



ANALYSIS

STRENGTHENING THE UK'S MILITARY POWER IN THE BALTICS

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| EUAN GODBOLD |

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Authors: Godbold, Euan

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©International Centre for Defence and Security
63/4 Narva Rd., 10152 Tallinn, Estonia
info@icds.ee, www.icds.ee

FOREWORD

Euan Godbold¹ has produced a meaningful addition to ICDS's intellectual output by formulating and recently updating this paper on UK's choices to contribute to the defence of its allies, the Baltic states. I was very pleased to be Euan's tutor during his three weeks' internship at ICDS in the spring of 2016, when the decisions adopted at NATO's Warsaw Summit were only taking shape, and the result and repercussions of the Brexit vote were hardly anticipated.

The UK has always been one of the most favoured partners of Estonia, as well as of Latvia and Lithuania, in defence and security matters. Despite the British people opting to leave the EU, even though by narrow margins, the UK has pledged more forcefully than ever before to fulfil its obligations to the Alliance. The UK will considerably increase its military presence in the Baltic area, in particular by becoming the framework nation of a multinational allied battalion to be deployed in Estonia in early 2017. Euan has also elegantly and thoughtfully brought out other important areas where Britain has the potential to bring added value to the defence of NATO's Eastern Flank: joint multinational exercises, naval presence, air defence, joint defence procurement and prepositioning of equipment.

The EU and NATO are experiencing new challenges. Nevertheless, it is the policy pursued by each individual member state that has the ultimate impact on the success of these organisations, which are absolutely crucial for the defence and security of the Baltic states. There is little doubt that the UK, whose relationship with the EU will become clear in a couple of years, will continue to be one of the main pillars of NATO. I hope that the new British Government will continue to upgrade UK's involvement in the Baltic Sea area; this paper provides quite a few good ideas to that end.

Kalev Stoicescu

ICDS Research Fellow

¹ Euan Godbold was the ICDS intern during March-April 2016. He is currently an undergraduate student at the University of Cambridge.

INTRODUCTION

The aftermath of 'Brexit' can be described with many words, but none more so than confusing. Almost overnight, the UK's party political system, the strength of the City of London and the UK's platform within Europe seemed unclear. Despite the sensationalism found within European media, particularly within the UK, the mandate from Downing Street remains clear: carry on as normal. As the UK continues to formulate plans for its exit from the European Union over the next two years, its role within NATO will become increasingly important in order to ensure beneficial relationships with EU member states. With regard to the Baltic states, this will involve a significant role deterring Russian aggression.

THE UK'S CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENCE PLANNING

There are noticeable trends in UK foreign policy, in particular towards the Baltic states, which should be understood fully before considering what possible contributions the UK could make.

The form of contribution the UK has demonstrated a favour for is in training and advice. Following efforts made with Ukraine, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the UK has a clear interest in building on this policy as it is far less expensive and requires far fewer UK personnel but still makes a significant impact.² Although the situation in the previous three countries is clearly very different from the Baltic states, the benefits and success of effective training is clearly evident to the UK. Consequently, the UK has announced its intention to join the Transatlantic Capabilities Enhancement and Training (TACET) initia-

² ["Single departmental plan: 2015 to 2020"](#), UK Ministry of Defence, accessed June 20, 2016.

tive.³ As part of this the Baltic states and Poland will receive regular training programmes offered by the UK Armed Forces.⁴

Nevertheless, following agreements made at the Warsaw Summit, the UK has pledged, along with other Allied nations, to create four robust multinational battalions to be stationed in the Baltic states in 2017.⁵ In particular, the UK will be sending 500 troops to Estonia and 150 to Poland.⁶ This is a historic step forward for NATO, as it will now provide substantial support for effective deterrence in the Baltic states that can be built upon if necessary.

A historic but still very widely regarded tendency is the implicit UK policy of 'America First'. With Ukraine and Syria the UK has demonstrated that its contributions will often follow from a larger enterprise from the United States.⁷ However, with the formation of the JEF, the UK has somewhat bucked the trend. By the end of 2017 the UK's primary method of contribution to the Baltic states is as the framework nation for the JEF, which aims to provide an interoperable task force made up of the Baltic states, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, with Sweden considering being involved as well.⁸ It is intended to offer a rapid response force that can be deployed anywhere in the world at short-notice and is able to act either with the member nations or on behalf of organisations such as the UN and NATO.

