

## 4. LESSONS LEARNED AND CONFLICTS HISTORY

# THE IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIA'S 2014 MILITARY DOCTRINE FOR THE MILITARY SECURITY OF THE BALTIC STATES TO 2020

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### ABSTRACT

In its 2014 military doctrine, Russia defines the world as an unstable environment that is not able to provide sufficient security to Russia. In these terms, Russia looks to its large military force that would be able to protect the Russian vital sphere of interests, which supposedly also includes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Thus, Russia strives to re-establish the control in its vital sphere of interests and the 2014 doctrine reveals the intent of it. However, the steady development of military capabilities, strong political will to defend the sovereignty along with the principle of collective defence has made the Baltic States strong enough to withstand security challenges caused by its Eastern neighbour, The Russian Federation. As a result, although the confrontation of interests in the Baltic region remains persistent, the probability of Russian direct military aggression against the Baltic States will stay low up to 2020.

### KEY WORDS

The Baltics' Security, Russian Doctrinal Threats, Resurgent Russia, Deterrence of Russia.

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## Introduction

'We must admit to ourselves that in Putin's Russia we deal with an aggressive regime that is seeking to restore the empire in the borders of the former Soviet Union,' Estonian Defence Minister Urmas Reinsalu emphasized in 2014 (MacKinnon, 2014).

In 2014, Russian president signs a document that on the one hand provides the basis for Russian security and defence policy to 2020, but on the other hand, it reveals

the implications for the military security of Baltic States in the near future. 2014 military doctrine of the Russian Federation highlights Russia's commitment to use the military force for the protection of its national security interests in the vitally important areas.

It is worth mentioning, though, that for the sake of its certain national interests, Russia has dramatically striven to maintain its

power in the Baltics for centuries. Indeed, each Baltic State has its own meaning to Russia. Estonia means the control of the Gulf of Finland, Russia's access to the Baltic Sea. Latvia has the largest Russian population in the Baltics and the important port of Riga. Lithuania separates Russia from its western exclave, Kaliningrad, which is home to a significant part of Russia's Baltic Fleet. At the same time, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as the Baltic States have their own national security interests and these interests are in direct contradiction to those of the Russian Federation. Thus, there is a confrontation of interests in the Baltics' security environment.

Although the confrontation of interests in the Baltic region caused by Russia's ambitious intent and capacious force remains persistent, the reinforced Baltic deterrence means that the probability of Russian direct military aggression against the Baltic States will stay low up to 2020.

First, the paper will analyse Russian doctrinal threats and reveal the reasons for the persistent sense of vulnerability Russia has always experienced in regard to its western borders and the states behind them. Next, it will examine Russia's ambitious intent and capacious force it needs in order to control the vital sphere. The challenges to the security environment of Baltic States' will be discussed before the overall conclusion, followed by the implications of Russia's military doctrine for the environment in the near future. The security recommendations will be presented in the final section of the military security of the Baltic States in the near future (up to 2020).

## An overview of Russia's 2014 military doctrine

Russia's military doctrine reflects the commitment of the Russian Federation to use its military force in order to protect its

national security interests in the global environment that Russia perceives in its own specific way. According to the 2014 military doctrine:

*World development at the present stage is characterized by increasing global competition, the tension in the various areas of interstate and interregional interaction, values and rivalry development patterns... Unresolved are many regional conflicts. (There) is a tendency to force their resolution, including in the regions bordering the Russian Federation. Existing architecture (System) (of) international Security does not provide equal security for all States (President of the Russian Federation, 2014).*

In the doctrine, Russia defines the world as an unstable and rather unfriendly competitive environment, because it is not able to provide equal security to all states and particularly to Russia itself. Defining the world this way, on the other hand, Russia seeks to inform its internal audience of the possible outside threats and on the other hand, justify the growing Russian armed forces, adding weight to Kremlin's foreign policy.

Among the main external military dangers and threats listed in the doctrine that could under certain circumstances lead to military conflicts, the following two are worth mentioning because of their implications for the military security of the Baltic States. First, the deployment (build-up) of military contingents of foreign states (groups of states) in the territories bordering the Russian Federation and its allies as well as in adjacent waters, including political and military pressure on the Russian Federation is one of the main external military dangers. Second, a demonstration of force in the course of the exercises on the territory of the states bordering the Russian Federa-

tion and its allies is proclaimed as a main military threat by the doctrine (President of the Russian Federation, 2014).

