Analysis

Baltic Defence Development

Adding Value to the Defence of the Baltic Sea Region

| Martin Hurt | Mārtiņš Vargulis | Liudas Zdanavičius |
| Tomas Jermalavičius |

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Author: Hurt, Martin; Vargulis, Mārtiņš; Zdanavičius, Liudas; Jermalavičius, Tomas
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© International Centre for Defence and Security
63/4 Narva Rd., 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
info@icds.ee, www.icds.ee

About the Authors

Martin Hurt

Martin Hurt was a research fellow at the ICDS from September 2019 till October 2022. His areas of research included developments in NATO and the EU, as well as national security and defence related topics in the Nordic-Baltic region. He worked as defence counsellor to the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Estonia to NATO (2016-19), at the ICDS as a research fellow and deputy director (2010-16), and at the Estonian Ministry of Defence on various positions: as Undersecretary for Defence Investments/National Armaments Director (2005-10), as Undersecretary for Defence Planning (2004-5), and (Deputy) Director of the Defence Policy and Planning Department (2002-4). From 1998 to 2000, he served as an adviser of the Swedish Armed Forces to the Republic of Estonia; first in the Ministry of Defence, Defence Policy, and Planning Department and later in the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence Forces, J5/8. From 1995 to 1998, he worked in the Headquarters of the Swedish Armed Forces Land Forces directorate as a desk officer with budgeting and financial reporting. He holds an MA in Social Sciences from the Estonian Business School and a BBA from Stockholm University.

Mārtiņš Vargulis

Mārtiņš Vargulis is the deputy director of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. In his academic career, he has focused on issues concerning Russia (particularly security, economy, and soft power), the World Trade Organization, NATO and EU security related issues, as well as the European Neighbourhood. He is the author of numerous articles and the scientific editor of several books. He is also a lecturer in the Rīga Stradiņš University. In his long-standing professional career as an official at the Ministry of Defence of Latvia, he has been head of the Defence Policy and Strategy Section as well as diplomat at the Permanent Representation of Latvia to NATO and EU. He holds an MA in International Relations and currently continues his PhD studies at the Rīga Stradiņš University.

Liudas Zdanavičius

Liudas Zdanavičius had been an analyst at the Centre for Defence Analysis of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania until Autumn 2022, when he took a position with the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris. He is the author and co-author of a number of articles and books on security in the Baltic Sea region, including topics such as Russian foreign and security policy, Russian and Chinese economic influence, and the Kaliningrad region. While at the Military Academy, he worked on the policies of Russia and China towards central and eastern European countries. He holds an MA in International Relations and Diplomacy from the Vilnius University.

Tomas Jermalavičius

Tomas Jermalavičius is the head of studies and research fellow at ICDS. Prior to joining ICDS in the end of 2008, he served at the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL), first as Deputy Director of the College's Institute of Defence Studies and Lithuania's Senior National Representative in 2001-24, and later as Dean of the College in 2005-08. In 1998-2001 and in 2005, he was with the Defence Policy and Planning Department of the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence, including as the department's deputy director. Since 2017, he also has been a visiting professor at the Natolin Campus of the College of Europe in Warsaw, teaching a course on terrorism and hybrid warfare to post-graduate students. At the ICDS, he deals with various aspects of defence policy and strategy, regional security and defence cooperation in the Baltic area, impact of emerging disruptive technologies on security and defence, energy security, and societal resilience. He holds a BA in political science from the University of Vilnius, an MA in war studies from King's College London, and an MBA degree from the University of Liverpool.

Introduction

The armed forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were established from scratch after the three countries regained their independence in the early 1990s. There were no existing forces on which to build, and military personnel had served in a system vastly different from those they sought to emulate.[1] Nonetheless, the three states pursued robust defence development strategies and together achieved their primary foreign policy goals: joining NATO and the EU in 2004.

Despite similarities in size, history, and geostrategic position, the three Baltic states have taken somewhat different paths in their defence development. Estonia has placed more emphasis on building a large reserve-based force structure focusing on territorial defence. Latvia and Lithuania (at least until recently) invested in developing all-volunteer forces.

Russia's 2014 aggression against Ukraine put a fresh impetus behind the Baltic states' defence modernisation programmes, while its full-scale invasion in 2022 has led to Baltic decisions to further increase defence spending and strengthen national defence capabilities. The war has also led to a greater convergence of the three states' defence policies and postures, notably with the re-introduction of conscription in Lithuania and Latvia.

This analysis captures some of the key recent and planned defence developments in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

[1] Garry Johnson, "Foreword," in *Apprenticeship, Partnership, Membership: Twenty Years of Defence Development in the Baltic States,* eds. Tony Lawrence and Tomas Jermalavičius (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence Studies, 2013), 6.

1. Estonia: Increasing Quality And Quantity

Martin Hurt

The basis for Estonia's defence capability development is the National Defence Development Plan 2031, approved by the government in December 2021.[2] While the National Defence Development Plan contains few details, its first years are more closely specified in a four-year development plan that identifies the main capability development programmes and spells out concrete targets to be achieved.

The government has in recent months made ad-hoc decisions to increase defence spending to fund specific programmes and activities. With two decisions in early 2022, the government allocated more than 800 million additional euros for national defence for the coming years.[3] This money will be spent on military capability development, civil protection, cyber defence and security, as well as on internal security, including 340 million euros for improving early warning and procuring ammunition. The government also decided on 29 September 2022 that Estonia will spend 2.85% of GDP on defence in 2023 (1,098 million euros), increasing to 3.26% of GDP (1,317 million euros) in 2024.[4]

1.1. Key Initiatives

1.1.1. Maritime Security And Defence

In recent years, several political decisions have been made to strengthen Estonia's maritime security. Each individual step may not appear significant, but together they will improve maritime situational awareness and ensure closer coordination in the maritime domain.

[2] Government Office of Republic of Estonia, *Riigikaitse arengukava 2022–2031* [National Defence Development Plan 2022-31] (Tallin: Government Office, 2021).

[3] Riigikogu [Parliament of Republic of Estonia], *Riigi 2022. aasta lisaeelarve seadus* [2022 Supplementary State Budget Act] (Tallinn: Riigi Teataja [State Gazette], 19 May 2022).

[4] Rahandusministeerium [Ministry of Finance Republic of Estonia], *Riigi eelarvestrateegia 2023-2026* [State budget strategy 2023-2026] (Tallin: Ministry of Finance, 29 September 2022), 111.

On 30 May 2022, the Parliament approved legislative amendments to assign responsibility for maritime situational awareness to the Estonian Navy. The legislative package also included decisions to transfer four vessels and all coastal surveillance radars from the Police and Border Guard to the Navy. The transfer of these four vessels will improve the potential of harmonising the long-term development of the merged fleet to meet maritime security- and defence-related requirements. Most of the ships of the merged fleet will need to be replaced in the next 15-20 years.

These vessels and radars will complement the mobile coastal surveillance radars (AN/TSQ-288) delivered to the Estonian Navy by the U.S. in 2021.[5] In addition, Estonia signed contracts in 2021 to procure Blue Spear 5G SSM coastal defence missile systems and PM16 Blocker naval mines for the Estonian Navy.[6] The Blue Spear systems, with a maximum range of 290 km, will considerably increase the ability of the navy to deliver effects in the Baltic Sea, building on a common Recognised Maritime Picture that will be significantly improved once Finland and Sweden have joined NATO. Estonia will thus be able to contribute, in cooperation with other NATO Allies, to the defence of the Baltic Sea and to restricting the Russian Navy's freedom of action in times of conflict.

