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Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence, 2017-2020

Edited by
Alexander Lanoszka
Christian Leuprecht
Alexander Moens

Research Division

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List of abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ABCT	Armoured Brigade Combat Team
BAOR	UK Army of the Rhine
BATUS	the UK Army's Training Unit in Suffield
BG EST	Battlegroup Estonia
BG LTU	Battlegroup Lithuania
BG LVA	Battlegroup Latvia
BG POL	Battlegroup Poland
CETA	Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement
CIS	Communications and Information Systems
CIVPOP	Civilian population
CRC	Deployable Control and Reporting Centre
CVRT	Armoured tracked military reconnaissance vehicle
EDF	Estonian Defence Forces
EDL	Estonian Defence League
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EMS	Electromagnetic Spectrum
EU	European Union
FIWAF	Fighting in woods and forests
FOI	Freedom of information
HJS	Henry Jackson Society
HNS	Host Nation Support
HQ MNC NE	Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
MNC NE	Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin

MND NE	Multinational Division North East in Elbląg
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NAEW	NATO Early Warning and Airborne
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRFA	NATO-Russia Founding Act
SNF	Short-Range Nuclear Forces
TACET	Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training-Initiative
TACOM	Tactical Command
TFL	Task Force Latvia
TFL HQ	Task Force Latvia headquarters
TOA	Transfer of Authority
TTPs	Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
UAS	Unmanned Aerial System
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force
WMD	Western Military District

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Alexander Lanoszka
Christian Leuprecht
Alexander Moens

Foreword

When NATO's heads of state and government gathered in Warsaw in July of 2016, they agreed to strengthen the Alliance's military presence in the East, with battalions in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on a rotational basis. This decision by our leaders was the launch of the enhanced Forward Presence, or eFP battlegroups.

As resident Ambassadors in the three Baltic States, we have a unique window into the success that is the result of that important decision. To our mind, the eFP exemplifies precisely what NATO is. In the Baltic region and Poland, no less than 23 of NATO's 30 members have deployed soldiers. These men and women serve, train, parade, eat and live together as a single battlegroup 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. NATO is, at its heart, a community of like-minded nations who have worked together for over 70 years to keep the peace. When one member needs help, the rest rally to that cry. An eFP officer perhaps best put it this way: "It is about everyone knowing that we have your back".

As we see first hand every day, there are numerous secondary benefits from the eFP battlegroups, and it is hard to imagine that these were ever considered back in Warsaw. The deployments have opened up an entirely new world of cross cultural collaboration and communication between European and Transatlantic neighbours. Who could have imagined, just a few years ago, that we would have soldiers from Nottingham in Narva; Vancouver in Ventspils; Köln in Kaunas or Portland in Poznan? Not to mention the opportunities for development amongst the Allies. In Latvia, for example, ten different nations serve alongside their Latvian hosts. That is one third of NATO. Typical training notwithstanding, troops take classes in each other's languages, compete in sporting events together and experiment with different cuisines, particularly impressive in the variety of instant meal packs used in the field.

While our generals, political and diplomatic leaders tackle major policy issues in Brussels, soldiers and officers in the field are discovering how to mix kit from half a dozen nations to ensure tanks roll out, troops are fed and communications are solid.

Our embassies benefit enormously from having a robust troop presence in each of the three Baltic countries. Not only is it just good fun to be out in the field watching soldiers exercise, but it has opened up an entirely new avenue of outreach. An ambassador visiting a town outside of a capital may have some cachet. However, doing so with a military vehicle display and a few dozen soldiers serving up a hot meal has revolutionized our work.

What is most exciting is that this is all new. Every rotation of soldiers is building on the

team before them. Our own civil-military cooperation is still at a nascent stage. There is no rulebook for how to best work with the eFP. Every exercise, every community outreach, every sporting event offers new opportunities and lessons learned.

It is for that reason that we are particularly grateful to the writers and contributors of this volume. This work represents the first holistic view of the lessons learned and best practices of all four eFP battlegroups. It is written from the perspective of seasoned military experts and academics, with a smattering of input from us diplomats.

Perhaps one has to be here, in the midst of it all, to truly appreciate just how important these deployments are. They are everything that is right about NATO and they are only getting stronger. The analysis provided in these subsequent pages and the work of future rotations and assuredly by our successors reinforces just how robust and resilient the Alliance is.

In conclusion, let us simply say that to serve alongside these men and women in uniform is one of the great privileges of our lives.

Theresa Bubbear, British Ambassador to Estonia
Kevin Rex, Canadian Ambassador to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania
Matthias Sonn, German Ambassador to Lithuania

Introduction

Alexander Lanoszka, Christian Leuprecht, and Alexander Moens

President Donald Trump's 2020 plan to withdraw 12,000 American troops from Germany once again shook the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had, between 2016 and 2020, been subject to sustained criticism from the leader of its most powerful and essential member. However, amid the uncertainty that Trump's criticisms have engendered, the Alliance has taken many concrete measures to bolster its security in the face of new threats from Russia. As Anthony Cordesman notes, "NATO is making real progress in spite of the differences between its members, their different interests and security policies, and the many challenges they face". Amongst these measures are "the efforts to improve deterrence in the forward area", most notably the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative.[1]

In early 2014, the security environment in Europe changed dramatically. With Kyiv in chaos after a protest movement took power, Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula in Europe's first territorial annexation since 1945. Shortly after the Kremlin sought to legitimate this landgrab with a pseudo-democratic referendum, cities in Ukraine's Donbas region were rocked by protests in which pro-Russian militants stormed government buildings and proclaimed independence from Kyiv. For many observers, Russia was leveraging its political ties with parts of Ukrainian society and exploiting its regional military dominance to upend the territorial status quo.[2]

These developments alarmed NATO members, especially those that adjoin Russia. Although Poland and the Baltic countries were largely skeptical that Russia was ever a benign neighbour, they had spent the last decade calibrating their militaries away from territorial defense to focus more on out-of-area operations with their fellow Allies.[3] They were, after all, relatively new to NATO and eager to contribute. Russian revisionism promptly invalidated that geopolitical paradigm. The Alliance's attention turned back to

1 A. Cordesman, "NATO's 'brain death' burdensharing blunders: focusing on the right investment, force strength, and readiness needs", Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019, p.1.

2 R. Allison, "Russian 'deniable intervention' in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules", *International Affairs*, Vol.90, No.6, 2014, pp.1255-1297.

3 L. Simón, "'Back to basics' and 'out of area': towards a multi-purpose NATO", *The RUSI Journal,* Vol.159, No.3, 2014, p.14.

Europe: Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania now found themselves on the front line of NATO's newly threatened northeastern flank.

In due course, NATO developed a response to the Russian challenge. At the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, members formalized their pledges to spend more on their militaries, to bolster collective defence, and to assure those easternmost Allies that the Alliance was serious about them. NATO adopted a declaration condemning "in the strongest terms Russia's escalating and illegal military intervention in Ukraine" and "[demanding] that Russia stop and withdraw its forces from inside Ukraine and along the Ukrainian border".[4] One tangible initiative was the Readiness Action Plan, which established "adaptation measures" to reassure worried Allies and to enhance NATO's ability to respond to a crisis in Europe. These adaptation measures – as distinct from assurance measures[5] – included the creation of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Forces (VJTF), the establishment of eight Force Integration Units in Central-Eastern Europe, and the expansion of the NATO Response Force.[6] NATO also expanded ongoing Air Policing over the Baltic States to include an air field in Estonia for the deployment of additional air policing assets. NATO Early Airborne Warning raised the number of missions over the Baltic States and Poland while NATO Standing Naval Forces engaged more robustly in the Baltic Sea. Exercises and training programs such as the Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training-Initiatives (TACET) were established to enhance capabilities among allied forces. Assurance measures also included allied states deploying forces and capabilities into the area on a rotating basis. The idea was and is to commit Allies to reassure Baltic States and Poland by sending an unequivocal signal of solidarity across the full spectrum of air, maritime and land options. Alongside these efforts, the United States (US) pre-positioned military equipment in the Baltic region and rotated small numbers of its military forces to demonstrate its commitment.