The commitment of Russia to use its military force in case of aforementioned threats is explicitly stated in the doctrine. But what are the motives or *vital interests* behind them that Russia truly pledges to defend?

## A revealing insight into the doctrine

Security doctrines proclaim states' officially adopted views on the protection of their territory and population. Also, they send signals or messages on how states actually perceive their threats, revealing its strategic vulnerabilities.

Russian political culture has constantly considered the enormous size of its country as both the advantage and the disadvantage. The vast territory of Russia has provided excessive natural resources to its economy and huge living space to its population. On the other hand, it has always made the need to protect the gigantic territory with land boundaries as long as 22,408 kilometres (according to the CIA's World Factbook of 2014) an ambitious undertaking. As a result, a feeling of consistent insecurity, specific to Russian strategic culture, has influenced the country to rely on the large military force that must be able to protect what Russia calls *the vital sphere of its interests*.

The Baltic States can supposedly also belong to the vital sphere of Russian interests as in spite of its vast space, Russia has always perceived the strategic depth of its western territories truly limited, thus vulnerable to the state's security. Indeed, throughout its history, Russia has witnessed many invasions coming from the West: Poles, Germans, French and others – some of whom succeeded in threatening Russian capital Moscow. Estonia, Latvia

and Lithuania lie on the North European Plain, Europe's direct route to Russia. Furthermore, today when the Baltic States are NATO members, the western threat may seem more exaggerated to Russia than ever in the past. In these terms, the 2014 military doctrine addresses the vulnerable issue and sends a clear message: Russia considers the former Soviet countries, including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania its vital sphere of interests and has a high level of commitment to influence it.

The next section will analyse how Russia's ambitions to be a great power have directly correlated with its military capabilities. So, is Russia capable of doing what it intents?

## Russian intentions and capabilities

The strong do what they have the power to do; the weak accept what they have to accept (Thucydides, The Melian Dialogue).

Historically, Russia has perceived military power as a prerequisite for the status of a great power in the world. A strong army is supposed to guarantee the territorial integrity of Russia in order to preserve its national interests in the international environment. In the post-Cold war period, Russia failed to keep mighty conventional military capabilities it had inherited from the Soviet Union due to the lack of political will and financial means, usually referred to Boris Yeltsin's time of the presidency. This period reflects an accommodating posture of Russia and positive or at least neutral relations with its Western neighbours. A steady rise in the defence budget of the past decade and the implementation of systematic army reforms since 2008 have revived Russian military power. It will make possible to regain the status of great power in the near future, unless Russian economy and demography fail the process.

In fact, Russia's wide ambitions have been already explicitly articulated by Russian political elite led by president Putin. Kaarel Kaas argues that:

*The long-term strategic aim of the current Russian elite has been to create armed forces that can, firstly, guarantee the military superiority of Russia over the entire territory of the former Soviet Union and in the areas directly bordering it; and, secondly, project limited military force on a strategic, global level (Kaas, 2014).*

The statement as such clearly demonstrates the intent of a great power.

Next, the capabilities will be discussed. The following two indicators are selected to evidently demonstrate the growing military capabilities of Russia: the boosted defence spending and the increased complexity of strategic exercises.

First, since 2000 the Russian economy has shown positive tendencies due to the income of oil and gas money into the budget of the country. Having strong political will to regain its military power, thus the status of great power, Kremlin prioritized the budget spending, putting the defence spending at the top of the list. Susanne Oxenstierna claims that:

*The ongoing reform of the Armed Forces has resulted in a marked rise in the Russian defence budget, from an average of 2.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the 2000s to around 3.1-3.8 percent during the budget period 2013-2015... Comparing Russia's total military expenditure to other countries', this level of the Russian defence budget corresponded to total military spending of 4.4 percent of GDP in 2012 (SIPRI 2013). This is equal to the share of national defence in*

*the GDP of the USA, but high compared to European countries, where defence spending has tended to decline since the Cold War and its shares in GDP lie at around 2 percent (Oxenstierna, 2013, p. 103).*

State's defence budget is not a direct indicator of either growing or reducing military power, but it may be assumed, though, that increased defence spending facilitate the development of stronger capabilities. In these terms, Martin Russell argues that 'a new State Armaments Programme for 2011-2020 was adopted... with substantially increased funding and a target of raising the percentage of modern military equipment from 20% to 70%, in line with NATO armed forces, by 2020' (Russell, 2015).