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In the 2030s, Estonia's existing mine counter-measures vessels, which form the backbone of the fleet, will need to be replaced, potentially in cooperation with other littoral states of the Baltic Sea.

1.1.2. Territorial Defence

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the success of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces prompted Estonia to double the size of its own territorial defence units from 10 000 personnel to 20 000. The role of these reserve light infantry units is to delay and attrit enemy forces. The increase will be achieved in early 2023 by assigning trained reservists to new units which will augment the existing reserve units that so far have been manned by members of the voluntary *Kaitseliit* (Defence League). The reservists assigned to these new units will be called up in autumn 2023 for refresher training. For this purpose, the government has allocated extra 30 million euros that mostly will be spent on personal equipment. The entire process will be completed by 2024.[7]

1.1.3. Divisional Structure

At the NATO Madrid Summit, Estonia announced that it would establish a divisional structure within the framework of NATO for its defence. On 12 December 2022, the government decided to establish a division. Its main task will be to plan and conduct operations within its area of responsibility taking command of its own units and assigned Allied armed forces.[8] The Estonian 1st and 2nd Brigades, Logistics Battalion, Headquarters and Signal Battalion, and an Artillery Battalion will be part of the division alongside UK contributions: the UK has assigned a brigade for the defence of Estonia, with some sub-units to be based in Estonia.[9]

Estonia is setting up the divisional headquarters with the support of the U.S. and the UK. It will also join the renowned U.S. Operation Warfighter programme, which comprises a series of exercises culminating in a capstone training event that provides certification to participating corps and division formations.[10]

1.1.4. Ground-Based Air Defence

Estonia had, for some years, considered developing a medium-range ground-based air defence (GBAD) capability, but until 2022,

[5] U.S. Embassy in Estonia, "Press Release: U.S. Delivers Artillery Ammunition and Navy Radars to Estonia,"8 June 2021.

[6] Seth J. Frantzman, "Estonia buys Blue Spear missiles for coastal defense," *DefenseNews*, 8 October 2021; "Estonia takes delivery of Finnish-made Blocker PM16 naval mines," *Navy Recognition*, 25 December 2021.

[7] Mari Peegel, "Herem: kaitseväe sõjaaja koosseis tõuseb 36 000 inimeseni [Herem: the size of the war-time defence forces will increase to 36,000 personnel]," *ERR*, 5 July 2022.

[8] Defence Forces of Republic of Estonia, "Estonian Division," 6 February 2023.

[9] Ministry of Defence of Republic of Estonia, "Laanet at the Madrid Summit: We have moved from NATO Forward Presence to a Forward Defence posture," 1 July 2022.

[10] "Estonian government establishes Defense Forces division under NATO," *ERR*, 8 December 2022.

this had not been a priority for funding. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine and with additional funding being available in principle, the procurement of a medium-range GBAD system was launched in July. In September, the government decided to allocate funding for a GBAD system that would enable the protection of two different geographic locations or areas.[11] In early September 2022, Estonia also signed a contract with the Polish company *Mesko* for Piorun man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS): 100 launchers, 300 missiles, and simulators for training. The first missiles and launchers will be delivered in 2023 with most deliveries taking place in 2024. The Piorun MANPADS will be used to equip light infantry units and the new territorial defence units.[12]

1.1.5. Increasing Firepower And Protection

The ad hoc decisions to increase defence spending after 24 February enabled the procurement of an additional 12 K9 self-propelled howitzers and loitering munitions. The previously agreed national defence development plan had included funding to procure approximately 220 4x4 and 6x6 protected vehicles that mainly will equip the 2nd Infantry Brigade.[13]

1.1.6. Training Opportunities

More active and capable Estonian forces and the presence of larger numbers of Allied forces require existing training areas to be enlarged and new ones to be established. Better training facilities are also required for training with new capabilities and weapon systems that were not envisaged when existing areas were established.[14]

More active and capable Estonian and Allied forces require existing training areas to be enlarged and new ones to be established

The 3 930-hectare Soodla training area was established in July 2015, close to Tapa where the NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroup is deployed. Another government decision the same year allowed military training, including live-firing, to be conducted for up to 90 days per year on 10 000 hectares adjacent to the existing 12 200-hectare Central Training Area, allowing training of an armoured infantry battalion. The enlarged area thus provides training for Estonia's main contribution to NATO but is also frequently used by the eFP battlegroup.

Recently, the Ministry of Defence announced its intention to establish a new garrison and training area in south-east Estonia to meet the needs of an enlarged national wartime defence structure of 36 000 personnel and a brigade-sized allied contingent of 3-5 000 personnel.

1.2. Comprehensive Defence

Estonia employs a comprehensive national defence concept, which involves both military and non-military capabilities, and activities and resources from the public and private sectors and civil society. For the consistent and effective functioning of national defence, Estonia develops capacity in six pillars: military defence, civilian support for military defence, international action, domestic and internal security, maintenance of the continuous operation of the state and society, and psychological defence.[15]

While this concept has been implemented through a number of development plans, the development of non-military capabilities was slow due to a lack of political will and insufficient funding, but it changed in early 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion

[11] Meinhard Pulk, "Kolme piirkonna asemel kaks: keskmaa õhutõrje otsus tekitab pingeid [Two instead of three regions: Medium range air defence decision raises tensions]," *Postimees*, 19 September 2022.

[12] Grzegorz Sobczak, "MSPO 2022: Mesko improves Piorun MANPADS as more orders flow in," *Shephard*, 13 September 2022; Marko Tooming, "Eesti hangib koos Poolaga lühimaa õhutõrjesüsteeme [Estonia is procuring short-range air defence systems together with Poland]," *ERR*, 7 September 2022; Indrek Ojamets, "Hanno Pevkur ja Priit Soosaar räägivad uuest lühimaa õhutõrjesüsteemist PIORUN [Hanno Pevkur and Priit Soosaar talk about the new short-range air defence system PIORUN]," *Kuku pärastlõuna* [Kuku afternoon], podcast, 7 September 2022.

[13] "Eesti ostab kaitseväele 220 soomukit [Estonia will procure 220 armoured vehicle for the defence forces]," *ERR*, 14 April 2022.

[14] Ülle Harju and Meinhard Pulk, "Kaitsejõud plaanivad Võrumaal asuvat harjutusväljakut ulatuslikult laiendada [The defence forces plan to extensively expand the training ground in Võrumaa], *Postimees*, 5 September 2022.

[15] Government Office, *National Security Concept 2017* (Tallin: Government Office, 2017).

of Ukraine. According to the latest defence development plan (December 2021), only seven million euros per year would be allocated to fund non-military capabilities.[16] Further, although a 73-page civil protection concept was approved by the government in February 2018, no funding was made available to the relevant agencies. Instead, they had to request funding during the annual drafting of the state budget strategy – a document that sets out the next year's state budget plus projected plans and budgets for the subsequent three years. During the negotiations, budget requests related to civil protection were treated as extraordinary activities and, in most cases, received no funding.[17]

This changed in early 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A government decision to fund measures aimed at strengthening civil protection and crisis preparedness was formally reflected in the supplementary state budget passed by the Parliament on 19 May.[18] It includes extraordinary funding for installing new warning sirens, improving public awareness, strengthening rescue and evacuation capabilities, identifying existing shelters and other suitable infrastructure, and increasing food security.[19]

The Rescue Board, in cooperation with the State Real Estate Agency and the municipalities, has since developed standards for, identified, and designated public real estate that could serve as shelters for civilians. Shelters – mostly improvised rather than dedicated structures – have been identified in Tallinn (22 locations), Tartu (18), and Pärnu (6, including two in the vicinity of the city).[20] In October 2022, a contract was signed to equip 22 cities and with civil defence sirens by July 2023.[21]

[16] Government Office, *Riigikaitse arengukava*, 10.