4 "Warsaw Summit Declaration", NATO, 30 August 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

5 "NATO's Readiness Action Plan", NATO Public Diplomacy Division, July 2016, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf

6 "Readiness Action Plan", NATO, 23 March 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm

Figure 1. NATO enhanced Forward Presence as of July 2020

Source: NATO, "Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast", 21 September 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

Furthermore, at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit members agreed to create the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) – a set of four battalion-sized battlegroups to be composed of ground force elements drawn from across the Alliance (see Figure 1). Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US stepped up as Framework Nations to lead the battlegroups deployed to Latvia (through 2023, at least), Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, respectively. About 4,500 troops across the four battlegroups would strengthen NATO's presence in the Baltic region.[7] Specifically, these "combat-ready forces" aim at "demonstrating the strength of the transatlantic bond, and making clear that an attack on one Ally would be considered an attack on the whole Alliance".[8] Unlike deployments to Germany during the Cold War, they are not permanently garrisoned in the host countries. Instead, they are rotational, so as to highlight NATO's faithfulness to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which provides that "in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces". Although

7 NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *The Secretary General's Annual Report: 2017*, Brussels, 2018, p.12.

8 "Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)", NATO, 2020, https://lc.nato.int/operations/enhanced-forward-presence-efp

Russia's annexation of Crimea may well have negated the Founding Act, NATO continues to observe it, both to preserve the support of those members worried about antagonizing Russia and to signal its defensive motives to Moscow.[9]

Amidst an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment, the eFP is NATO's first new deployment model since the Alliance's inception over seventy years ago: member states assisting other member states with the unanimous endorsement of the Atlantic Council. Born out of necessity, the model is arguably the most important military and political innovation in ensuring NATO's sustainability, adaptability, relevance, and flexibility since the Cold War ended. At the same time, because NATO confronts the problem of strained resources and an ever-expanding spectrum of threats, the eFP is an exercise in multinational optimization. By design, select member states operate, exercise, train, work, and even live together, thereby ensuring a better division of labour, improved competences and capacities, greater collaboration, and higher confidence in deploying jointly for mission success. Over three years into this deployment, this volume steps back to reflect on what has been learned so far from the eFP experiment.

This *NDC Research Paper* takes a systematic comparative approach to NATO's and Allies' experiences with this new deployment model. Few comprehensive analyses of the four eFP battlegroups exist, with almost no work done so far on comparing these experiences methodically yet sensitive to the nuances of how the eFP operates in each Host Nation. On the one hand, the operational successes and shortfalls of the four eFP battlegroups have intrinsic value. On the other hand, a better understanding of what works and what could work better can inform future Alliance decision-making. Some concern exists that the four battlegroups are not coordinating as much as they should: it is still primarily a hub-and-spoke model, to the detriment of multiplayer networks both between and within Host Nations. This collection identifies subtle patterns in military, civilian, and civil-military cooperation across these battlegroups. In analyzing those very patterns, there are many variations to leverage, whether in terms of capabilities and interests of Framework Nation, attributes of host country, or the composition of battlegroups.

Such variation does not simply reflect the diversity of the individual societies and governments that contribute to the mission. The US and the UK are the two Framework Nations that could presumably fall back on extended nuclear deterrence if their military personnel were at physical risk in a military confrontation with Russia. The other Framework Nations – Germany and Canada – are economically powerful but roughly spend the same relatively modest proportions of their Gross Domestic Product on their conventional militaries. Estonia and Latvia are often paired because both have a sizeable minority of

9 "Founding Act", NATO, 12 October 2009, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm?

ethnic Russians, many of whom remain effectively excluded from national citizenship. The core task is to enhance security *vis-à-vis* a resurgent Russia that still wages a territorial conflict with Ukraine.

Which deterrence?

Despite the shared recognition that Poland and the three Baltic states need reassurances against the threat posed by Russia, disagreement abounds over the military purpose of the eFP deployments: do they provide a militarily credible defensive capability, a primarily deterrent capability, or both? To this end, this section breaks down key terms with the caveat that NATO defence planners do not use concepts such as tripwire and punishment.

When members of a defensive alliance forward deploy their military forces, they do so for deterrence and/or defence. These concepts overlap but are distinct. Deterrence consists of taking measures that serve to prevent an adversary from undertaking actions that would revise the status quo.[10] Broadly speaking, states practice deterrence in two ways. Deterrence-by-punishment consists of threatening the imposition of unacceptably high costs on an adversary, usually through one all-encompassing action. Much of nuclear deterrence has this character. When a state threatens to strike the adversaries' cities with nuclear weapons in retaliation for an undesirable action, that state is practicing deterrence-by-punishment. By contrast, deterrence-by-denial comprises the use of measures that would impede the ability of the adversary to achieve its campaign objectives at acceptable cost. If a state fields a military capable of potentially depriving its adversary of success on the battlefield, then that state is practicing deterrence-by-denial. To be sure, deterrence-by-denial can involve nuclear weapons if they are used to forestall enemy advances. That is what NATO had planned to do against invading Warsaw Pact forces during the Cold War. Nevertheless, deterrence is distinct from defence. According to Thomas Schelling, "if the object, and the only hope, is to resist successfully, so that the enemy cannot succeed even if he tries, we can call it pure defense. If the object is to induce him not to proceed, by making his encroachment painful or costly, we can call it a 'coercive' or 'deterrent' defense".[11] Deterrence is about manipulating the psychology of the adversary. Defence is about effective forcible resistance.

Most strategists discount the ability of the eFP battlegroups to resist a massive military assault successfully. The controversy concerns their function: deterrence-by-punishment

10 Deterrence theory is rich and so we are simplifying it for the purposes of exposition. See G. H. Snyder, *Deterrence and defense: toward a theory of national security*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961; and P. M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

11 T. C. Schelling, *Arms and influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p.78.

or deterrence-by-denial. Are the battlegroups a tripwire or a combat-credible force? If they are a tripwire force, then their primary mission is to incur casualties so as to trigger a wider response by the Alliance to Russian aggression. Such a response may or may not involve nuclear weapons. If it does, then deterrence-by-punishment is operative. If they are a combat-credible force that services deterrence-by-denial instead, then they can put up enough of a fight to complicate Russian war-plans, making any incursion potentially too painful to undertake. Of course, forward deployed forces can sometimes be both tripwires and combat-credible. Fighting alongside their South Korean partners, US forces in South Korea would likely prevail on the battlefield against North Korea. However, US casualties might provoke Washington into unleashing punitive measures against Pyongyang. Yet some deployments can have a largely tripwire character. During the Cold War, the Berlin Brigade would have been unable to resist a major Soviet attack, but its placement in West Berlin signified a powerful commitment by the United States that, if attacked, could incite major retaliation.