Second, the complexity of strategic exercises that Russia has recently conducted shows the impressive development of its military capabilities. As an example, during *Zapad-2013* strategic exercise (West-2013 in English translation), Russia's Armed Forces demonstrated an ability to conduct joint or inter-service as well as inter-agency operations with larger formations. The fact indicates the readiness of the Russian Federation not only for small conflict, but also for a wider war attempt. Correspondingly, Johan Norberg states, 'the scope of *Zapad-2013* and the simultaneous Northern Fleet exercise indicated that they were about a regional war with NATO, including a possible escalation into using the Northern Fleets nuclear weapons (Norberg, 2015).

That leads us to a conclusion that Russia has the intent declared by the Kremlin in the 2014 military doctrine and capabilities in the form of its military power that is potentially able to regain and maintain the advantage of Russia's foreign policy in the Baltic States. Kaarel Kaas emphasizes that 'armed forces with this power add military

weight to Moscow's foreign policy "toolbox". In 2008, Russia demonstrated the use of this instrument in Georgia and it is currently (2014 – author's note) continuing the demonstration in Ukraine' (Kaas, 2014).

The forthcoming section will introduce the current security situation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and initiate the understanding of the doctrine's implications for it.

## The security environment of the Baltic States

The Baltic States are hardly defensible countries lying on the North European Plain opened to Russia from the West. Their small size also makes them highly vulnerable as there is no strategic depth of the land and sea. Furthermore, they are bordered by Russia to the east, Russian Kaliningrad to the west and Russian ally Belarus to the south. This is the current security situation, likely seen from Russia's military perspective. However, and this is definitely the hard truth for the Kremlin, each country is pro-Western and a member of the European Union and NATO; each has demonstrated the steady development of its military capabilities over the past few years; each has a strong national commitment and political will to defend its sovereignty in the case of aggression.

From this point forward, the current security environment of Estonia, then Latvia and finally, Lithuania will be presented according to the report of The International Centre for Defence Studies (the reference can be found at the end of the quotation that is intentionally left unmarked due to the length of it).

### Estonia

Estonia's military defence is based on its initial self-defence capability and the NATO principle of collective defence under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This means

that the capabilities that are necessary for military defence and deterrence, but which Estonia cannot develop on its own are ensured in cooperation with its allies in NATO. One perceived weakness in Estonia's current defence concept is imbalance between the development of initial self-defence capabilities and the capabilities that can be used in international operations.

### Latvia

Latvia has based its security on collective defence; it is actively involved in strengthening NATO capabilities and participating in NATO-led operations. Latvia has switched to a professional army to modernise its National Armed Forces (NAF) (...) The NAF is built to provide national defence and meet the requirements of the NATO principle of collective defence. (However) due to considerable financial reductions, Latvia's defence structure was streamlined to focus on combat and operational capabilities (...) The significant numbers of highly professional and motivated military personnel retired in 2008–2010. It is doubtful whether the NAF is currently able to fulfil their tasks.

### Lithuania

The country's number one priority is to develop its armed forces and its national defence system in accordance with NATO's requirements. Participation in both NATO and EU missions is an essential part of this goal. Work continues on the formation of a Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian trilateral army brigade (...) After the Russia-Georgia war, the Lithuanian political elite expressed a need to re-balance territorial and collective defence and to build a sufficient military reserve. (Moreover) the militarisation of the Kaliningrad District has been raised as a serious issue by Lithuanian policymakers on a number of occasions (Kaljurand, et al., 2012).