[17] Interview with a representative of the Government Office, 19 August 2022.

[18] Riigi Teataja, *Riigi 2022. aasta lisaeelarve seadu.*

[19] Ministry of Finance of Republic of Estonia, *2022. aasta lisaeelarve seaduse eelnõu seletuskiri* [Explanatory Letter to the 2022 Supplementary State Budget Act] (Tallinn: Ministry of Finance, 2022), 46-50.

[20] Päästeamet: Estonian Rescue Board, "Avalikud varjumiskohad [Public sheltering places]," accessed on 28 February 2023.

[21] "Estonia to buy civil defense sirens from a Slovakian company," *ERR*, 26 October 2022.

2. Latvia: Putting Together Pieces Of The Puzzle

MĀRTIŅŠ VARGULIS

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 added further stimulus to the defence adaptation that started in Latvia in 2014. The attack was another wake-up call for Latvian politicians and those working in the defence sector to further strengthen defence capabilities. Important decisions have been made. First, in the search for solutions to Russia's ever-increasing aggression, as well as to alleviate issues in the recruitment of new soldiers, Latvia has decided to return to compulsory military service (conscription). Second, regional and international solutions have been adopted to strengthen air defence. Third, important decisions have been made with regard to the missing elements of the land forces, including providing them with necessary equipment such as 6x6 armoured vehicles. Fourth, investment in new technologies will continue to be a priority, allowing the armed forces to wage war in an electronic warfare environment. Fifth, there is a political commitment to increase defence spending to at least 3% of GDP until 2027 and beyond as a precondition to ensure that these decisions will be implemented.[22]

Several of these projects had already been planned before 24 February 2022. Russia's full-scale war strengthened Latvia's resolve and made it easier to implement projects by attracting additional financial resources with unanimous support of the political elite. Despite the intensive military procurement in recent years, Latvia (as well as in the entire Baltic region) still faces capability shortfalls that could be exploited by an adversary in times of crisis or war. There are significant deficiencies in the air and maritime domains where Russia has superiority in the Baltic region (although the balance will change once Finland and Sweden become full-fledged NATO members). The purposes of this chapter are to identify the most important decisions taken regarding the strengthening of Latvia's military

[22] Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Latvia, *Deklarācija par Artura Krišjāņa Kariņa vadītā Ministru kabineta iecerēto darbību* [Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš's governmental declaration] (Riga: Cabinet of Ministers, 14 December 2022), 6-7.

capabilities and their inclusion in the common national defence system, as well as to define the elements that are still missing and will need to be worked on in coming years.

2.1. Conscription

The introduction of conscription is undoubtedly a significant change in the national defence system. It will have an impact not only on the development of capabilities but also on society's understanding of the role of an entire population in defence. The issue first became a matter of discussion after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, while Lithuania's return to conscription in 2015 gained particular attention. Following that decision, Latvia remained the only country in the region without conscription, raising many questions and some confusion. The Ministry of Defence played an active role in the 2014 discussions, arguing against the introduction of conscription on the basis of interrelated aspects. First, finances – the introduction of conscription would be expensive, meaning that the procurement of currently needed capabilities would suffer due to limited finances. Second, response time – wartime would require quick and effective action to deal with Russia's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities and its potential strategy in Baltic states, which could be best provided by a professional military service. Third, the National Guard – this organisation already fulfils the function of ensuring broader public involvement in defence. Fourth, timing – the increasing threat from Russia made it an inappropriate time to radically change the existing defence system.

Conscription will have an impact not only on the development of capabilities but also on society's understanding of the role of an entire population in defence

Both Russia's full-scale 2022 aggression in Ukraine and Latvia's then-upcoming parliamentary elections (1 October 2022) made the issue of conscription topical and relevant. Although used as a vehicle to gain political support, it has done much to address several challenges that exist today. One of the main arguments for introducing conscription is the challenge of recruitment in the armed forces. Since Latvia regained its independence, the Latvian National Armed Forces have competed with the free market to attract as many professionals as possible. This constant struggle has become more pronounced in the context of demographic developments. Even now, several operational units are not fully manned, leaving significant gaps in the military structure. Furthermore, as the forms and types of warfare change, specialists are needed in areas such as cyberspace, electronic warfare, and disinformation. The examples of Estonia and Lithuania indicate that about 4-7% of conscripts are recruited to the professional military service, creating an additional channel through which these specialists might be brought into service.

A second argument concerns the involvement of every individual in the defence of the country. Conscription can be a vehicle for promoting the involvement of the whole of society in the defence of the state. The more people who go through conscription, the greater the public awareness of defence-related issues. Introducing conscription is, however, only part of the puzzle. Another essential piece is to ensure regular exercises for reserve soldiers to maintain training levels even after their conscription ends.

There are, however, some unanswered questions when it comes to the introduction of conscription, including the role of the conscripts in the force structure.[23] It is still unclear whether conscripts will form complete units or be mixed with professional soldiers and integrated into combat units. Another issue is related to the compulsory involvement of women. This is not part of the initial plan, but some political parties are advocating gender equality. Rough estimates from the Ministry of Defence indicate that the total number of men between the ages of 18 and 27 who can be conscripted annually is between 6 000 and 9 000. Involving women as mandatory conscripts would double this number. The estimated annual cost of conscription is around 120 million euros. This is a proportionately large burden, considering that the total defence budget is currently 758.35 million euros.

[23] The plan is to call up around 1000 conscripts in the first years and to increase this number gradually year-by-year.

2.2. Addressing Capability Shortfalls

Several elements of the development of the armed forces had been planned prior to 24 February 2022 and remained priorities. Significant resources have been allocated to ensure that the land forces have the necessary equipment, vehicles, and support – the lessons from Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2014 have led to a special emphasis on strengthening logistics, ability to react quickly to a short-notice attack, and improved electronic warfare capabilities have also been among the top priorities in defence planning for some years. Of particular note among the major capability development programmes are: medium-range air defence systems (Latvia and Estonia have signed a letter of intent to jointly procure systems); coastal defence systems (the Ministry of Defence is in early negotiations to purchase coastal defence missile systems from the U.S.); long-range rocket artillery (currently provided by the U.S.); uninhabited aerial vehicle systems (produced by the Latvian defence industry); transport vehicles; and infantry fighting vehicles.

Latvia (and the other Baltic countries) started to build their armed forces from the scratch in the 1990s. Although these developments are important, they are only one more brick in the wall.

2.3. Comprehensive Defence

Discussions about the introduction of a comprehensive defence system began in Latvia after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Contemporary security threats are complex, often going beyond mere military challenges to include actions in areas such as information, cyberspace, civil society, and finance. The use by foreign-based entities of targeted activities aimed at destabilising or influencing a particular state or society is part of today's reality. Indeed, adversaries have been accused of having applied influence, cyber-attacks, and other non-military means to impact political processes in foreign countries. A system to address this growing threat to national security is clearly required.

Latvia's comprehensive defence system was based on the experiences of other countries, notably Finland, Singapore, and Sweden. According to planning documents, the aims of the national comprehensive defence concept are to deepen the cooperation between state institutions; ensure the development of effective public and private partnership mechanisms; and increase the public's awareness of how to defend themselves, their families, and Latvia.[24] The Ministry of Defence was chosen to be the leading body in the implementation of these goals, while separate bodies were created at the government level to address comprehensive defence issues.