As the chapters will reveal, the contributors to this volume disagree over the functions of the eFP battlegroups. Indeed, some countries may be hesitant to describe forward deployments as tripwires – even when they might objectively lack combat credibility – because the notion implies that the involved military personnel and their families could end up as cannon fodder. Their effect in the land domain makes the eFP battlegroups the most tangible commitment that NATO has to the region as part of a multi-domain military response adopted by the Alliance since 2014 known as Operation Reassurance. Poland and the Baltic countries have all increased their defence spending and acquired new military hardware. The Alliance has adopted a new military strategy (MC400/4) that emphasizes a theater-wide approach and NATO members have been negotiating to facilitate the movement of military forces across state borders. Finally, even though Russian forces positioned near the Baltic countries dwarf NATO forces in the Baltic countries, the military utility of the battlegroups is greater than the tripwire moniker might imply. Contrary to early assessments that Russia could take local national capitals in a matter of days, sundry geographical and logistical constraints would hamper any large-scale attempt at territorial conquest.[12] Not knowing the adversary's capabilities and pain thresholds, this volume cannot definitively conclude to what extent the battlegroups are tripwires or combat credible forces.

12 D. A. Shlapak and M. Johnson, *Reinforcing deterrence on NATO's Eastern flank: wargaming the defense of the Baltics,* Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2016; A. Lanoszka and M. A. Hunzeker, *Conventional deterrence and landpower in Northeastern Europe*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, 2019; and K. Giles and M. Boulegue, "Russia's A2/AD capabilities: real and imagined", *Parameters*, Vol.49, No.1-2, 2019, pp.21-36.

Plan of the *Research Paper*

The rest of the volume will look at each Framework and Host Nations' experiences of the eFP on a case-by-case basis. For each battlegroup, there will be two paired chapters, beginning with the Framework Nation and ending with the Host Nation. The first pair will be the United States and Poland, followed by the United Kingdom and Estonia, then Canada and Latvia, and finally Germany and Lithuania. A concluding chapter will describe, and reflect on, the main lessons that the contributors have identified in reviewing their country's eFP experience.

1

United States as framework nation

Michael A. Hunzeker

President Barack Obama and Poland's President Andrzej Duda held a joint press conference on the first day of the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw. President Obama used the opportunity to emphasize their countries' deepening strategic ties, to praise Poland for spending 2 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on defence, and to reaffirm Washington's commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and, by extension, to Poland's security. The president's remarks also contained an important policy announcement – namely, that the US had agreed to serve as a framework nation for one of the four new, NATO "enabled" eFP battlegroups. The decision meant the US was about to add another US Army battalion to units already conducting "heel-to-toe" rotations in Poland. Unlike other US military forces deployed along NATO's so-called northeastern flank, this battalion was going to operate less than 75 km from Russian-held territory.

Four years on, it is worth taking stock of both the US-led eFP battlegroup – now known as Battlegroup Poland (BG POL) – and the overarching eFP initiative. Have the battlegroups genuinely enhanced the security situation along NATO's vulnerable northeastern flank? Or are they provoking the very threat they were designed to deter? Has BG POL achieved Obama's original objectives, and at what cost? And what are the chances that the US will continue to serve as a Framework Nation?

The initial results are encouraging. Alongside its counterparts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, BG POL has facilitated burden sharing, reassured NATO Allies in the region, and made it riskier for Russia to attack. Moreover, it has achieved these goals at a relatively low financial cost, and without triggering much negative publicity in the region or among American voters. Such successes notwithstanding, the eFP initiative cannot be complacent. Although BG POL has proven its value and validated the overall eFP concept, it is still possible to enhance its deterrent effect. Specifically, the US and NATO should clarify BG POL's command and control relationships; develop contingency plans for reinforcing and resupplying it in a conflict; and re-evaluate the merits and risks associated with sometimes sourcing the US Army's contribution to the battlegroup from the US Army National Guard.

Aims and interests

President Obama's initial announcement did not offer much insight into the reasons and rationale for the new deployment. Indeed, he devoted a mere three sentences to the subject.[1] Nevertheless, it seems clear that the move was designed to pursue three goals.

First, reflecting a growing consensus in Washington on the need to transition from reassuring European Allies to deterring Russian aggression, the eFP battlegroups improved NATO's deterrent posture along its northeastern flank, primarily by acting as a tripwire. In essence, the very presence of NATO troops so close to the border raised the costs and risks associated with attacking Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania or Poland. Doing so might kill or injure troops from across the alliance, triggering public outrage and galvanizing support for a military response.[2] Of course, US policymakers did not intend for a US Army battalion to simply serve as a target. That the Obama Administration decided to deploy frontline combat units suggests that it also intended for its battlegroup to serve as a credible combat force by either thwarting a small-scale land grab or delaying a larger scale invasion.

Second, the Obama Administration wanted the battlegroups to help improve burden and risk sharing across the Alliance.[3] From Washington's perspective, US military forces had long provided a disproportionate bulk of NATO's combat power. Even after massively reducing its post-Cold War footprint in the 1990s, 67,000 US servicemen and women were still based in Europe prior to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.[4] The Obama Administration sent rotational forces to the region in the wake of that crisis. The US also spent over USD 5 billion on this increased military activity between fiscal years 2015 and 2017.[5]

Third, despite emphasizing deterrence, the Obama Administration clearly wanted the eFP battlegroups to reassure NATO's most vulnerable members that the Alliance was serious about defending them from attack. Theoretically, putting troops from framework and contributing nations on Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish soil, would credibly demonstrate that the Alliance had "skin in the game" and therefore would not – and could not – abandon them in a crisis.[6]

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1 "Remarks by President Obama and President Duda of Poland After Bilateral Meeting", The White House, 8 July 2016.

2 D. Mix, "Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: background and US-Baltic relations", Congressional Research Service, 2 January 2020, p.14; and J. Strickland, "US Army-led NATO Battle Group on deterrence mission in Poland", US Army Press Release, 25 September 2017.

3 P. Belkin, "NATO's Warsaw Summit: in brief", Congressional Research Service, 14 November 2016, pp.9-10.

4 Mix, "Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania", p.13.

5 M. Shevin-Coetzee, *The European deterrence initiative*, Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019, p.5; P. Towell and A. Kazlaukas, "The European deterrence initiative: a budgetary overview", Congressional Research Service, 8 August 2018, p.1.

6 C. Pellerin, "Obama: US to be lead nation for enhanced NATO presence in Poland", Department of Defense News

Various factors influenced the Obama Administration's decision to serve as the Framework Nation for BG POL. Chief among these was how the two countries already enjoyed a preexisting bilateral relationship. Poland had long sought closer foreign policy and military ties with the US. By 2016, that relationship included robust weapons sales and the rotational presence of elements of a US Army brigade combat team on Polish soil. Moreover, given concerns that the eFP battlegroup deployments might increase tensions with Russia, the decision to send another battalion to Poland was likely seen as being less provocative than introducing a new US presence in the Baltic states.