In conjunction with this, the UK intends to contribute 3000 troops to NATO's Very High Readiness

³ ["Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training \(TACET\) Initiative 'Common Training – Improved Interoperability Enhanced Capabilities and Resilience – Credible Assurance'"](#), NATO Defence Ministerial, accessed July 23, 2016.

⁴ ["Defence Secretary announces more support in Baltics and Ukraine"](#), UK Ministry of Defence, accessed July 23, 2016.

⁵ ["NATO leaders bolster collective deterrence and defence"](#), NATO, accessed July 20, 2016.

⁶ ["UK to enhance NATO's ability to rapidly respond to threats"](#), UK Ministry of Defence, accessed July 23, 2016.

⁷ There has been a consistent trend following the Ukraine Crisis. America announced they would supply arms to the Ukrainian Government following which the UK send personnel for training, and after America announced that they would conduct airstrikes in Syria the UK held a vote to on whether to take part.

⁸ O'Dwyer, Gerard, ["Sweden Considers Joining UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force"](#), *Defense News*, October 4, 2015, accessed April 5, 2016.

ness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Agreed at the Wales Summit in 2014, the task force is intended to be the first force deployed by NATO in response to a crisis. It will supposedly consist of a 5000 strong land-brigade with naval, air and Special Forces components.

In the Baltic region in particular, Britain has contributed Eurofighter Typhoons to NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission for 2014 and 2015 and will be sending a further round in 2016.⁹ They have also contributed a Type-23 frigate to Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) as well as minesweepers to Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1 (SNMCMG1).¹⁰ Along with standing NATO missions, the UK has pledged that more than 4000 personnel will be involved in NATO exercises for 2016, building on the 4000 contributed in 2015.

ARE THE UK'S POLICIES AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF RUSSIA?

The permanent positioning of a multinational NATO force in the Baltic states is the most significant and effective response to Russian aggression. Not only does it make a big step forward to an effective deterrence of Russia, but it also returns to the NATO tripwire strategy to ensure a faster response to Article 5. However, the UK's defence policies towards the Baltic states are not without their issues.

The first issue with the UK's military contributions to the defence of the Baltic states is that there seem to be a multitude of rapid response forces. Along with the JEF and VJTF, the UK will also establish two Strike forces and pledge to put greater emphasis on the UK-France Combined Joint Expeditionary Force. It currently

looks like the UK will be part of three different groups all designed to have the same functionality: provide a cooperative, rapid response force to the escalation of conflict in an allied region. The UK needs to be precise on exactly what the circumstances of deployment for each of these different response forces are.

Following from this comes an even bigger issue. Despite an emphasis on rapid response forces as both a deterrent and a meaningful response to crises, the majority of these options seem to be neutralised by Russian A2/AD capabilities.¹¹ If the UK intends to contribute forces like the 16th Air Assault Brigade, their mobility is limited given the lack of freedom to manoeuvre within an A2/AD defended zone. The very notion of A2/AD is to harass the build-up and deployment of troops so, without an effective response to the potential use of this technology, the UK's rapid response forces will clearly not be as effective.

Finally, there is a grave question over how 'rapid' these response forces might be. The VJTF, by virtue of being a rotating force, has no specifically selected area to conduct its operations. Not only could it be operating anywhere in the world when it is required to respond to the Baltic states, making it far less rapid in responding to crises, but consequently it is not able to preposition a significant amount of equipment, meaning further transportation will be required to move troops as well as the majority of their necessary equipment. The JEF looks far more promising, however the UK has said publicly that it does not intend to be tied to any plat-

⁹ ["Defence Secretary announces more support in Baltics and Ukraine"](#), UK Ministry of Defence, accessed July 23, 2016.

¹⁰ Sengupta, Kim, ["Britain to send five Royal Navy warships to join Nato's maritime arm in response to Russian threat"](#), *The Independent*, February 10, 2016, accessed July 20, 2016.

¹¹ A further threat is Russia's use of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) as part of a surprise conventional attack to create a fait accompli. From an operational perspective, A2/AD combines the strategy of limiting the entry of enemy's forces into the battle theatre, 'A2', coupled with the tactical aim of reducing the enemy's freedom to manoeuvre within the theatre, 'AD'. By positioning missile-based defence systems, technology to jam communications and dual-use technologies, a hemisphere is formed that can span across land, sea and air within which enemy forces suffer a huge disadvantage. Russia have sought to establish multi-layered A2/AD capabilities that cover a 400-500 km range that, given their situation in the St. Petersburg area and potentially the Kaliningrad Oblast, includes the Baltic states.

form in particular.¹² They are yet to be clear about whether this will include the prepositioning of equipment in JEF nations.