The overall comprehensive defence system emphasises several important elements: a) military capabilities; b) public awareness; c) civil protection; d) cross-sector cooperation and sustainability; e) economic resilience; f) strategic communication; and g) social unity and psychological resilience. Each of these elements requires close cooperation between government, non-government, and business stakeholders. To strengthen capacity, the government has organised both information campaigns and large-scale exercises in which these elements are tested.

Nonetheless, very important work is still needed to promote public involvement and awareness. A study by the Centre for Defence Research of the Latvian National Defence Academy shows that only 31% of Latvian residents are ready to take up arms to defend the country.[25] According to the Centre for Defence Research survey, the most significant obstacle to society's involvement in the country's defence is a lack of understanding of what their duties and actions should be in the event of an attack. Particular attention needs to be paid to this problem as ensuring society's involvement in defence-related processes is essential if the comprehensive defence system is to achieve its aim of strengthening the resilience of society and its institutions.

[24] Ministry of Defence of Republic of Latvia, "Comprehensive State Defence," accessed on 28 February 2023.

[25] "Pētījums: 31% iedzīvotāju militāra iebrukuma gadījumā būtu gatavi aizstāvēt Latviju ar ieročiem [Research: 31% of the population would be ready to defend Latvia with weapons in the event of a military invasion]," *Diena*, 22 January 2020.

2.4. NATO In The Baltics

In recent years, NATO has adopted several important decisions that have strengthened the defence of the Baltic states. The decision at the NATO summit in Warsaw (2016) to create the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) was an important turning point for NATO's deterrence and defence posture, confirming the return to collective defence as the Alliance's primary task. At the 2022 Madrid summit, Allies agreed that the eFP was "to be scaled up from the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required."[26] NATO's intent is to have robust, multinational, combat-ready units, that demonstrate the strength of the transatlantic bond and make clear that an attack on one Ally will be met by forces from across the Alliance.

NATO's command and control has also been improved in the Baltic region. A new Multinational Division North headquarters has been established in Ādaži, Latvia. The Baltic air policing mission has been enhanced and NATO Force Integration Units have been established in all three Baltic states (along with another five elsewhere on NATO's eastern flank).

Still, it would be a mistake to believe that defence in the Baltics is complete. There are still various gaps to be filled for NATO's deterrence and defence posture to be more credible. Time is a crucial consideration when it comes to the defence of the Baltic states. Although Russia's aggression in Ukraine has led the Allies to enhance the ability of NATO's response forces to react quickly and deliver immediate military effect through a 360-degree approach, the possibility of a short- or no-notice attack against the Baltic states still needs to be properly addressed. Latvia believes that it is of utmost importance to further increase the size of the pool of properly exercised rapid response forces that could be pre-authorised for immediate use by SACEUR in a short-notice conventional scenario.

It is of utmost importance to increase rapid response forces that could be pre-authorised for immediate use by SACEUR in a short-notice conventional scenario

Another necessary piece of the puzzle is the stress testing of large-scale Allied reinforcement in a contested environment. Russia's A2/AD capabilities would make the deployment of additional Allied forces challenging. NATO's deterrence and defence posture requires executable plans and a common understanding of how to reinforce the region with additional units and supplies in the event of a military conflict, including from across the Atlantic. In turn, this requires large-scale military exercises to train for this eventuality and demonstrate NATO's ability to coordinate large-scale movements with Allies and partners.

One of the main priorities of Latvia's foreign and security policy is that permanent presence of Allied troops would ensure that they can be counted on in the long term and integrated into operational planning. The Baltic states regard the immediate involvement of eFP troops in any conflict to be of utmost importance: this is included in Latvia's military doctrine.

Permanent Allied presence also contributes to the building of interoperability between the Baltic states and the forces of other Allies. The interoperability of forces deployed on Baltic soil and national forces then needs to be tested and exercised more. Such exercises would improve NATO's overall response and send strong messages to an aggressor regarding the unity and solidarity of the Alliance. In this regard, Latvia has invested significant resources to provide host nation support to allied deployments. This has been among the top priorities since NATO's summit in Warsaw in 2016, during which the decision to deploy eFP was taken.

Among the most critical shortfalls are those related to the air and maritime domains. The Alliance's adaptation since 2014 has largely focused on land forces, leaving the maritime and air domains vulnerable. Russia still has superiority in the air and at sea in the Baltic region. The costs associated with developing capability in these domains mean that the Baltic states will not be able to provide a full response to challenges here without significant

[26] NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, *Madrid Summit Declaration*, Press Release (2022) 095 (Madrid: NATO,29 June 2022), para 9.

contributions from the Allies. One of the most urgent points is the Alliance's collective response in air defence, especially in the context of Russia's development of the SSC-8 ground-launched cruise missile. A credible deterrence and defence posture will require further investment in the air and maritime domains.

3. Lithuania: A Qualitative Leap

Liudas Zdanavičius and Tomas Jermalavičius

Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 was a clear wake-up call for Lithuanian society and decision-makers. At the time, the country was spending less than 1% of its GDP on defence.[27] Since then, considerable efforts and progress have been made to strengthen Lithuania's national security and defence system – not only in military capabilities but also in other important fields, such as cyber and information security, intelligence and counterintelligence, foreign investments screening, and internal security. The armed forces themselves have become an important player in non-military fields such as countering disinformation.[28] Yet, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 highlighted the pivotal importance of military capabilities and the readiness to fight high-intensity, large-scale, conventional war. The ongoing war in the neighbourhood has accelerated Lithuania's plans to acquire new capabilities and triggered a raising of the level of ambition of its military build-up.

Russia's invasion highlighted the pivotal importance of military capabilities and readiness to fight a high-intensity, large-scale, conventional war

3.1. Strategy And Finances

The latest National Security Strategy – a capstone national security document – was approved by the Lithuanian Seimas (Parliament) shortly before Russia's attack on Ukraine, in December 2021. The Strategy clearly stipulates that Lithuania should implement a total defence system that depends not only on the armed forces but also on all other state institutions, the private sector, and individual citizens. National security is based on three main pillars: state defence; resilience of the state and society; and an international security system that favours the interests of Lithuania.[29] The Lithuanian Military Strategy is currently undergoing a thorough revision, but it is unlikely that the core missions and tasks of the armed forces – defence of the territory and sovereignty of Lithuania, contribution to NATO collective defence and crisis management missions, and support to the civilian authorities during crises – will change.

Since the early 2000s, Lithuania has formalised a broad political consensus about national security and defence in the form of an agreement signed by all the parliamentary parties. The latest one – signed in July 2022 by almost all parties represented in the Seimas – covers the period to 2030 and expresses their common political will to continue strengthening Lithuanian defence.[30] Most importantly, this political will translates into increased defence spending.

The financial situation of the national defence system began to improve rapidly after the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014. In 2019, when defence spending finally reached 2% of GDP (977 million euros), it was 3.6 times higher than in 2013, representing one of the fastest peacetime rises of defence spending in the world. In 2022, because of its severely deteriorated security environment,

[27] NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2009-2016)*, Communique PR/CP(2017)045, (Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 13 March 2017), 9.

[28] Kristīne Atmante, Riina Kaljurand, and Tomas Jermalavičius, "Strategic Cultures of the Baltic States: The Impact of Russia's New Wars," in *Strategic Culture in Russia's Neighborhood: Change and Continuity in an In-Between Space*, eds. Katalin Miklóssy and Hanna Smith (New York: Lexington Books, 2019), 69.

