian officials were monitoring Russian provocations in their predominantly Russian-speaking areas, they doubted that Moscow could sustain a mobilization of the Russian-speaking population. They also argued that the threat of NATO's involvement would deter Russia from escalating lower order disruption into a full-blown crisis. Furthermore, Estonia and Latvia are

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"well-functioning states" with "effective internal security services and border guards that are more capable of protecting their territory than the ones Ukraine had."[33]

Estonia's strategy in the information domain is to focus its activity inward—on the building of societal resilience—rather than trying to directly influence Russia. Here, the notion of psychological defense—somewhat loosely defined in the National Security Concept as "informing society and raising awareness about information-related activities aimed at harming Estonia's constitutional order, society's values, and virtues"—is relevant.[34]

In Estonia's security thinking, psychological defense has a more active counterpart, strategic communication, which "involves planning the state's political, economic, and defense-related statements and activities, preparing a comprehensive informative whole on the basis of these,

and transmitting it to the population."[35] Strategic communication is aimed at both Estonian society and foreign target groups and, in line with broader Estonian thinking on comprehensive defense, relies on the support of social networks and the media.[36] In practical terms, the state has attempted to implement strategic communication by providing the public with honest, factual information according to guidelines set out in a government communications handbook.[37]

Another means for presenting unbiased factual information, this time specifically directed at the Russian-speaking population, is the Russian language television channel, ETV+, launched in 2015 by the Estonian public broadcaster, ERR. Rather than try to compete with Russian entertainment channels or to counter Russian propaganda, ETV+ focuses on local interest stories. The aim is to tackle the disengagement of the Russian-speaking population by persuading them to feel more connected to the state, to Estonian speakers, and also to other Russian speakers.[38]

Finally, in a typical small-state approach, Estonia has promoted the internationalization of the disinformation problem. It was among the early supporters of the establishment within the EU European External Action Service of the East StratCom Task Force that "analyzes disinformation trends, explains and exposes disinformation narratives, and raises awareness of disinformation coming from Russian State, Russian sources and spread in the Eastern neighbourhood media space."[39]

Estonia's booming economy also helps insulate it from Russian interference. One sector where this approach is apparent is energy. Estonia is fortunate that its oil shale deposits allow it to meet 90 percent of its electricity generation needs; thus, it has the lowest energy dependency rate in the EU.[40] For renewables, Estonia presently achieves about twice the EU average percentage of gross final energy consumption.[41] At the same time, Estonia is attempting to integrate its energy infrastructure more closely with that of other EU nations. Estonia, along with Latvia and Lithuania, is seeking to desynchronize its grid from the Soviet legacy Integrated Power Sys-

tem (IPS)/Unified Power System (UPS)–wide area interconnector and synchronize instead with the synchronous grid of continental Europe, a project with geopolitical significance.[42] Projects are also under way to connect the Estonian gas supply systems to the Central European gas networks and to construct an additional liquefied natural gas terminal in Estonia, again aimed at reducing dependency on supply from Russia.[43] Unsurprisingly, Estonia has been a harsh critic of the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, which it argues serve Russia's geopolitical interests in contravention of EU energy policy.[44]

In a more direct application of the economic instrument of power, Estonia has been supportive of the sanctions implemented on Russia by the EU following the annexation of Crimea. These include both economic and financial measures. The economies of Estonia and the other Baltic states have been damaged more than most other EU countries by Russia's countersanctions against agricultural products, notably in the dairy and canned fish sectors, and in reductions in tourism volumes. However, upholding international law, a vital consideration for small states whose sovereignty depends on international respect of its principles, far outweighs any economic loss.[45]

On the financial and legal side, Estonia has also proved itself resilient against Russia's active weaponization of corruption and organized crime. In 2018, it ranked 21st in the world in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (making it the least corrupt former Communist country) and 10th in terms of the costs imposed on business by organized crime in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index.[46]

Russia has leveraged corruption to capture regional elites and establish patron-client political relationships to spread influence at home and in the near abroad.[47] Clearly, efforts to prevent corruption from spreading westward need to be stepped up, not only in Estonia but also across Europe.