WHAT SHOULD THE UK DO NEXT?

The UK's contributions to the defence of the Baltic states must focus on two important features: conventional deterrence in the Baltic Sea area and, most importantly, ensuring counter-A2/AD capabilities.

1. THE UK MUST INCREASE INVOLVEMENT IN JOINT NATO EXERCISES

The UK must continue its contribution to joint NATO exercises, especially as its role within the European Union begins to decline. Not only is this symbolically supportive of the Baltic states, but it also possesses considerable meaningful elements in deterring Russian aggression in the region by demonstrating NATO's capacity to offer an effective, cooperative response to an attack against allied nations. This is something the UK will certainly continue.¹³

However, a further importance of joint exercises is highlighted by Keir Giles¹⁴. Exercise Noble Jump in June 2015 allowed the VJTF to practice, prepare and evaluate the bureaucratic and legal components involved in, for example, moving troops freely across borders. These aspects are difficult to develop contingency plans for, but effective practice and experience allows NATO to identify and resolve problems in advance, consequently making the response of the VJTF to a crisis faster and smoother. As a result of this benefit, the UK should consider an increase in exercises of a similar scale and nature in order to effectively problem-solve and streamline the deployment of the JEF. Not only will this

¹² [Comments made by former UK Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir David Richards](#) during a talk at the Royal United Services Institute on December 17, 2012, accessed April 5, 2016.

¹³ Farmer, Ben, ["Britain announces 1,000 more troops for Eastern Europe exercises"](#), *The Telegraph*, January 16, 2016, accessed July 23, 2016.

¹⁴ Giles, Keir, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West*, (London: Chatham House, 2016).

allow the JEF to be deployed faster in a crisis, but it also creates bilateral agreements to streamline the freedom of movement for troops that could also be applied to crises involving a response from the VJTF. Lessons should also be learned from the freedom of movement previously experienced by the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (AMF), a brigade of 5000 personnel made up of troops from 14 NATO allies that could freely move across Europe. Improved capabilities for movement between borders will only serve to provide a more meaningful and effective deterrence against a conventional Russian invasion.

2. INCREASE AND IMPROVE ITS MARITIME CONTRIBUTION

The UK could improve its contribution by upgrading the frigate contributed to SNMG1 to a Type-45 destroyer.¹⁵ The importance of these ships needs to be emphasised to the Baltic states. These ships possess Aster 30 anti-missile capabilities within a 400 km range and have the capacity to respond to multiple missile attacks on a fleet, including saturation attacks.¹⁶ This defence system would be invaluable if contributed to SNMG1 as it offers counter A2/AD capabilities that will improve the effectiveness of JEF and VJTF at responding to crises situations in the Baltic states.

This contribution could be of even greater value due to research being conducted on Type-45 destroyers. At present there is no formal plan for a ballistic missile defence system on board any of these destroyers, but the UK armed forces have carried out considerable investigations into potential anti-ballistic missile technology. Not only has the Sampson radar system on board demonstrated the capacity to track ballistic missiles at sea¹⁷, but the UK have also agreed on a cross-procurement policy with France in

¹⁵ MacAskill, Ewen, ["UK to send five ships to Baltic as part of Nato build up against Russia"](#), *The Guardian*, February 10, 2016 accessed April 5, 2016.

¹⁶ ["Aster 15 & 30"](#), MBDA Missile Systems, accessed July 20, 2016.

¹⁷ Baker, Berenice, ["Sampson radar – UK pursues at-sea missile defence capabilities"](#), *naval-technology.com*, July 24, 2014, accessed April 5, 2016.

order to obtain Aster Block 1NT missiles that could be adapted for use on a Type-45, which have the capability of intercepting ballistic missiles within a 1500 km range.¹⁸ This is something that the UK should continue to explore as an at-sea missile and ballistic missile defence system within the Baltic Sea would provide invaluable deterrence of the use of A2/AD technology against allied forces operating in the Baltic states.