[29] Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution amending resolution no IX-907 of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of 28 May 2002 on the approval of the National Security Strategy*, Resolution XIV-795, 16 December 2021.

[30] Seimas [Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania], *Lietuvos Respublikos Seime atstovaujamų politinių partijų susitarimas dėl Lietuvos nacionalinio saugumo artimiausio laikotarpio sustiprinimo* [Agreement between the political parties represented in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on strengthening national security in the nearest future] (Vilnius: TS-LKD, July 2022).

Lithuania spent over 2.5% of GDP (1.5 billion euros). The parliamentary parties have agreed to maintain this level until 2030, though there is considerable pressure – in the context of the war in Ukraine – to move towards a target of 3% of GDP.[31] The government has thus agreed to earmark additional funding for defence, financed by borrowing, that will bring Lithuania to the 3% target, provided that the overall national budget deficit does not exceed 4.9% of GDP (which would presumably trigger cuts in all areas).[32]

Increased defence spending allowed the Lithuanian Armed Forces to invest in new capabilities and increase their readiness. This is clearly seen in the dynamics of the defence spending structure. In 2013, Lithuania spent 66.5% of the defence budget on personnel and only 9.2% on equipment.[33] In 2022, personnel spending was 37.3%, and equipment accounted for 30.5%, reflecting a more balanced allocation of the financial resources.[34]

3.2. Structures And Personnel

The land forces have consistently received the highest priority in national defence development, although strengthening air defence (part of the Air Force) and special operations (under the purview of the separate service, Special Operations Forces) capabilities was also among the key priorities throughout the 2010s.

Since its establishment in 1992, the mechanised infantry brigade "Iron Wolf" (with two mechanised and one motorised infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, and an engineer battalion) has been the main formation of the land forces. The multinational German-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroup in Lithuania is also an integral part of this brigade. A motorised infantry brigade "Žemaitija" was added in 2016, with responsibility for the defence of western Lithuania.[35] It was formed from two existing and two newly established units – artillery and infantry battalions. The process of fully manning, equipping, training, and developing infrastructure for this formation is still underway, but Russia's war in Ukraine has provided a new sense of urgency and impetus for achieving its full operational capability as soon as possible.

The third brigade – the light infantry brigade "Aukštaitija" – was formally established in 2017 as a reserve brigade to be activated after mobilisation. The headquarters of this brigade will be formed from the Lithuanian TRADOC and its units from static structures, such as the Military Academy, TRADOC schools, and other structures, and from the mobilisation reserve.[36]

The new structural arrangement has not been yet fully tested, but once it is in place, the land forces will essentially be able to field a wartime division. Shortly before the Russia-Ukraine war, the Lithuanian armed forces began cooperating with the U.S. in developing divisional command and control capability in the Land Forces HQ.[37] This work now aligns with NATO's overall intent to enhance command structures in the region as part of strengthening its posture on the eastern flank.

A new Communications and Information Systems Battalion was created in 2019 from the communications company of the Staff Battalion in Vilnius, tasked with maintaining a secure C3I system for armed forces and contributing to NATO operations.[38] From 2024, it will form the core of the new Cyber Defence Command, bolstering Lithuania's ability to act

[31] Seimas, "Lietuvos Respublikos Seime atstovaujamų politinių partijų susitarimas."

[32] Augustas Stankevičius, "Ministras: galimos papildomos lėšos būtų skirtos ginkluotei, amunicijai, sandėliams [Minister: Additional funding would be allocated for armament, munitions, warehouses], *BNS/Delfi.lt,* 17 November 2022.

[33] NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2009-2016).*

[34] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Krašto apsaugos ministerijos biudžetas [Budget of the Ministry of National Defence]," last modified on 4 July 2022.

[35] "Steigiama nauja Lietuvos kariuomenės brigada [A new brigade of the Lithuanian Armed Forces is established]," *Delfi.lt*, 31 December 2015.

[36] Krašto apsaugos ministerijos Ryšių su visuomene skyrius [Department of Public Relations of the Ministry of National Defence], "Lietuvos kariuomenė stiprina gynybinius pajėgumus: suformuota lengvoji pėstininkų brigada „Aukštaitija" [Lithuanian Armed Forces are strengthening defence capabilities: light infantry brigade "Aukštaitija" has been formed]," Mano Vyriausybė [My Government] / E. pilietis, 23 March 2017.

[37] "Planuojama Sausumos pajėgų štabo struktūrą priartinti prie JAV kariuomenės divizijos štabo struktūros [It is planned to align the Land Force headquarters structure with the US division structure]," *ELTA/Delfi.lt,* 9 March 2019.

[38] "Kariuomenėje įkurtas Ryšių ir informacinių sistemų batalionas [Communication and Information Systems Battalion established in the Armed Forces]," *BNS/15min.lt*, 8 January 2019.

in a relatively new operational domain of the Alliance.[39]

Personnel numbers have grown with the growing structure. The number of full-time contract military personnel in all services and branches has increased from almost 7 900 in 2014 to about 11 300 at the end of 2021 and is expected to reach almost 15 500 in 2030. In addition, there are 5 600 military volunteers in the National Defence Volunteer Forces (KASP), and their number is expected to reach 6 300 in 2030.

The most significant change in personnel composition, however, occurred in 2015 when, after a brief period with an all-volunteer force, Lithuania became the first NATO and EU country to reinstate military conscription. Conscription had been suspended in 2008 on socio-political grounds and to adapt to the force requirements of the expeditionary operations era. But this decision was not accompanied by significant force structure changes or funding increases and quickly led to disastrous under-manning – less than 30% in some units – and a rapidly shrinking mobilisation reserve.[40] In 2015, with the armed forces barely fit for purpose in the degraded security environment, Lithuania restored a mandatory military draft for all male citizens of 19-26 years of age (women are welcome to become conscripts on a voluntary basis) for a service period of 9 months.

The reintroduction of conscription served as an important message to both domestic and foreign audiences that Lithuania was taking concrete steps to strengthen its defence. Initially, the armed forces drafted 3 000 conscripts annually. By 2022, this number reached just over 3 800.[41] Just as importantly, the mobilisation reserve has begun to grow again. The active reserve (those with fewer than 10 years since completion of military service) increased from 15 000 in 2018 to over 24 000 in 2021 and should reach 30 000 in 2024.[42] A reserve refresher training programme, and better organisation by assigning reservists to particular units for wartime duties, will further enhance the armed forces' ability to endure high-intensity wars characterised by high levels of attrition.

A reserve refresher training programme and better organisation will further enhance the armed forces' ability to endure high-intensity wars characterised by high levels of attrition

There are also efforts to expand and strengthen the Riflemen Union – a voluntary paramilitary organisation outside the armed forces that would contribute to the mobilised structure in wartime. The budget of this organisation tripled to 4.8 million euros in 2022, with a further doubling to 10.8 million euros planned in 2023.[43] Currently, it has 11 000 members who played significant supporting roles in recent crises (Covid-19 pandemic and illegal cross-border migration from Belarus). An ambitious plan under discussion in the parliament would further increase the funding of this organisation (to 2% of total defence spending) and bolster its membership to 50 000 by 2030. However, only a relatively small proportion of this number would be fully trained to become part of the armed forces in case of aggression. The remaining members would provide various support services to military and civilian institutions.

Currently, there is an active debate about universal conscription for men and perhaps even women. Universal conscription for all 18- and 19-year-old male citizens, would mean drafting around 6 100 conscripts annually. Extending the mandatory draft to women, as in Norway or Sweden, would increase this number to around 11 900.[44] The reasons for

[39] "Lietuvos Respublikos Seime atstovaujamų politinių partijų susitarimas."