BG POL was activated in April 2017 and was attached to the Polish Army's 15th Mechanized Brigade. Based at the Bemowo Piskie training range near Orzysz, BG POL operates approximately 65 km from Kaliningrad, 70 km from Belarus, and 135 km from the so-called Suwałki Gap. From April 2017 until September 2018, active duty reinforced Stryker battalions from 2nd Cavalry Regiment (based in Vilseck, Germany) served as the backbone of the battlegroup. The Tennessee Army National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment took over the mission in 2018. Two Army National Guard squadrons – one armored, the other reconnaissance – rotated through the battlegroup from September 2018 to May 2019, and from May 2019 to January 2020, respectively. The 2nd Cavalry Regiment re-assumed responsibility for the eFP mission in January 2020, and is slated to maintain the mission until summer 2021.[7] Croatia, Romania and the UK have provided company-sized elements to BG POL throughout most its existence. As of early 2020, BG POL contains a motorized reconnaissance company from the UK; an air defence battery from Romania; and an artillery (rocket launcher) battery from Croatia. The rotation schedule is staggered such that new units from contributing members arrive or depart every few months.

Achievements

Four years on, the eFP battlegroups have convincingly improved burden sharing. Eighteen NATO Allies have contributed troops to one or more of the battlegroups to date – including Allies from farther afield, such as Croatia and Portugal. The eFP battlegroups have likewise helped spread risk across the Alliance. Most notably, Canadian, German, and UK-led battlegroups are located in the Baltic states and thus are more vulnerable than most US military forces operating in Europe. By comparison, in a conflict scenario, BG POL can leverage Poland's geographic depth; fight alongside Poland's relatively large and well-

Release, 8 July 2016.

7 In July 2020, the Trump Administration announced plans to move 12,000 US troops, including the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, out of Germany. It is yet unclear whether, or when, this shift might occur, or how it might impact BG POL's rotation plan.

equipped military; and receive reinforcements and support from US Army forces located in western Poland and eastern Germany. The BG POL has likewise enhanced reassurance while expanding US-Polish ties. Overall, the presence has fuelled a "rise in national self-confidence on NATO's eastern flank and a subsequent reduction in the fear of Russian aggression".[8] The presence of US forces so close to Poland's eastern border serves as a powerful and reassuring symbol to Polish audiences. Public opinion polling indicates that Polish voters overwhelmingly approve of hosting US troops in Poland. [9]

Of course, reassurance depends partly on the degree to which BG POL credibly deters Russian aggression. BG POL's achievements here are perhaps less clear-cut. Experts continue to disagree over the degree to which any of the battlegroups represent a credible fighting force in their own right, as is discussed below. At a minimum, BG POL's proximity to Kaliningrad and the so-called Suwałki Gap raises the stakes for Russian decision-makers.[10] The rotational nature of the eFP program also allows the US, Poland, and contributing nations rehearse deploying forces, while helping to identify and ease barriers to cross-border movement.[11] Finally, BG POL's aggressive training cycle improves readiness and interoperability.

Despite these benefits, BG POL has received little attention in the US. It has low-visibility among US policymakers, and no visibility with voters. Ironically, this "low political salience" probably represents a strength given the current administration's fickle attitude towards NATO; as well as the antipathy towards military commitments animating populist movements across the American political spectrum. In all likelihood, a larger deployment so close to Russian-held territory might prove to be a political non-starter in the US. Nor does the relatively small size of the US military commitment mean that these rotations necessarily constitute "cheap talk".[12] Ground forces are inherently credible, if only because they are hard to extricate in the midst of a crisis.[13] Thus, even if most Americans can overlook peacetime eFP battlegroup rotations because of their small size, one can reasonably assume that US voters will pay a great deal more attention if US soldiers fall

8 S. Macguire, "The positive impact of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence", *The Strategy Bridge*, 3 September 2019.

9 See P. Szymański's contribution in this volume.

10 J. Deni, "NATO's presence in the East: necessary but still not sufficient", *War on the Rocks*, 27 June 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/; C. Leuprecht, "The enhanced Forward Presence: innovating NATO's deployment model for collective defense", *NDC Policy Brief,* No.22, October 2019, p.4; R. Czulda, "Enhanced Forward Presence: evolution, meaning and the end Game", in R. Ondrejesák and T. Lippert (eds.), *NATO at 70: outline of the Alliance today and tomorrow*, Bratislava, Slovalkia, The Strategy Policy Institute, 2019, p.36.

11 C. M. Scaparrotti and C. B. Bell, *Moving out: a comprehensive assessment of European military mobility*, Washington, DC, Atlantic Council, April 2020.

12 D. Pfundstein Chamberlin, "NATO's Baltic tripwire forces won't stop Russia", *The National Interest*, 21 July 2016, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/natos-baltic-tripwire-forces-wont-stop-russia-17074

13 M. Hunzeker and A. Lanoszka, "Landpower and American credibility", *Parameters*, Vol.45, No.4, 2015, pp.18-26.

prey to Russian aggression.

Finally, BG POL represents an impressive return on investment. It has unambiguously facilitated greater burden sharing and improved reassurance for a fraction of the amount that the US spends on other military deployments. The US spent a mere USD224.9 million supporting BG POL in FY 2019, an amount that represented 3.5 percent of the overall USD6.5 billion EDI budget for the year; and a mere .03 percent of the total national defense budget.[14]

Remaining challenges

Without downplaying BG POL's achievements, gaps and shortcomings remain. Most urgently, more can be done to ensure BG POL can generate as much credible combat power as possible in a conflict, thereby maximizing its ability to deter aggression in the first place. Currently, BG POL is already capable of deterring by punishment – to "die heroically, dramatically, and in a manner that guarantees the action cannot stop there".[15] Yet is it sufficiently prepared to deter by denying an invasion force the ability to achieve its aims by force of arms? Three challenges stand out.

Command and control

BG POL has a complicated chain of command. BG POL's commander currently reports to at least three bosses: the commanding general of the 15th Polish Mechanized Brigade (who in turn reports to both the 16th Division and Multinational Division Headquarters Northeast); the US Army's 2nd Cavalry Regiment; and the commanding general of Multinational Division Headquarters Northeast. Such a setup generates friction under the best of circumstances. It could impede quick decision-making in a crisis. To be sure, complex chains of command are par for the course in any alliance. Yet the current state of affairs probably reflects a genuine "lack of clarity over who can order eFP units into action and who controls them once they are engaged".[16] Hybrid conflict scenarios appear to exacerbate the risk. In all likelihood, the North Atlantic Council would respond to an unambiguous, all-out invasion by immediately approving BG POL to fight as part of the 15th Mechanized Brigade. But, there appears to be few answers as to who can order BG POL into action in a range of easily imaginable sub-conventional situations; for example, if the 15th Mechanized Brigade were called upon to support policing actions against Russian-

14 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), European Deterrence Initiative: Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2019, February 2018.

15 T. Schelling, *Arms and influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p.47.

16 J. Deni, "Is NATO's enhanced Forward Presence fit for purpose?", p.100.

sponsored groups engaging in subversive activity.[17] So-called "national caveats" among contributing nation units could further complicate matters .[18]

Reinforcement and resupply

In the highly unlikely event that Russia invades Poland or tries to "close" the Suwałki Gap, BG POL would need immediate reinforcement and resupply. The fact that BG POL is attached to a Polish mechanized brigade will help it avoid being quickly overrun. But obstacles remain. First, this scenario implies that Russia has already decided to provoke a ground war with NATO, which means it is unlikely to hold anything back. Even Poland's formidable ground forces will be hard pressed to delay – let alone stop – the three armies that Russia can draw upon from its Western Military District alone.[19] Second, US and NATO will face an uphill fight to reinforce and resupply BG POL. Russia will likely use its long-range precision weapons to interdict attempts to resupply and reinforce BG POL.[20] Third, the longer BG POL holds out, the faster it will consume its ammunition, fuel, food, water and – most critically for mechanized units – parts.