Latvia. The nonmilitary threats for Latvia's security are the result of the country's endogenous fragilities and, in some cases, the clash between security objectives and political/economic interests. Latvia's main political objec-

tive has been joining the West and institutions such as the EU, the OECD, and NATO to distance the country from Russian influence. Nevertheless, one of the main priorities of its economic policy is to establish Latvia as a bridge between East and West in finance and logistics/transit, with Russia inevitably being the main partner.

Since economics and politics are deeply interconnected in Latvia, it was inevitable that Russia would maintain a certain degree of indirect influence in Latvia's political affairs. While Russia was never successful in diverting Latvia's plan of politically and economically integrating with the West, it has engaged in many efforts to gain influence.

The Latvian government has been closely following the developments of these influence operations and countering them by presenting the population with facts and

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critical information. It directly informs them about such operations in clear language, stating who the attacker is (if known), what its objectives are, what its narrative is, and why that narrative is not true.[48] It does not prohibit the broadcast of Russian television and radio unless there are cases of hate speech and incitement for violence.

Another important issue is education. After independence from the Soviet Union, Latvia maintained the Soviet dual-language system of education, with schools in Latvian and Russian. Each system had its own educational program and material, resulting in some cases in a deep divergence of learning outcomes, especially in disciplines such as history. Between 2019 and 2022, there will be a gradual transition until all disciplines are taught in Latvian with the exception of language and literature

and disciplines related to the culture and history of the minority group.

It is a mistake to consider the Russian-speaking population in Latvia and in the Baltics a fifth column ready to support a Russian operation in the region. For many, taking Russian citizenship was an economic decision to receive a pension earlier to complement the regular income in Latvia and not allegiance and loyalty to Russia.

The analysis of the economic platforms of all Parliamentary parties shows that the key economic sectors to be developed were transit, real estate, and finance.[49] All three have been highly dependent on money from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, resulting in business interests being a significant conduit for Russian influence. Since part of these

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assets had shadowy origins, this also created a problem of reputation for Latvia because of allegations of money-laundering and corruption.

Favoring finance, real estate, and transit resulted in deindustrialization, the shrinkage in the services sector through a lack of competitiveness due to the overvalued exchange rate, and economic reorganization in favor of speculative and/or nonsustainable sectors (for example, consumption of durable goods).[50] It also resulted in the competitiveness of the country being based on low wages. First, because of the financial crisis of 2008, absolute living standards decreased. Second, and most important, on separation from the Soviet Union, Baltic businesses sought to exploit the relatively low cost of their labor development manufacturing. Unfortunately, low-wage industries also usually have low productivity. Thus, eco-

nomic growth did not result in improving relative living standards. On the contrary, it deepened wealth inequality and consequently increased sentiments of relative deprivation.[51] As result, a significant part of the population emigrated or developed resentment against the state and the political system. These are socioeconomic grievances that Russia continues to try to exploit.

Unlike its Baltic neighbors, Latvia has not instituted conscription because of the significant necessary financial, personnel, and infrastructure resources that are not available at this moment. Only wage expenses for an additional 1,000 conscripts would represent an additional cost of approximately 100 million euro. Latvia's 2020 defense budget is 640 million euro, or 2 percent of GDP. Conscription would not solve other problems, either. The professional armed forces still lack personnel. Also, since modern warfare relies on high-tech systems, it is necessary to modernize and acquire new capabilities instead of spending resources with undertrained manpower. Thus, Latvia has adopted the concept of comprehensive defense of the whole of society for resisting aggression. The Latvian National Armed Forces have 5,000 professional soldiers, 3,000 reservists, and 8,000 national guardsmen.[52] It is passing through an intensive process of modernization.

Lithuania. The events of 2014 in Ukraine were a game changer for Lithuania. Hybrid war and its companion, the "Gerasimov doctrine," became buzzwords used to explain the Russian military approach and to focus the Lithuanian response. The Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) designated two battalions as rapid-reaction units ready to act in less than 24 hours. Relevant national laws were adopted to provide legal shortcuts to allow crises such as Crimea to be dealt with swiftly.[53] At the same time, Lithuania's military community and society writ large acknowledged the importance of nonkinetic elements of defense. Discussions about information, cyber warfare, and strategic communication dimensions entered the debates about hybrid conflicts.