[40] Tomas Jermalavičius, "Reinstating Conscription in Lithuania: Bringing society back into defence?" in *Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Realities and Prospects*, eds. Andris Sprūds and Māris Andžāns (Riga: LIIA, 2017), 33-53.

[41] "2023 metų šaukimo planas [Call-up plan for 2022]," Karys.lt, last modified on 14 November 2022.

[42] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, *2021 metų veiklos ataskaita* [Activity report for 2021] (Vilnius: Ministry of National Defence, 14 March 2022), 5.

[43] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Ateinančiais metais augs finansavimas Lietuvos šaulių sąjungai [Next year, funding of the Lithuanian Riflemen Union will grow]," 28 December 2022.

[44] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Krašto apsaugos ministerija pristato visuotinio šaukimo studiją ir kviečia viešai diskusijai: ar šaliai reikalingas esamo dabartinio modelio keitimas? [Ministry of National Defence presents the universal conscription study and invites to a public discussion: does the country need a change of the current model?]," 27 January 2021.

these small numbers include negative demographic prognoses, and poor health among potential recruits. Universal conscription would also entail additional financial costs (between 400 million and 1.5 billion euros annually) and perhaps require defence spending to increase well above 3% of GDP.

3.3. Armament And Equipment

Increased financing and the worsening geo-political environment have also the triggered rapid modernisation of capabilities. Until recently, most purchases had been of upgraded but second-hand equipment, with the biggest priority given to the land force. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated the need for mobility, armour, firepower, and range to efficiently fight against a possible invasion.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated the need for mobility, armour, firepower, and range

Lithuania had launched a number of significant acquisition projects even before Russia's attack on Ukraine. For instance, in 2016, it signed a 386-million-euro contract in 2016 with the German-Dutch consortium *ARTEC* for 88 Boxer infantry fighting vehicles (IFV) to equip two battalions of the "Iron Wolf" brigade. The special configuration ordered by Lithuania (named *Vilkas*, or Wolf) includes a Samson turret (30 mm automatic cannon, 7.62 mm machine gun, and Spike long-range anti-tank missiles) made by the Israeli company *Rafael*.[45] The full value of the project, including a logistics and training package and ammunition, is up to 700 million euros. The contract envisaged delivery by the end of 2020; however, due to the challenges of integrating the Samson turret with the Boxer platform, Lithuania had received only half of the order by September 2022, with the remainder expected within a year.[46] The Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence (MoND) has recently announced that it is negotiating with the *ARTEC* consortium to purchase another 120 Boxers in IFV and other (medical evacuation, command post, etc.) configurations.[47]

The acquisition of 200 armoured Joint Light Tactical Vehicles from the U.S. company *Oshkosh Defence* will also improve mobility and force protection of the land forces. Their delivery deadline is 2024, but the first batch of 50 vehicles already reached Lithuania in 2021.[48] They will gradually replace the U.S.-made High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), almost 70 of which have been in use by the Lithuanian military since 2004.

The 2015 acquisition of 16 PzH 2000 155 mm self-propelled tracked howitzers, formerly in service with the German army, was a significant upgrade to the indirect fire support capability of the "Iron Wolf" brigade's artillery battalion. The 58.3-million-euro contract included full modernisation, two training units and three systems to be used as spares.[49] Delivery was completed in 2022 and extended the effective fire support range from 11 to more than 50 km, as well as added considerable mobility, survivability, and precision. The artillery battalion of the "Žemaitija" brigade will receive 18 French-made Caesar Mark II self-propelled wheeled howitzers to replace its old 105 mm towed howitzers through a 110-150-million-euro agreement concluded between Lithuania and France at the end of 2022 – a project triggered by the war in Ukraine and demonstrating the increased speed with which the procurement processes can operate when necessary.[50] Indirect fire support is also being enhanced through the acquisition of

[45] Lithuanian Armed Forces, "Ministras J. Olekas: „Pasirašyta sutartis dėl 88 pėstininkų kovos mašinų įsigijimo – tai ženklas, kad Lietuva rūpinasi savo saugumu ir investuoja į jį" [Minister J. Olekas: "The signed contract of the acquisition of 88 infantry fighting vehicles is a sign that Lithuania is taking care of its security and invests into it"], 22 August 2022.

[46] Saulius Jakučionis, "Lithuania's Boxer IFV deliveries delayed due to faults," *LRT.lt/BNS,* 27 December 2019; "After delivery delays, Lithuania to receive Boxer IFVs over next six months," *LRT.lt/BNS*, 15 March 2021.

[47] Jaroslaw Adamowski, "Lithuania launches talks to buy more than 120 Boxer military vehicles," *Defense News*, 21 April 2022.

[48] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Second shipment of JLTVs arrives in Lithuania," 1 December 2022.

[49] "Lietuva pasirašė sutartį dėl vokiškų haubicų pirkimo [Lithuania signed a contract for the acquisition of the German howitzers," *BNS/Lrytas.lt*, 12 October 2017.

[50] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Agreement reached with France on procurement of Caesar Mark II howitzers," 30 December 2022.

mobile 120 mm EXPAL 120-MX2-SM mortars from Spain for almost 10 million euros, with deliveries starting in late 2023.[51]

Lithuania will also purchase eight HIMARS M142 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems that have proved extremely valuable in degrading Russian forces in Ukraine. This project is expected to cost almost 500 million U.S. dollars and will include missiles capable of precision strike up to 300 km.[52] The project will also create opportunities for cooperation in training, logistics, munitions, and other aspects of this capability between the three Baltic states since Estonia and Latvia are planning to acquire the same system.

The war in Ukraine has confirmed the importance of efficient air defence, gaps in which have been a long-standing problem for Lithuania. A decision of considerable importance was taken in 2017 to acquire two NASAMS-3 medium-range air defence batteries through a 109-million-euro contract with the Norwegian company *Kongsberg*. These were delivered in 2020 and are on their way to full operational readiness. NASAMS is well integrated with the short-range air defence system RBS-70, which is also operated by the Lithuanian Armed Forces and has recently been modernised.[53] Still, the question of air defence is not fully solved, as the country needs an efficient multi-layered (including long-range) air defence system. In 2022, the Seimas asked the MoND to prepare a feasibility study of the integrated air defence system and recommend possible options.

The Air Force has invested in enhancing the air surveillance capabilities that are essential for air defence. In 2019, a decade-long air surveillance system modernisation project worth some 60 million euros and undertaken in cooperation with the NATO Communications and Information Agency and NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency was completed. Through this, the Spanish company *Indra* installed two 3D long-range radars and communication systems in southern and western Lithuania and upgraded one similar radar in the eastern part of the country, bringing Lithuania closer to fulfilling NATO the requirements of the Alliance's Integrated Air and Missile Defence System.[54]

The Air Force as well as the Navy are also modernising and expanding their core capabilities. For the Air Force, Lithuania has ordered four U.S. Black Hawk UH-60 helicopters, worth 181 million U.S. dollars, to be delivered by 2024.[55] The Lithuanian Navy's most important recent project was the 2022 contract for the purchase, refurbishment, and modernisation of the UK Royal Navy's Hunt class minesweeper, HMS Quorn, to be delivered also by 2024.[56] It is negotiating the acquisition of Jehu-class small patrol ships from Finland to patrol the Curonian lagoon and protect the vicinity of Klaipėda harbour.[57] The broader question of naval posture after 2030 is still to be addressed, possibly in the framework of the common vision presented in 2020 by the navy commanders of the Baltic states.