3. ENSURE EFFECTIVE DEFENCE OF AIRCRAFT OPERATING IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Fast jets spearhead much of modern NATO entrance to the battle theatre, and this would continue to be NATO's response if Russia were to launch a surprise conventional attack on the Baltic states and create a *fait accompli*. However, given the current A2/AD bubble extending over the Baltic states NATO allies must ensure their air assets are effectively defended when entering the Baltic Sea Region.

The UK's continued reduction of Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) capabilities is highlighted by the RAF's retirement of the ALARM missile in 2013, one of the most advanced anti-radiation missiles available. Whilst the UK continues to research and develop modern electronic countermeasures (ECM) in order to, for example, disrupt enemy radar systems¹⁹, the UK's ability to pierce enemy A2/AD airspace is not yet adequate. The USAF have led by example here, with a substantial build up EA-18G Growler aircraft that can provide in air electronic attacks in order to support ground troops and allied aircraft operating in enemy A2/AD airspace.²⁰ The UK should continue to develop SEAD and ECM capabilities with the intention that they could operate in the Baltic Sea Region.

4. EXPLORE JOINT DEFENCE PROCUREMENTS

The UK would benefit greatly if the Baltic state's areas of spending were shown to directly affect and support the UK's contribution to the defence of the Baltic states. A particular area the UK would benefit from seeing the Baltic states spend on is SAMs and hardened aircraft shelters, the lack of which makes the Baltic air bases very vulnerable during a conflict scenario.²¹ This would be necessary to meet the demands for further UK and NATO air presence in the Baltic Sea Region, as the case for increasing the number of aircraft deployed becomes more convincing if they can provide effective defence of allied aircraft in the Baltic states' airspaces given the A2/AD threat. However, major investments are required in all three countries in order to upgrade the quality of the ground-based air defence systems from short to medium range.

Consequently, the UK should encourage the Baltic states to make joint procurements in the future, both between the Baltic countries themselves and with the UK. This would divide up the immediate expenditure and future maintenance costs of military hardware, making up for the difficulty the Baltic states experience in finding the financial resources to make such large purchases. This would not only provide further symbolic ties between the Armed Forces of Baltic countries with the British Armed forces, but it would also save significant amounts of money for the reasons outlined above. Moreover, by further integrating the equipment used by the British Armed forces and the Armed forces of the Baltic states, the effectiveness of the robust multinational presence in the Baltic states and the VJTF is improved as a result of British and Baltic armed forces being able to more easily share equipment that both are trained to use. If joint procurements were made on counter-A2/AD air-space support, the UK could also contribute to

¹⁸ Tran, Pierre, "[MBDA: France, UK Agree on 'Cross-Procurement' Policy](#)", *Defense News*, March 17, 2016, accessed June 10, 2016.

¹⁹ "[Electronic Warfare](#)", Royal Air Force, accessed July 20, 2016.

²⁰ "[EA-18G GROWLER](#)", Boeing, accessed July 24 2016.

²¹ Gestrin-Hagner, Maria, "[Försvarsexpert: Flygövning fredstida spel för gallerierna](#)", *HBL.fi*, January 20, 2016, accessed April 5, 2016.

training and developing a suitable ground based air defence system that would support NATO aircraft operating in the Baltic states.

5. THE PREPOSITIONING OF EQUIPMENT

Whether the UK likes it or not, there are logistical challenges facing the deployment of JEF and VJTF to the Baltic states during a crisis if there are not prepositioned equipment points. By prepositioning equipment, the infantry can be deployed faster and lighter enabling them to more effectively respond to a crisis situation. Given the US are intending to preposition equipment throughout Central and Eastern Europe as part of the ERI²², it is possible that the UK would consider the prepositioning of equipment for rapid response forces in order to compliment the US in operations involving the VJTF, but that would also benefit the JEF as well. Not only would it improve the effectiveness of the VJTF and JEF in an actual crisis scenario, but it would also reduce the cost and logistical administration involved in conducting joint exercises because a sizeable amount of the equipment will not need to be transported. The prepositioning of equipment continues to build on a policy of meaningful deterrence in the Baltic Sea Region.

²² [“FACT SHEET: The FY2017 European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request”](#), *The White House Office of the Press Secretary*, February 20, 2016, accessed April 5 2016.

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63/4 NARVA RD., 10152 TALLINN, ESTONIA
INFO@ICDS.EE, WWW.ICDS.EE