BG POL currently relies on a peacetime supply chain whereby US units draw their supplies from Germany, while British, Croatian and Romanian units rely exclusively on their national supply chains. This system is likely to falter under combat conditions. Nor does BG POL seem to be stockpiling large stores of ammunition, supplies or parts. Its units might rely on the Polish army for standardized ammunition, medical supplies, food, and water. Parts, however, are platform, and therefore, country-specific. It seems unlikely that a Polish mechanized brigade will be able to supply parts for US Styker or British scout vehicles without having previously stockpiled them.

National Guard versus Active Duty

Demand for battalion-sized US Army armoured, mechanized and motorized units vastly exceeds their availability. This constraint forced the US Army to source units for BG POL from the National Guard in 2018 and 2019. Although active duty units are once again supporting the mission, another relief in place/transfer of authority with the National Guard will likely occur in mid-2021.

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17 Interview by author.

18 J. Deni, "Is NATO's enhanced Forward Presence fit for purpose?" p.100.

19 A. Lanoszka and M. Hunzeker, *Conventional deterrence and landpower in Northeastern Europe*, Carlisle, PA, Strategic Studies Institute, 2019, pp.20-21.

20 S. Frühling and G. Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad challenge", *Survival*, Vol.58, No.2, 2016, pp.95-116; and A. Lanoszka and M. Hunzeker, "Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and precision strike challenge in the Baltic Region", *The RUSI Journal,* Vol.161, No.5, 2016, pp.13-14.

There are certainly compelling reasons to support BG POL with National Guard units. Long-term force structure realignments mean the National Guard now holds a significant proportion of the US Army's heavy armour assets. For example, the aforementioned 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment is a "heavy armour" unit composed of main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery. In contrast, squadrons from the active duty 2nd Cavalry Regiment use light armour infantry fighting vehicles. National Guard units could prove more adept at handling certain hybrid warfare missions, as their part-time soldiers are often police officers, computer technicians, and lawyers. Finally, using National Guard units to support overseas deployments helps reserve units rehearse mobilization and gives them invaluable operational experience.

Nevertheless, using National Guard units in lieu of active duty forces could inadvertently reduce BG POL's readiness. Because it is located close to both the Suwałki Gap and Kaliningrad, BG POL must be able to fight frontline Russian forces with little warning. Unfortunately, part-time military forces need more time to achieve the same level of proficiency as their active duty counterparts, making them especially vulnerable during the initial stages of a deployment cycle. To be sure, their relative lack of combat readiness does not reflect on their morale or professionalism. Instead, it is due to the reality that US guard and reserve units have one-tenth of the training time as their active duty counterparts.[21] More pre-deployment training can of course mitigate this risk. However, lengthy mobilisations tend to be politically controversial, especially in peacetime. Units supporting BG POL already spend nine-months in theater. Therefore, to allow for more pre-deployment training, the US Army would need to mobilise National Guard units a year or more so as to allow for rigorous pre-deployment training; a nine-month deployment; and de-mobilisation.

What next?

Evidence from the past four years demonstrates that BG POL has increased burden sharing, bolstered reassurance and deepened US-Polish ties. It accomplished these goals for a relatively low financial price and without provoking either a militarized response from Russia or a domestic backlash in the US. For these reasons alone, the United States should continue acting as BG POL's Framework Nation. These results should also encourage NATO planners to consider ways to employ the overarching eFP model in future contingencies.

Still, the model can be improved. Specifically, the degree to which BG POL is a combat

21 M. Hunzeker and S. Underwood, "Reserve training: the 10 percent problem", *The Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol.99. No.7, 2015, p.50.

credible force in its own right is questionable. However effective the battlegroups act as tripwires, the fact is that both voters at home, and soldiers on the frontlines, support these deployments because they believe these forces are capable warfighters, not helpless hostages. The preceding analysis suggests three priorities.

Streamline – or at least rehearse – the chain of command

BG POL's complex chain of command remains a vulnerability. Burdensome in peacetime, it could prove lethal in a crisis. The situation should improve once Poland's 15th Mechanized Brigade comes under the Multinational Division Headquarters Northeast's operational control. More can be done, though. NATO could use simulations to help senior leaders rehearse command and control relationships and identify likely friction points. NATO might also consider shifting the eFP program away from the "Uber" model by which it, like the rideshare company, somewhat incredibly claims to "enable" the battlegroups without actually "controlling" them. This conceit was probably necessary in order to generate support and disarm opposition within the Alliance four years ago. Yet it is highly unlikely that Russia finds the eFP battlegroups less provocative because NATO claims not to exercise direct control over them. As a result, the existing lack of clarity does more to increase the risk of paralysis in a conflict than it does to reduce the chance that Russia might provoke such a conflict in the first place.

Emphasize readiness when deciding between active or reserve forces

Readiness should drive force planning. BG POL is located astride an oft-cited invasion route, which implies its units must arrive ready to "fight tonight" lest Russian planners seek to exploit a "window of opportunity" during the transition from one unit to another. Unfortunately, active and reserve units are not perfectly fungible when it comes to readiness. Active units have more time to train and are therefore more likely to arrive "ready to fight". If the US Army wants to support BG POL with National Guard units, it should mobilise them at least six months before they deploy so as to facilitate a full pre-deployment training cycle. There are also other ways to integrate guard and reserve units into the mission. Instead of building BG POL around a single National Guard battalion, smaller-sized reserve units can augment an active duty Stryker squadron. Reserve and guard cyber, civil affairs, electronic warfare, psychological operations and special operations detachments could be especially useful.

Improve logistical resilience and survivability

BG POL's logistical practices seem ill prepared to support intense and prolonged combat operations in a non-permissive environment. Despite the inefficiencies involved, the battlegroup should consider shifting to a stockpile system, especially insofar as parts and other country-specific maintenance materials are involved. In terms of reinforcements: NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) will likely still face operational, logistical and administrative barriers if it tries to rapidly link up with any of the four battlegroups. Although US Army units already based in Poland might not face the same obstacles, it still is not clear that rapid reinforcement plans are routinely rehearsed.

2

Poland as host nation

Piotr Szymański

Poland holds a unique position on NATO's northeastern flank since it is a Host Nation of the eFP, a regional military hub for Allied activity, and a security provider through its military presence in the Baltic states. The US-led Battlegroup Poland (BG POL) is a "gatekeeper" in NATO's eFP system, closing the Suwalki Gap for potential Russian hostile actions and keeping it open for allied military reinforcements to the Baltic states. It has so far been a successful endeavour: it has accelerated the adaptation of Poland's military posture in the eastern part of the country, increased the combat readiness of those local forces and has led to the improvement of Host Nation Support and additional investments in military infrastructure. Finally, BG POL has not only encouraged closer Poland-US military cooperation but has also pushed Poland to strengthen military ties with the Baltic states.

Nevertheless, as this chapter argues, lessons learned reveal some shortcomings of the eFP in Poland related to managing multinational formations, the lack of major NATO exercises on the northeastern flank, and BG POL's limited military capabilities. A severe economic or military crisis, which would divert the attention and resources of the force providers, remains the biggest peacetime challenge for the mission, especially because the US and the UK – powers with a global outlook – provide most of the troops.

Battlegroup setup and mission

The US-led BG POL – deployed to Bemowo Piskie training range, located near the garrison town of Orzysz – has already seen changes in its line-up and enablers.[1] It was first deployed to north-eastern Poland in April 2017 on the basis of the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit provisions. Originally, the US – the Framework Nation and main force provider

1 The Wehrmacht used the former East Prussian garrison in Orzysz (Arys) to launch an attack on Poland in September 1939. Erwin Rommel also used it to exercise armoured tactics before the Africa campaign. In communist Poland, Orzysz served partly as a disciplinary unit.