The broader question of naval posture after 2030 is still to be addressed, possibly in the framework of the common vision presented in 2020 by the navy commanders of the Baltic states

Lithuania is also planning to acquire more advanced UAVs, as it currently operates only a small number of Scaneagles. In September 2022, based on lessons of the war in Ukraine, it initiated the acquisition of 35 small and medium intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance UAVs, while officials also hinted at the possibility of procuring medium altitude long endurance armed combat drones such as the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 at some point.[58]

[51] "Lithuania to buy Spanish mortars worth €10m," *BNS/LRT.lt*, 28 October 2022.

[52] Augustinas Šemelis, "Lithuania signs $495m contract with US for HIMARS systems," *LRT.lt*, 16 December 2022.

[53] Lithuanian Armed Forces, "NASAMS medium-range air defence systems delivered to the Lithuanian Air Force," 19 June 2020.

[54] "Lithuanian Air Force deploys two long-range 3D radars," *Airforce Technology*, 6 December 2018.

[55] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Lithuania and the U.S. signed a contract on procurement of a new UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter platform from the U.S. Government," 13 November 2020.

[56] "Refurbishments begin on British minehunter purchased by Lithuanian Navy," *BNS/LRT.lt*, 30 August 2022.

[57] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Letter of Intent signed with Finland on acquisition of two patrol craft," 15 June 2022.

[58] Augustas Stankevičius, "A.Anušauskas: Lietuva svarsto įsigyti „Bayraktar" kovinių dronų [A. Anušauskas: Lithuania considers procuring Bayraktar combat drones]," *BNS/15min.lt*, 31 May 2022.

Lithuania also became the first international customer of the U.S. Switchblade 600 loitering munition: a contract worth 45 million U.S. dollars was signed at the end of 2022.[59] It is also expected that the U.S. government will finance, through the U.S. Military Assistance Fund, Lithuania's acquisition of Switchblade 300 loitering munitions.

Lithuania's development programme is a work in progress and might be hampered by shortage in global defence capacity, but its completion will represent a qualitative leap in the capabilities

Lithuania's development programme is still very much a work in progress and might be hampered by factors such as a shortage in global defence capacity at a time of high demand, but its completion will represent a qualitative leap in the capabilities of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Many legacy platforms such as M113 APCs, 105mm towed artillery howitzers M50, all stocks of L-70 anti-aircraft guns, and even older generation Stinger MANPADS and Javelin ATGMs, meanwhile, have been provided to the Armed Forces of Ukraine as part of Lithuania's military assistance to a key partner country at war.

3.4. Infrastructure

Rapidly rising personnel numbers, the reintroduction of conscription, the arrival of the NATO eFP battalion and other allied forces (air policing, U.S. armoured rotational battalion, etc), and newly acquired armament have required the urgent expansion and improvement of Lithuania's military infrastructure.[60] At least 670 million euros (or 4% of total planned defence spending) will be invested in the coming ten years.

One of the biggest obstacles to deploying larger NATO forces in Lithuania is the shortage of suitable training areas. Lithuania's six military training areas are too small for brigade-size training (and most are barely sufficient for company or battalion training). As a result, two of the biggest military training areas are being doubled in size; a new military training area that will allow training of up to 3 000 troops will be ready by 2027 at a cost of more than 260 million euros.[61]

The construction of military facilities to accommodate new units also began in 2021, with contracts for three completely new military garrisons. These facilities are to be built on a public-private partnership basis, with the total cost of the construction and 15 years of maintenance priced at 168 million euros and providing room for 2 500 civilian and military personnel. [62] Accommodation was also constructed for 7 million euros at "Camp Herkus" for the U.S. armoured battalion troops deployed in Pabradė.[63]

Transportation infrastructure to allow the rapid arrival of allied forces and their movement inside Lithuanian territory is also being enhanced with funding from the national budget and the military mobility programme of the EU's Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). In 2022, Lithuania received 73 million euros from the CEF to upgrade the Via Baltica road that runs through the Suwałki corridor from Poland into the Baltic states to a dual carriageway and to build a railroad freight terminal in Palemonas, close to Rukla military base. In 2022-27, at least 500 million euros – half from the national budget and another half from the

[59] "'First in the world': Lithuania signs contract to acquire Switchblade combat drones from US," *LRT.lt*, 22 December 2022.

[60] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Infrastruktūros plėtra [Infrastructure development]," last modified on 2 March 2022.

[61] Stasys Gudavičius, "Naudotis oficialiai atidarytu Rūdninkų poligonu kol kas galima nepilnai [So far the use of the newly-open Rūdninkai training area is possible not to a full extent]," *Verslo žinios*, 2 June 2022; Lithuanian Armed Forces, "Atidarytas Rūdninkų karinis poligonas [Rūdninkai training area has been opened]," News, 2 June 2022; Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Atnaujinami Lietuvos kariuomenės poligonai ir jų infrastruktūra [Lithuanian Armed Forces' training areas and their infrastructure are being updated]," 18 April 2016.

[62] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Pasirašytos sutartys su įmonėmis, kurios statys tris naujus karinius miestelius Šiauliuose, Rokantiškėse ir Pajūryje [Contracts have been signed with the companies that will develop three new military garrisons in Šiauliai, Rokantiškės and Pajūrys]," 8 January 2021; Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Lietuvoje pradedamos naujų karinių miestelių statybos [Construction of three new military garrisons begins in Lithuania]," 2 August 2022.

[63] "Lithuania opens training camp for US troops in bid to draw Washington's attention," *BNS/LRT.lt*, 30 August 2021.

EU – are planned for upgrading transportation infrastructure.[64]

Lithuania also receives considerable financial assistance for infrastructure development from its bilateral cooperation partners. From 2016 to 2020, 24 million euros from the U.S. European Deterrence Initiative fund were used to develop military infrastructure such as the air force base in Zokniai and a further 15 million euros for improving military training areas.[65] Germany, meanwhile, has invested in Rukla military base, where its troops are deployed with the eFP battlegroup and a German brigade staff element has recently been established. Berlin pledged to invest up to 110 million euros into different infrastructure projects at this base.[66]

Infrastructure investments are expected to create the conditions necessary to host a full allied brigade in the country – an ambition that underpins Lithuania's negotiations with Germany and is seen by Vilnius as key to enabling a more credible NATO forward defence posture in the region. The issue became highly contentious in the domestic political debate during late 2022 and has even caused some tensions with Berlin over Germany's perceived reluctance to commit to the forward deployment of an entire brigade.[67]

Infrastructure investments are expected to create the conditions necessary to host a full allied brigade in the country – a key to enabling a more credible NATO forward defence posture

While some Lithuanian top officials admit that fulfilment of their aspiration is rather unlikely in the near future, ensuring proper Host Nation Support to Allied presence in Lithuania will remain a major defence development priority of high political visibility in the coming years.[68]

4. Baltic Defence Cooperation: Common Front But National Approaches

Martin Hurt, Mārtiņš Vargulis, Liudas Zdanavičius and Tomas Jermalavičius

Since 2014, the Baltic states have increasingly coordinated their foreign, security, and defence policy positions, for example, by sharing information and synchronising positions regarding their contributions to NATO within the NATO Defence Planning Process. All three states meet the NATO guideline of spending 2% of GDP on defence and have expectations of spending more. They have met frequently at all levels and been united in their public statements. The unprecedented solidarity that they have enjoyed in recent years has allowed them to present a common front in the security organisations to which they belong. And thus, they have achieved some success in ensuring that their interests and views are reflected in the positions of these organisations, for example, in the robustness of the sanctions adopted by the EU after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the development of NATO defence plans for the Baltic region, the upgrading of the Baltic air policing mission, and the creation and evolution of eFP.