From the beginning, members of the military community were skeptical about the novelty of hybrid warfare. The military command wanted to follow conventional

warfighting functions. Similar ideas were circulating in other NATO member states. In 2015, Lieutenant General Frederick "Ben" Hodges, USA, noted the 60-mile-long stretch of the Lithuanian-Polish border is the only land connection between the Baltic states and the rest of Europe. Keeping it open became a major task for NATO.[54] Thus, the Suwałki corridor scenario temporarily replaced the hybrid war concept as a focus of NATO effort. International, regional, and national military exercises, based on scenarios defending the corridor, followed one after another.[55]

At the same time, NATO and the EU began to improve the military logistics and mobility system (the so-called military Schengen).[56] In Poland and especially in Lithuania, it helped put the development of host-nation support capabilities at the top of the political priority list. The debate promoted the awareness of national politicians and, to some extent, of the military itself, that logistics was essential for any military activity in the corridor. However, this fixation on the Suwałki corridor faced its own challenges in Lithuania; there was increasing pressure from the defense community itself to engage all functions of the defense effort, both military and civilian.

Western analysts prefer to focus on Lithuania's conventional kinetic capabilities, unconventional warfare, and capacity for violent resistance. This approach perceives societal resistance under the occupation scenario. In contrast, Lithuanian officials and experts focus their efforts on deterrence and defense. This gap in perspectives may have been caused by concerns that the Baltic states could be occupied by Russia within a certain number of hours, or perhaps that the Baltics' defensibility is doubted, or simply that there is a lack of information about the region.[57] Fortunately, in recent years, U.S. officials began paying more attention to the strategic thought circulating in the Baltic region and accordingly tailoring operational concepts more appropriately. For instance, the Resistance Operating Concept was published in the fall of 2019.[58]

Over the past 6 years, Lithuanian thinking about defense has evolved through three different concepts: hybrid, Suwałki corridor, and comprehensive defense. Since the end of 2018, debates about comprehensive defense have gained importance. It is important to emphasize, however, that these different discussions do not replace each other but coexist and have their imprint on defense politics.

This conceptual dynamic of defense priorities shows that during the past few years, Lithuania has engaged in a fluid, diverse, and productive intellectual reflection. It also confirms that Lithuania is still searching for its own way to defend itself, and, as a consequence, experimentation is taking place.

The first major decision made by Lithuania was to renew its goal of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense until 2020. In 2018, the Lithuanian Defence Policy Guidelines for 2020–2030 aimed to ensure proper funding for defense by allocating at least 2 percent of the country's GDP and achieving at least 2.5 percent of the

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country's GDP no later than 2030.[59] It also established a new commitment to increase public and national resistance, build resilience against hybrid threats among state institutions and the Lithuanian public, and further enhance the development of national cyber security capabilities. The Lithuanian government launched the National Cyber Security Centre in 2015, which provides cyber security expertise and assists the EU with improving its cyber capabilities.[60]

The second important decision was to reintroduce conscription in 2015.[61] It was decided that between 3,000 and 3,500 conscripts per year would serve 9 months. Public approval remains high and should be seen as a major success of Lithuanian society.[62]

Lithuania also never lost sight of international lobbying and concerted action, regarding both as equally

vital for ensuring national security. Lithuania focused on forming diverse bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation agreements to complement Lithuania's security umbrella provided by NATO. However, understanding the complex nature of NATO decisionmaking and its cumbersome military structure, Lithuania made a strategic decision to diversify its efforts by actively participating in Alliance reforms while also pursuing its military cooperation with a number of countries. As one senior official of the Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania stated, Lithuania looked for partners with "teeth and claws" that are willing, capable, and experienced in warfighting. Lithuania opted to work with countries that, in the event of crisis and war, could be first responders.