(battalion-size unit) – was joined by the UK (reconnaissance company) and Romania (air defence company). In October 2017, a Croatian artillery unit reinforced BG POL. It has consisted of four contributing nations since, usually on six-month rotations. As for military equipment and capabilities, BG POL was initially set up as a light and mobile force with US Stryker APCs and towed artillery (lightweight M777 howitzers). However, in 2018-2019, the US tested a much heavier posture for eFP deployment, replacing Stryker units with the National Guard armoured battalion. Abrams tanks, Bradley IFV, and Paladin self-propelled howitzers ensured greater firepower. Lessons learned from mechanised cavalry deployments to the region eventually resulted in the Strykers being upgraded, from an APC-type vehicle to the more lethal Stryker Dragoon IFV (by adding a 30 mm autocannon).[2] These changes transformed BG POL into a more combat-ready force, better suited to high-end warfare against a peer competitor. The capabilities provided by the UK, Romania, and Croatia remained the same.

Domestically, BG POL enjoys cross-party support. All mainstream stakeholders in the parliament favour a substantial NATO presence on Polish soil, with support for NATO membership and strengthening its northeastern flank largely uncontested.[3] For Poland, the establishment of BG POL marked an important shift in NATO's approach towards the security of its region. In 2016, NATO switched its focus from military reassurance of the eastern member states to a policy of deterrence against Russia, which – for Warsaw – should constitute eFP's core mission. In Poland and in the Baltic states, rotational company-size Allied units focused primarily on training and exercises were replaced by combat-ready battalions. Reinforcement of NATO's Command and Force Structure shortly followed.

Poland does not consider eFP deployments to be a "game changer". Rather, they help signal Allied solidarity and contribute to a credible NATO deterrent together with other Alliance measures. Militarily, given the size and capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces, the added value of one Allied battalion-size unit is less for Poland than for the Baltic states. Indeed, Poland was the only eFP Host Nation where the Framework Nation has significantly strengthened its military presence outside the eFP format, since the overall US military presence in Poland reached a level of 5,500 rotational troops in 2020 with a forward corps and division headquarters, a rotating Armoured Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), and prepositioned equipment for another brigade. Nevertheless, the tripwire

2 A. Gregory, "Lethality upgrade: why a new stryker variant is needed on the modern battlefield", Modern War Institute, 12 April 2017, https://mwi.usma.edu/lethality-upgrade-new-stryker-variant-needed-modern-battlefield

3 "Polacy popierają obecność wojsk NATO w Polsce", *Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej*, 5 June 2018, https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/polacy-popieraja-obecnosc-wojsk-nato-w-polsce-; "MON: Ponad połowa Polaków chce utworzenia stałej bazy wojsk USA w naszym kraju", *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 28 October 2018, https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1322658,mon-polacy-chca-stalej-bazy-wojsk-usa-w-polsce.html

effect of BG POL remains limited due to its location in northeastern Poland, which means that attacking forces can bypass it more easily than in the case of the Baltic states. However, BG POL is designed to play an important tactical role. Its major mission is to guard the so-called Suwałki Gap – a narrow land corridor linking the Western Allies with the Baltic states through Polish territory. Securing this area is vital for delivering Allied military aid to the Baltic states or for fighting a conventional conflict involving threats originating from Kaliningrad or Belarus.[4]

From the perspective of Poland's security policy, the BG POL's line-up constitutes a "dream team". Both the US and the UK are nuclear powers and were the first to reassure eastern flank countries in early 2014. Poland perceives the US as a crucial ally that has both the necessary military capabilities and the political will to respond to Russian aggression. At the same time, Poland places emphasis on deepening military ties with the UK, which Warsaw traditionally sees as a like-minded security partner with considerable expeditionary capabilities.[5] BG POL also comprises a medium power (Romania) and a small power (Croatia), which would not be directly involved in the Baltic Sea region in the event of military conflict. However, the importance of Romania in Poland's security policy derives from history and the shared view that Russia is their main challenge. Since 2014, Poland (facing a militarised Kaliningrad) and Romania (with a Crimean outpost over the Black Sea) have been working hand in hand to reinforce NATO's eastern flank.[6] Finally, Croatia is Poland's closest partner in the Balkan region, with growing economic cooperation in the Three Seas Initiative framework. Thanks to Croatia's contributions to the eFP battlegroups in Poland and Lithuania, this cooperation now has a military dimension.

Poland sees a four-nation structure of the BG POL – with one visibly dominant force provider – as a suitable solution, much like the UK-led Battlegroup Estonia. This limits potentially negative side effects of multinational formations (e.g., battlegroups in Latvia and Lithuania) such as differences in organisational culture and military equipment as well as difficulties in communication. This translates into greater readiness and interoperability and also reduces additional costs in logistics.

4 On the daily operational level, the eFP deployment's core tasks included developing military interoperability between Polish forces and BG POL, ensuring ambitious exercises and a training program, and mastering HNS.

5 The December 2017 signing of the treaty between the UK and Poland on Defence and Security manifests clearly this policy.

6 Poland contributes some mechanised infantry to NATO's tailored Forward Presence in Romania.

Achievements

BG POL has several achievements of note.

First, it encouraged the Polish Ministry of National Defence to accelerate the adaptation of Poland's military posture to a post-Crimea reality by reinforcing areas east of the Vistula river.[7] A relic of the Cold War, the majority of the Polish Armed Forces and military infrastructure are in western Poland. Providing BG POL and the Suwalki Gap with necessary support and firepower was one of the goals of this military rebalancing. Initially, it included establishing new light infantry territorial defence troops and the redeployment of armoured units.[8] The latter – conducted in 2017 – encompassed moving Poland's best tanks, namely two battalions of Leopard 2A5s, to the eastern part of the country, and bringing PT-91 Twardy tanks to the Northeast in order to bolster the 15th Brigade, which hosts BG POL.[9] In 2018, complementing these changes was a newly established army formation located east of the Vistula river, the 18th Division (fourth in the land forces).

Second, BG POL has raised the combat readiness of the Polish 15th Mechanised Brigade. Although demanding for commanders and soldiers, it fits into NATO's recent emphasis on combat readiness well. BG POL serves to respond to threats 24/7 and holds exercises with units from the 15th Brigade on a de facto permanent basis.[10]

Third, BG POL has cooperated with the German-led battlegroup in Lithuania. During the US-led Saber Strike 2017 exercises, a successful integration of both battlegroups was performed, when BG POL carried out a two-day tactical road march through the Suwalki Gap in order to reinforce the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Brigade. Thus, it demonstrated NATO's freedom of movement and BG POL's readiness to execute a forward passage of lines across the Polish-Lithuanian border.[11] Moreover, plans exist to deepen cooperation

7 M. Świerczyński, "Amerykańskie wojska wjeżdżają do Polski. I zostaną na stałe", *Polityka*, 5 January 2017, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1689416,1,amerykanskie-wojska-wjezdzaja-do-polski-i-zostana-na-stale.read; *Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia komisji obrony narodowej (nr 111) z dnia 13 listopada 2018 r.*, Kancelaria Sejmu, 13 November 2018, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/zapisy8.nsf/0/0572BF8674B6CE11C125834A005036B0/%24File/0374208.pdf

8 The Territorial Defence Forces are the fifth branch of Poland's armed forces. Two brigades in northeastern Poland were created in 2016-2017.