Despite the considerable development of self-defence and collective defence capabilities Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have made over the past few years, the security environment in the Baltics still remains sensitive to Russia's ability to quickly project its military power and strengthen its military bases. In these terms, the past several years have witnessed the remarkable strengthening of Russian military capabilities near the Baltic countries – several manoeuvre units were strengthened by personnel and renewal of arms and equipment, new units were created and specific weapon systems were located in the Baltic's neighbourhood. Referring to the newly created units in the vicinity of the Baltics, Kaarel Kaas states:

*In 2009, the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade was established as a completely new unit (...) in Estonia's immediate vicinity, on the eastern side of Lake Peipus. In the summer of 2013, Ostrov Air Base was (re)opened (...) next to the Latvian border(...) It is equipped with about 50 of the newest attack and transport helicopters (...) These carry the latest weapons systems (...) which will considerably improve the efficiency of the Russian armed forces in our region (the Baltic States – author's note). (Next), Russia opened an air base on the territory of Belarus (...) By the end of this year (2014), Baranovichi Air Base in Belarus would house a whole regiment (24 aircraft) of Su-27M3 fighters. This kind of development would double the number of Russian fighter aircraft stationed near Lithuania and Poland (Kaas, 2014).*

Moreover, Russia has deployed Iskander-M, the ballistic missile system along with the S-400 long-range anti-aircraft missile

system to Kaliningrad, significantly endangering the security environment of the Baltic States in the near future as the set of two is an influential argument of Russian foreign policy in the region. Kaarel Kaas reveals that 'these missile systems provide the Russian armed forces with the capability to hit almost all strategically important targets (...) from southern Poland to central Finland. Metaphorically, Iskander-M is the sword and S-400 is the shield' (Kaas, 2014). As a result, the security environment of the Baltic States remains constantly threatened by the Russian military potential in the region that is able to conduct conventional joint-level offensive operations in the Baltic States with an overwhelming ratio of force as long as the deployment of NATO allies is denied or deterred by the mighty set of Iskander-M and S-400 from Kaliningrad as well as other locations close to the Baltics. Still all three Baltic countries continue to base their security on the principle of collective defence under NATO Article 5.

Nevertheless, the Alliance's security guarantee is not hot air. This is more about doing than talking. The Atlantic Resolve Operation is a good example of it. The United States of America has sent its troops to Eastern Europe, including the three Baltic States, in order to reassure its NATO partners, but what is more important, to prevent Russia from using its military advantage in the region in the way discussed above. Accordingly, the official homepage of United States Army Europe (2016) states that:

*Operation Atlantic Resolve is a demonstration of continued U.S. commitment to the collective security of NATO (...) in light of Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine. Since April 2014, Army Europe has led land forces efforts on behalf of the U.S. military, by conducting continuous, enhanced multinational training*

*and security cooperation activities...  
These multinational training and  
security cooperation activities are  
taking place in Estonia, Latvia (and)  
Lithuania (...)*

Moreover, the amount of U.S. troops can be really expanded from a company size unit, each Baltic country is hosting presently, to a battalion or more in the future. A few months ago the United States Secretary of Defence, Ash Carter assured that 'the equipment, enough to arm one combat brigade, will be positioned in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland' (Lendon, 2015). This is the significant guarantee to the military security of the Baltic States that must prevent Russia from military aggression in the near future as the economic, political and military consequences of the conflict would be highly unacceptable for the people of Russia.

## Conclusion

In its 2014 military doctrine, Russia defines the world as an unstable environment that is not able to provide sufficient security to Russia. The paranoid worldview must be exaggerated by a deep-rooted sense of insecurity that Russia has always experienced towards its Western borders. It has made the country always rely on the large military force that must be able to protect the Russian vital sphere of interests, which supposedly includes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Presently, the countries are pro-Western and the members of the EU and NATO.

Thus, Russia strives to re-establish the control in its vital sphere of interests and the 2014 doctrine reveals the intent of it. Moreover, the growing military power shows that Russia will be potentially able to achieve the intent in the future. However, the steady development of military capabilities, strong political will to defend the sovereignty along

with the principle of collective defence has made the Baltic States strong enough to withstand security challenges caused by its Eastern neighbour, The Russian Federation. As a result, although the confrontation of interests in the Baltic region remains persistent, the probability of Russian direct military aggression against the Baltic States will stay low up to 2020.