When it comes to more practical defence programmes, either in capability acquisition or between operational units, the Baltic states

[64] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "Lietuva parengė dar vieną karinio mobilumo jungčių gerinimo projektų paketą ir siekia gauti ES finansavimą [Lithuania prepared another package of projects for the improvement of military mobility connections and seeks the EU funding]," 18 May 2022.

[65] Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "U.S. investment tripled Lithuanian Air Force Base capacity to host allied aircraft," 4 August 2020.

[66] "Germany Vows to Keep Troops in Lithuania, Invest More in Barracks," *Reuters/VOA,* 4 February 2019.

[67] Augustas Stankevičius and Saulius Jakučionis, "Dėl Vokietijos brigados Lietuvoje – vis daugiau klausimų: Landsbergis iš šalių vadovų tikisi aiškumo [Ever more questions about a German brigade in Lithuania: Landsbergis expects clarity from the heads of the states]," *LRT.lt/BNS,* 22 December 2022; Andrius Balčiūnas, "Vokietijos ambasadorius sako, kad brigada Lietuvoje treniruosis, bet perkelta nebus: dabar tai geriausia [German ambassador says that the brigade will train in Lithuania, but will not be moved here: this is what is best for now]," *LRT.lt*, 13 January 2023.

[68] Gytis Pankūnas, "Rupšys: pilna sąjungininkų brigada Lietuvoje artimiausioje perspektyvoje dislokuota nebus [Rupšys: full allied brigade will not be deployed to Lithuania in the near-term perspective]," *LRT.lt,* 17 June 2022; Augustė Lyberytė, "Nausėda įvertino diskusijas dėl Vokietijos brigados: ragina nesiginčyti, kas labiau myli Lietuvą [Nausėda assessed discussions about the German brigade: urges not to argue over who loves Lithuania more]," *Delfi.lt*, 21 December 2022.

have historically leaned towards national approaches. There have been cases when they have undertaken joint procurement, bilaterally and trilaterally, but these have rather been the exception. Almost all procurement projects have been implemented by the three countries separately (for example, even major projects to acquire broadly similar artillery platforms, infantry fighting vehicles, and air-surveillance radar systems have been carried out nationally). In the past, this was partially explained by their reliance on second-hand equipment, in turn made necessary by the limited funds that were available for defence procurement. But with larger defence budgets, all three states are moving in the direction of acquiring new systems and are beginning to include development stages in their procurement processes to tailor systems to their specific needs (such as Lithuania's integration of the Samson turret with the Boxer platform in its infantry fighting vehicle acquisition).

With larger defence budgets, all three states are moving in the direction of acquiring new systems and beginning to include development stages in their procurement processes to tailor systems to their specific needs

Meanwhile, in the absence of international sponsorship, there has been little incentive to find avenues for operational cooperation along the lines of the four flagship Baltic defence projects established in the 1990s. These themselves have partially withered: the Baltic peacekeeping battalion (BALTBAT) is dormant, and the Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON) no longer exists as a trilateral project following Estonia's withdrawal in 2015. However, the three states continue to cooperate in air surveillance through the Baltic Air Surveillance Network (BALTNET) and provide common military education to Baltic and other officers through the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL).

There has recently been more pressure from NATO Allies and from domestic sources to pursue joint capabilities development, leading to a slight uptick in Baltic defence cooperation.

In December 2021, the Baltic defence ministers declared their intent to jointly develop Multiple Launch Rocket System capability that would be interoperable across the region.[69] The original plan envisaged the joint procurement of U.S. M270 systems but, at least in part due to lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine, the three countries will now purchase a total of 20 M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) (Estonia six, Latvia six, Lithuania eight).[70] Although the procurements will be carried out separately, supported by U.S. foreign military financing, the parallel development of procedural mechanisms by which any Baltic country will be able to support its neighbours with indirect fire remains an important expansion of Baltic defence cooperation.[71]

There has been more pressure from NATO Allies and from domestic sources to pursue joint capabilities development, leading to a slight uptick in Baltic defence cooperation

In the margins of the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, Estonia and Latvia signed a Letter of Intent regarding the joint procurement of medium-range ground-based air defence systems.[72] Air defence capabilities are crucial, and these systems will significantly boost Estonia's and Latvia's ability to protect their manoeuvre forces, critical infrastructure, populations, and territories against air attack. Joint procurement would allow the countries to coordinate resources, maximise the efficiency of defence investments, and better promote stability and security in the region. Meanwhile, also at the Madrid summit, Spain agreed to deploy, as a stopgap measure, one NASAMS (Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) ground-based air defence missile battery to Lielvārde Air Base in Latvia.

[69] "Estonia plans to procure MLRS rocket systems jointly with Latvia, Lithuania," *ERR*, 22 December 2021.

[70] Maria-Ann Rohemäe, "Estonia and US sign HIMARS contract," *ERR*, 3 December 2022; "Latvia plans to buy six HIMARS systems," *LSM*, 12 October 2022; "Lithuania to buy HIMARS systems from US," *LRT/ BNS*, 10 October 2022.

[71] "Baltic states agree to create joint 'operational area' for defence," *LRT/ BNS*, 2 December 2022.

[72] Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, "Latvia and Estonia sign letter of intent for joint procurement of medium-range air defence systems," 1 July 2022.

Regarding the maritime domain, the three defence chiefs have agreed a Baltic naval vision for 2030 and beyond which advocates strengthened cooperation in several areas. Currently, all three countries operate naval vessels that will have to be replaced after 2030, offering opportunities for common acquisition, including whole-life aspects such as common maintenance and training. The document (which is not public and yet to be endorsed at the political level) also suggests a Baltic combined naval command to support regional naval operational planning efforts, the planning of exercises and operations, and the more effective use of subordinated national maritime assets through a Baltic naval unit. These efforts would seek to replicate the close cooperation of the Dutch and Belgian navies that has existed since 1948.

Overall, though, there is significant room for improvement in Baltic defence cooperation. Resource constraints mean that the Baltic states will not be able to fully provide for their own defence, especially in the air and maritime domains. The involvement of Allies in the region will continue to be important here. Baltic defence cooperation plays an important role in demonstrating to the Allies that the three states are ready to pursue maximum efficiency in providing for their own defence.

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However, the Baltic states have struggled to realise their good intentions of cooperating on the procurement of major systems. Further, they have made only limited progress in synchronising and testing defence plans. As an armed attack could separate Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from the rest of the Alliance, it is important to signal that their actions in such circumstances would be both united and pre-planned.

Conclusion

The threat posed by Russia has heavily influenced Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania's defence policies and postures since the re-establishment of their independence in the early 1990s. Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine from 2014 (in particular, its full-scale invasion in 2022) have only encouraged the Baltic states to work harder to develop robust, credible, and well-equipped armed forces. In recent years, all three countries have decided to develop new capabilities that will restrict the freedom of action of the Russian Armed Forces in the Baltic Sea region and contribute much to NATO's collective defence.

This progress will likely continue for some years. Defence is regarded as a priority in all three states, as evidenced by their decisions to allocate at least 3% of GDP for this. This should send a clear message to other Allies that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are not only seeking support from others, but are themselves detrained to contribute to developing an Alliance defence posture to meet today's needs.

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International Centre for Defence and Security
63/4 Narva Rd., 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
info@icds.ee

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