9 PT-91s replaced the oldest T-72M1 tanks there, which were withdrawn to western Poland. Besides this, Leopard tanks have been rotationally deployed to Bemowo Piskie to exercise with eFP troops.

10 Consider the regularly conducted Bull Run exercise. A rapid response exercise, it aims at ensuring an appropriate level of Allied interoperability and combat readiness. Its scenario envisages the snap alert and deployment of BG POL troops to a designated assembly area outside the training ground. K. Moriarty, "Battle Group Poland conducts rapid response exercise", *United States Army*, 20 September 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/227499/battle_group_poland_conducts_rapid_response_exercise

11 J. Geiger, "eFP Battle Group Poland crosses the Suwalki Gap into Lithuania", *EUCOM*, 19 June 2017, https://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/35844/efp-battle-group-poland-crosses-the-suwalki-gap-into-lithuania. C. Kemper, J. Helgestad, N. Colvin, and S. Cox, "Design to execution: into the Suwalki Gap", *Military Review*, 12 January 2018, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2018-OLE/Design-to-Execution

between the Polish 15th Brigade and the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Brigade. In January 2020, Poland and Lithuania signed an agreement on the affiliation of both formations with the Multinational Division North East in Elbląg (MND NE HQ), which should enhance their partnership in operational planning, exercises, strategic communication, situational awareness and protection of the Suwałki Gap.[12]

Fourth, establishing BG POL in Bemowo Piskie produced concerns regarding transport infrastructure in northeastern Poland. Currently, the infrastructural capacity to deliver military cargo to the Suwałki Gap remains limited. In September 2019, Poland's parliamentary National Defence Committee discussed military mobility and logistics. Among the priorities was the modernisation of the railway system in northeastern Poland.[13] The overall planned development of Poland's railway infrastructure in the southwest-northeast axis will enable quicker military reinforcements from western Poland and other NATO countries.[14]

Shortcomings

Despite these achievements, several shortcomings beset BG POL.

Chain of Command

NATO deployed BG POL before developing a complex regional chain of command. Some ambiguity characterised the transfer of command as well as military coordination and planning. At the tactical level, BG POL is integrated into the 15th Mechanised Brigade. Within the NATO Force Structure, the 15th Mechanised Brigade (including BG POL) is affiliated with the MND NE in Elbląg. At the highest regional level, the command and control over the MND NE, NATO Force Integration Units and eFP battlegroups is executed by high-readiness Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin (MNC NE).

This chain of command has never been tested in a large-scale NATO live exercise in the Baltic Sea region, which would include the reinforcement of eFP battlegroups. The absence of Article 5 exercises, based on a collective defence scenario with the deployment of VJTF and follow-on-forces, has been a shortcoming of the eFP concept. NATO's reluctance to exercise collective defence in the Baltic region reflects how some Allied governments believe that deploying more troops under NATO auspices would provoke Russia.

12 In turn, Latvian and Estonian brigades are affiliated with Multinational Division North (MND N).

13 This investment includes the construction of new rail lines connecting Giżycko and Orzysz, which is important for BG POL because it links its base in Orzysz with the 15th Brigade HQ in Giżycko. *Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia komisji obrony narodowej (nr 135) z dnia 11 września 2019 r.*, Kancelaria Sejmu, 11 September 2019, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/zapisy8.nsf/0/13DAA35155403B6DC125847900405BA5/%24File/0470208.pdf

14 The Polish 11th Armoured Cavalry Division and a contingent of US troops are located in southwestern Poland in Żagań.

Training and exercises

The focus of eFP exercises shifted from the integration of national contingents to harmonising procedures between corresponding subunits. Ensuring the latter was a series of exercises aimed at bringing together Polish and Allied gunners, sappers, anti-aircraft troops, etc. so as to cover snap drills, territorial defence, military mobility, and forms of hybrid warfare that include countering sabotage groups, riot control, and CBRN defence.[15]

BG POL exercises have revealed some challenges with multinational formations. First, BG POL and Polish troops have faced some difficulties in synchronising different procedures and weapon systems and, as a consequence, in producing joint fire. Second, more coordination was needed in communication. Accordingly, the 15th Brigade ultimately switched fully its combat communication and language of instructions to English.[16] Given the size of the Polish Armed Forces, BG POL is probably less integrated into Poland's defence planning and the land forces activities than its Baltic counterparts.

Host Nation Support

Because of its size, Poland appeared to be a more suitable destination for foreign troops than the Baltic states. Nevertheless, in 2014, Poland was not fully prepared for the "mass influx" of Allied soldiers, thus overstretching its HNS system.[17] New investments aimed at reducing deficits in military infrastructure are gradual and cannot be accelerated significantly in the short term. More also needs to be done in the civilian domain – healthcare being one example.[18] To encourage permanent US and Allied deployments in Poland, the MoD has offered the so-called "HNS plus" package (approx. PLN 56 million annually). This increase for HNS has fuelled debate on the necessary amendments to Poland's HNS legal framework, which is dispersed over numerous bills and contains loopholes. Experts have advocated the legal consolidation of HNS regulations into a single act, which would incorporate military needs and civilian responsibilities.[19]

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15 The Polish 15th Brigade and BG POL have implemented an ambitious training and exercise programme, with drills at the local (Bull Run, Puma), national (Dragon, Anakonda) and international levels (Saber Strike).

16 M. Miernicka, "Side by side", *Polska Zbrojna,* 3 July 2018, http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/25851?t=Side-by-Side

17 In 2013-2016 alone their number – in exercises or NATO assurance measures – increased more than six-fold (from 4,000 to 25,000).

18 In the event of injury, US soldiers from Bemowo Piskie are being sent for medical treatment to Germany. J. Vandiver, "If Russia ever acts against NATO, US soldiers at Suwałki Gap may be first to fight back*", Stars & Stripes*, 13 September 2018, https://www.stripes.com/news/if-russia-ever-acts-against-nato-us-soldiers-at-suwalki-gap-may-be-first-to-fight-back-1.547272

19 *Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia Komisji Obrony Narodowej (nr 47) z dnia 25 stycznia 2017 r.*, Kancelaria Sejmu, 25 January 2017, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/zapisy8.nsf/0/FB72BADA686CE72AC12580CD0049946C/%24File/0149208.pdf

Lessons learned and challenges

From a Polish perspective, overcoming the Western Allies' aversion to deploying NATO forces to eastern flank countries has been one of the biggest foreign and security policy advantages of the eFP. For years, such aversion jeopardised the security of Poland and the Baltic states given their exposure to Russian aggressive intentions and military power. The eFP deployment, although non-permanent and limited in size and capabilities, has helped bolster the deterrence against Russia, opening up prospects for further reinforcements in the future. BG POL, like the three other battlegroups, lacks proper enablers that would bolster its survivability. They are ground-based air defence systems, long-range artillery, and the permanent NATO maritime presence in the Baltic Sea.[20] Adding more capabilities to the eFP remains a key goal shared by Poland and the Baltic States.

Still, NATO's eFP deployment has nurtured greater military cooperation between Poland and the US, tethering US troops more strongly to Polish territory. However, BG POL constitutes only part of a broader picture. Poland-US bilateral defence ties are more comprehensive and include the deployment of a US ABCT and military procurements, with the US being the main foreign supplier for the Polish Armed Forces. Ever closer cooperation with the US (in NATO and bilaterally) has been a foundation of Poland's post-1989 foreign and security policy. Accordingly, the US battalion-sized contribution to the eFP in Poland should be perceived more as the result of the already close bilateral cooperation, rather than as a main platform for its enhancement.