## The implications of the doctrine

First of all, according to the 2014 military doctrine, one of the main external military dangers that could under certain circumstances lead to a military conflict is the deployment or build-up of military contingents of foreign states or allies (group of states) in the territories bordering the Russian Federation and its allies. As regards three Baltic States, the contingent mentioned by the doctrine must be the U.S. troops deployed to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the reassurance mission. The Atlantic Resolve Operation is a demonstration of commitment of the Alliance and an effective deterrent preventing Russia from using its significant military power in the region, yet it is a potential tripwire of a conflict between NATO in general with the United States in particular and the Russian Federation. In the near future, Russia will continue to consider the Baltic States as its vital sphere of interests because of the deep-rooted feeling of insecurity of its western borders. Thus, Russia will look to use opportunities that arise as well as already available advantages of its militarized foreign policy to influence the deterrence efforts of the allies, which it doctrinally considers to be a main external military danger. The result is the confrontation of interests in the region.

Next, a demonstration of force in the course of the exercises on the territory of the states bordering the Russian

Federation and its allies is considered by the doctrine as a main military threat to the Russian Federation. This is one of the most ambiguous statements in the 2014 military doctrine. Is it really possible to develop the military capabilities of the armed forces without force demonstrating exercises? What Russia actually reveals by the statement is the displeasure of vulnerability being incited by military exercises in the areas of the strategic importance for Russia. For instance, Estonia's security is based on its initial self-defence capability and the principle of collective defence. The capabilities that are necessary for military defence, but which Estonia cannot develop on its own are ensured by cooperation with its NATO allies. The cooperation means collective training and, as a part of it, regular employment of the joint capabilities during military exercises. Thus, Estonia like the other Baltic States must conduct military exercises to test and develop its self-defence and collective defence capabilities in order to ensure its military security. As a result, what is good for the military security of the Baltic States is a doctrinal military threat to Russia. This is another instance of confrontation of interests in the Baltics.

In summary, the confrontation of interests in the region will persist, but the form of the confrontation will be different than direct military actions in the near future. The probability of the conventional fight remains low; however, the Baltic States will witness the acts of Russian intimidation that will include, but will not be limited to the growing strength of the armed forces and a steady increase in Russian military air activity in the vicinity of the Baltic States. Also, Russia will look for new non-military measures to force NATO to show that it will not consider Article 5 in the case of direct military actions against Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

## Security recommendations

In the near future, the security of the Baltic States will depend on their ability to cooperate with the Alliance in general and the United States of America in particular and to offer regional solutions to different security challenges caused by becoming more and more assertive Kremlin's foreign policy.

First, the Baltic States must continue to improve the interoperability of its armed forces. Military cooperation in accordance with NATO's requirements will synchronize command and control, intelligence, fires, sustainment and other warfighting functions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the respective functions of Denmark, the Great Britain and the United States. Additionally, the ability of the Baltic States to integrate and effectively employ the joint capabilities provided by the Alliance must be further developed, trained and exercised. Moreover, U.S. interest in European security, including the Baltic States is crucial for maintaining effective deterrence against Russian aggression in the region. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must continue to emphasize the role the United States play in the security environment of Eastern Europe and to participate in U.S.-led security activities to the extent of their possibilities.

Second, the EU and NATO are less cohesive; the more important is the need for regional security and defence cooperation. A shift toward greater regionalization is already underway in Europe, including the regionalization of the security environment. In these terms, the Baltic States must consider more seriously the development of a comprehensive approach to common security and defence issues. Defence cooperation between the Baltic States must be intensified in such areas like training, logistics, procurement and security planning.



Additionally, more attention must be paid to Nordic-Baltic cooperative efforts in the military security sector. Cooperation within the framework of NORDEFECO is one of the possible regional solutions to the security challenges in the region.

In conclusion, Russia has dramatically striven to maintain its dominant position in the Baltic region for centuries. The endeavours to maintain the advantage in the strategically vital territories have withstood serious challenges and periods of turmoil. So, Russia's vitally important challenge in the future will be to find out how to regain its advantage in the Baltic States as they become more and more integrated into the system of Western values, which is antagonistic to the Russian worldview.

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