This idea manifested itself in closer bilateral cooperation with Poland, namely, the establishment of the Lithu-

> ## Lithuania looked for partners with "teeth and claws," that is, willing, capable, and experienced in warfighting

anian-Polish Council of Defence Ministers and affiliation of military units; increased compatibility with the United States by developing the Lithuania's Land Force's divisional headquarters component; special operations forces cooperation and training; and multilateral cooperation in the joint expeditionary force.[63] The joint expeditionary force not only provides actual defense planning and training with NATO states but also serves as a bridge for deeper cooperation with Sweden and Finland.

These warfighting partnerships were complemented by EU initiatives, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation, which is aimed at deepening defense cooperation among the EU member states.[64] From the Lithuanian perspective, NATO cannot deliver all the necessary tools for Baltic regional defense (for instance, smooth military mobility [military Schengen]). Some issues require spe-

cific legislation that is beyond Alliance jurisdiction but is in the EU's domain. Furthermore, Lithuania was among the first nations to initiate and support the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. The latter initiative proves that the nature of conflicts is not only kinetic; this center helps to build expertise, consensus on the hybrid threats among EU member states, and helps to provide a niche for cooperation with NATO.

Diversity and hybrid threats require a whole-of-government approach with coordinated action among state agencies. To execute Lithuania's National Security Strategy,[65] the National Model for Integrated Crisis Prevention and Hybrid Threats Management was established.[66] This is a legal and procedural framework for national efforts to monitor and assess threats, develop crisis plans, and conduct risk management. To monitor the implementation of tasks, it formed the Threat Management and Crisis Prevention Bureau (known as the Group).[67] Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic resistance, the Group remains understaffed and viewed by other state institutions as a competitor, challenging their authorities.

Alongside cyber security, Lithuania is well known for its advocacy for energy security. In 2010, Vilnius, following EU membership obligations, closed the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and lost its status as an electricity exporter, becoming instead an importer (65 percent of electricity is now imported).[68] Lithuania immediately took steps to reduce its dependency. By opening a liquefied natural gas terminal and increasing the capacities of its pipeline system, Lithuania eliminated Russia's decades-old monopoly on natural gas in the Baltic region. As a result, the cost of natural gas in Lithuania has gone from one of the highest prices in the EU to one of the lowest.[69]

With the completion of the Baltic states' synchronization with the continental European system in 2025, Lithuania will independently manage its electrical grid. The Baltic states will be disconnected from the Russian-controlled IPS/UPS system (Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—BRELL).[70] Additionally, to reduce its dependency on electricity imports, Lithuania has

set a strategic goal of increasing the share of electricity consumption from renewable energy supplies to 45 percent in 2030 and 80 percent in 2050.[71] Until that happens, Lithuania's dependence on Russian electricity remains a risk to the country's security. Even so, the current national energy security situation and Lithuania's efforts to reach this level of security deserve to qualify as a major success.

Another success is Lithuania's strategic communication program. In recent years, Lithuania has accumulated extensive experience in monitoring and assessing the risks of hostile strategic communication. This includes (but is not limited to) the assessment of both physical and electronic environments. The success lies in the way strategic communication is organized. This model rests on the decentralized and often informal cooperation between state and civil society; the core of this cooperation is mutual trust.[72] At the state level, government institutions assess the information environment according to their areas of responsibility and competence.

Civil society is directly engaged in the national information environment by monitoring, fact-checking, and strengthening society's media and information literacy. A good deal of work is undertaken by civil volunteers working in information technology, media, academia, education, and business sectors, such as the Lithuanian "elves," the mainstream media fact-checking platform Debunk. eu, and many others.[73] Civil society organizations counter disinformation and are active in positive narrative communication. Although the state provides financial assistance to civil society, its major financial support comes from international donors. The cooperation between state institutions and society set a framework for the whole-of-society approach to become tangible and long lasting.

Even though it is effective, strategic communication alone is not sufficient for developing long-term social resilience and the ability to cope, adapt, and quickly recover from crises or avoid escalation. Lithuanian experts together with Swedish colleagues adapted the concept of psychological defense to build up resilient, well-informed decisionmakers, institutions, and society. It empowers them by providing practical knowledge and tools to en-

sure their readiness and willingness to act in case of crisis.[74] Despite this action, social exclusion and a large gap in income remain challenges to societal resilience. In this context, it is vital to have a strong national narrative that dispels other forms of disinformation and helps to rally the nation.

Conscription was only part of the LAF overhaul. Lithuania also invested in military hardware to increase its warfighting capacities. It initiated a large-scale procurement program. It purchased mobile artillery systems (PzH 2000), armored fighting vehicles (Boxer), a short-range air defense system (National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System), tactical combat vehicles (Oshkosh Joint Light Tactical Vehicle), helicopters (Blackhawk), and other vitally important pieces of tactical equipment.[75]

the Baltic states will be disconnected from the Russian-controlled IPS/UPS system (Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—BRELL)

During the same period, the number of active personnel within the LAF rose from 13,000 in 2013 to around 20,000 in 2019.[76] Four new battalions were established, followed by the Second Infantry Brigade. The Land Forces grew to such an extent that it was decided to develop a division-level command and control capability in 2019. This was a remarkable transformation of the LAF. Their increased capabilities and manpower were complemented by the deployment of one of NATO's Enhanced Force Presence battlegroups.

Capable armed forces and international support are essential but not sufficient to resist an aggressor. To accomplish this task, it is crucial to involve and empower the whole of society. The complexity of implementing comprehensive defense, however, still poses many challenges to Lithuania's political leadership. The key issue is a consistent buildup of the structures for civilians to be

involved in defense. The National Security Strategy of Lithuania relies on the concept of civil-based defense.[77]

When it comes to civilian-based defense of Lithuania, education plays an extremely important role. Better education is key to a resilient society. Critical and informed citizens with a sense of duty are groomed starting from primary school. The education includes such topics as civic education, national security, and media and information literacy.

In a 2017 public opinion survey, the vast majority (88 percent) of respondents believe defending the country is the duty of every citizen.[78] Moreover, according to the survey, 6 percent of respondents or 150,000 Lithuanian citizens are absolutely determined to fight an aggressor. This demonstrates the will and potential for society to be

> **in a gray zone conflict, SOF, operating in close coordination with police and intelligence agencies, are crucial to detecting changes in the operational environment**

a significant reserve for the LAF, on the condition that people are properly prepared, trained, and educated.

The major changes that took place in Lithuanian security and defense policy deserve high praise and respect. Today, there is a clear understanding that the country's comprehensive defense posture should not be focused on only conventional warfighting. Lithuania's political elite, the military community, and wider society have to acknowledge the importance of nonkinetic elements of defense. The analysis discloses a huge potential of Lithuanian society's engagement in the country's defense process.

Defense should be co-owned by a variety of players. The government should facilitate this co-ownership by drafting new laws and revising old laws, procedures, and other legal documents. It should expand and clarify the functions of the Threat Management and Crisis Preven-

tion Bureau and transform it into a proper coordination center. Local authorities should be engaged in all these activities. It is also clear that comprehensive defense is most effective when it is compatible with allies' defense concepts and practices. Only then could it achieve a collaborative response to an incursion effectively. Moreover, it could prevent misinterpretation of events and mismanagement in case of a crisis. Comprehensive defense is only as strong as its weakest domain. How quickly state and regional institutions and agencies meet the requirements for comprehensive defense depends on political consistency and leadership. Nonetheless, Lithuania is committed to comprehensive defense.

Conclusion: Building Baltic Comprehensive Defense

In this paper, authors have described their nation's efforts to counter Russian hostile measures and hybrid warfare. Clearly, the Baltic states have, since the reestablishment of their independence, begun to embrace the defense strategy that their Nordic neighbors employ.[79] Going forward, they should continue to leverage this comprehensive whole-of-society approach to enhance societal resilience; strengthen the rule of law; weed out corruption in sectors like banking, energy, and rail; integrate Russian speaking minorities; and bolster their energy independence and infrastructure linkages to their Nordic neighbors and the rest of Europe.

Each author has noted that Russian disinformation seeks to alienate ethnic Russians and encourage a belief that ethnic Russians are a potential fifth column. U.S. analysts are deeply concerned about the internal threat presented by ethnic Russians. In fact, there are sharp contrasts between national groups and ethnic Russians on the issue of NATO and the threat from Russia. But there is little difference when it comes to ethnic Russians willingness to defend their Baltic homelands.[80]

The policy challenge, then, is in the best way to advance the integration of ethnic Russians in the Baltics and combat the disinformation that Russia conveys to them. While issues of integration such as citizenship, language,

and education are clearly national prerogatives, the issue of disinformation is an area that regional allies and partners can both offer assistance and learn from Baltic experiences. In 2015, the East StratCom Task Force within the European External Action Service was set up to begin reviewing and debunking the most blatant disinformation spewed by the Russians. Financial assistance from EU and Nordic partners to support these local efforts may be the best option. Independently produced Western programming is unlikely to be seen as credible, and broadcasts such as Radio Free Europe are likely only to be marginally influential.

Engaging the entire population in the defense of the state is a key element of comprehensive defense. As noted, due to recent efforts, the Baltic states can currently muster approximately 32,000 active-duty troops and over 33,000 reserve forces while spending approximately 2 percent of GDP.[81] Scholars have suggested this force is insufficient to stop a Russian invasion.[82] However, adopting comprehensive defense could be both a tool for increasing the number of military personnel and for a way to create a diverse set of problems the Russians must solve if they choose to invade.

While by and large the Baltic states are far better governed than other post-Soviet states, the transportation sector was historically plagued by corruption, especially in Latvia and Lithuania. This weakness in Baltic civil society runs headlong into a powerful tool of Russian statecraft, as the Kremlin often seeks to entrap corrupt institutions and officials of countries on its periphery for use in information campaigns aimed at discrediting the Baltic states as "failed" and "corrupt."[83] Recognizing this threat, Lithuania restructured its rail and air administrations between 2017 and 2019 to create transparent, accountable organizations. Both nations must remain vigilant against this threat.

Plans to address Baltic rail infrastructure issues are in motion. Rail Baltica, the largest EU project in the Baltic states, will eventually connect the capitals of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (with additional connections to Helsinki via Tallinn) with European-gauge track. This

will allow for a standardized rail link to NATO Allies and partners along a north-south axis. Unfortunately, the project is not expected to be completed until 2025.[84]

Finally, as all authors noted, to bolster comprehensive defense and enhance societal resilience, the disconnection of the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian power systems from the Moscow-controlled BRELL ring and their synchronization with the electrical grids of continental Europe must continue to be a priority initiative.[85] With the recent announcement of energy independence in Kaliningrad, the other members of the BRELL ring remain vulnerable.[86] Energy supplies and linkages can now be manipulated by Russia without fear of affecting the exclave.

The promise of Nordic cooperation on energy in the Baltics could be amplified through mechanisms such as the EU Baltic Market Interconnection Plan.[87] The regional interconnection of Baltic Sea energy grids will go a long way toward ending Baltic states' isolation and dependence on the BRELL ring. Energy infrastructure projects such as Estlink 1 and 2, connecting Estonia and Finland; NordBalt, linking Lithuania and Sweden; the LitPol Link, connecting Lithuania and Poland; and others have demonstrated significant progress toward ending reliance on Russian energy linkages. The EU has authorized additional funding for next steps, including ending power synchronization with the BRELL ring in favor of the continental Europe grid.[88]

Russian pushback to Baltic energy independence was on full display in the winter of 2018 as pro-Kremlin media in both Lithuanian and Russian languages sought to discredit Lithuania's independent energy policies after its government announced unpopular energy price increases of 15 to 20 percent.[89] While Russian propaganda will continue to discredit the effort, the real challenge may be the slow going and uneven pace of energy disconnection. The Nordic states and the EU have been steady partners and should endeavor to accelerate these projects with the Baltic states and infuse these projects with good governance to inoculate them against Russian propaganda. If properly and promptly executed, these efforts stand to significant-

ly increase the resilience of the Baltic states. This should change Moscow's decisionmaking calculus regarding its ability to use hostile measures and hybrid warfare to create the conditions in which a quick territorial land grab might be successful.

Notes

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