US participation in BG POL has admittedly created some challenges for Poland's relations with the Baltic states. Following the 2016 Warsaw NATO Summit, the US withdrew its company-size units from the Baltic states. The 2014-17 rotations of US troops in the Baltic states have been replaced with NATO's eFP battlegroups. Although each of the northeastern flank states has argued that its assigned framework nation is the best option and had expressed satisfaction with the decisions made at the summit, the Baltic states were concerned with the lack of a US military presence on their soil (excluding special forces and a small helicopter detachment in Latvia). Accordingly, Poland feared that the eFP posture might generate unnecessary distrust and competition for US attention between it and the Baltic states.

Poland has thus sought to reassure the Baltic states. Its main message was that it is not the final destination for US troops, but rather a regional military hub, with elements of the Poland-based US ABCT constantly rotating and exercising in the entire region. Warsaw

20 B. Hodges, J. Bugajski, and P. Doran, "Securing the Suwalki corridor: strategy, statecraft, deterrence, and defense", *CEPA*, 2018, https://www.cepa.org/securing-the-suwalki-corridor; L. Elak and Z. Śliwa, "The Suwalki gap: NATO's fragile hot spot", *Zeszyty Naukowe AON*, Vol.2, No.103, 2016, pp.24-40.

has also argued that a larger US military presence in Poland increases the prospects for the reliable defence of the Baltic states. The same relates to the eFP in Bemowo Piskie, which is more about aiding Lithuania and securing the Suwałki Gap than defending Polish territory. Moreover, Poland has pursued new initiatives, which were built on pre-existing military cooperation formats with the Baltic countries. Since 2017, it has been providing forces to the eFP battlegroup in Latvia. Poland has deployed an armoured company to the Canadian-led battlegroup in Ādaži (170 soldiers with 14 PT-91 Twardy tanks).[21] In 2017, it also began detaching F-16s (instead of MiG-29s) to the Baltic Air Policing mission. Finally, Poland has intensified its engagement in the military exercises related to the defence of the Baltic states.[22]

Finally, because a Polish government is unlikely to question its NATO membership or request Allied troops to leave, the main challenges for BG POL are external. First, Russia may step up its efforts to discredit the eFP in the eyes of public opinion and local communities. Data show that Russian disinformation around BG POL have portrayed NATO's military posture as provocative and aggressive.[23] More recently, it included fake news on allied troops spreading COVID-19. However, given the level of public support for NATO and the historically grounded resilience in the face of pro-Russian narratives, it would be difficult for the Kremlin to seriously undermine Polish trust in the Allied presence. Second, BG POL might be vulnerable to the domestic politics of contributing nations. In Britain, the Labour opposition under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership had advocated UN peacekeeping engagement over NATO contributions. Donald Trump's isolationist rhetoric in the 2016 US presidential election also worried northeastern flank countries. Potential resets with Russia seem to be another possible scenario affecting BG POL. If most of the Western Allies agree on the need for a complex rapprochement with Russia, without the Kremlin refraining from its aggressive actions, it would put NATO's eFP at risk of being a concession. Third, a severe global economic – possibly due to COVID-19 – or military crisis could undermine the battlegroups by significantly limiting the resources available to force providers, such as the US, potentially downgrading BG POL in equipment and capabilities.

21 See T. Jermalavičius, P. Järvenpää, T. Janeliūnas, N. Vanaga, J. Gotkowska, and P. Szymański, "NATO's Northeast quartet: prospects and opportunities for Baltic-Polish defence cooperation", *ICDS, Policy Paper*, November 2018, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ICDS-Policy-Paper-NATOs-Northeast-Quartet-November-2018.pdf

22 It started with the NATO assurance measures and a Polish mechanised company-size unit exercising in the Baltic states in 2016 (one month in each). In 2018, Polish Armed Forces' major bi-annual Anakonda exercises were also carried out in the Baltic states for the first time. In 2019, Poland deployed elements of its Naval Missile Unit equipped with Naval Strike Missiles to the annual Estonian Spring Storm exercises.

23 B. Nimmo, D. Barojan, and N. Aleksejeva, *Russian narratives on NATO's deployment*, DFRLab, 1 April 2017, https://medium.com/dfrlab/russian-narratives-on-natos-deployment-616e19c3d194. See also A. Kozłowski, S. Gliwa, "Flanka wschodnia pod rosyjskim „ostrzalem" dezinformacyjnym. Defence24 na liście celów", *Cyber Defence 24*, 22 January 2020, https://www.cyberdefence24.pl/flanka-wschodnia-pod-rosyjskim-ostrzalem-dezinformacyjnym-defence24-na-liscie-celow

3

United Kingdom as framework nation

Robert Clark, Andrew Foxall, and James Rogers

The United Kingdom (UK) has long taken a keen geopolitical interest in the Baltic Sea region. Not only does this region serve as the UK's primary gateway to Northern Europe, it also allowed Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and Germany to constrain UK sea power in times of tension and war. Consequently, the Royal Navy prevented the Danish Navy from slipping into Napoleonic France's hands in 1801. The Royal Navy was active there in 1854 during the Crimean War to open up a second flank against Russia and it supported Estonia and Latvia in their wars of independence in the late 1910s and early 1920s to reduce Russian or Soviet dominance. German and the Soviet activities during the world wars and the Cold War, respectively, only showed how vulnerable the UK could become if the Baltic Sea fell into enemy hands.

In this historical context, this essay argues that the eFP mission has been a success, but some limitations may need remedying.

Aims and interests

To deter Russia from extending its offensive from Ukraine to the Baltic region after 2014, the UK chose to act as the eFP Framework Nation for Estonia. Known by the UK Army as Operation "Cabrit", it deploys around 800 UK troops, backed up with heavy armour, field guns, and rocket artillery. Moreover, the UK agreed to send a Light Cavalry Squadron (c. 150 personnel) to Poland under the command of two US Cavalry Regiment, the US-led Battlegroup Poland. These decisions chime with established UK policy. The UK was one of the strongest supporters of NATO's post-Cold War enlargement and is the largest contributor to the eFP, both in terms of total personnel and the number of Allied states where they are deployed.[1] Augmenting the UK's land-based forces has been the deployment

1 As of early April 2020, the UK had 800 troops in Estonia and 140 deployed to Poland. It is the only ally to be a Framework Nation and have additional forces assigned to another battlegroup. See "NATO's enhanced Forward Presence – Factsheet", NATO, October 2019, https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/october_factsheet_efp.pdf

of Royal Air Force Typhoon fighter jets in support of the Baltic Air Policing mission at Ämari Air Base in Estonia in 2015, 2016 and 2019 and Šiauliai air station in Lithuania in 2014.

It was also in London where prominent voices were first heard calling for the sending of reinforcements to Eastern Europe in response to Russian aggression towards Ukraine in 2014. At the NATO Summit in Newport in September 2014, the UK pushed its Allies to establish a Response Force of some 13,000 personnel to meet an aggressor, should one appear, on the Alliance's eastern flank. Shortly after the Summit, the Henry Jackson Society (HJS) published the first study of its kind to assess what NATO would need to do to deter a Russian invasion along its north-eastern flank. It called for the establishment of small garrisons – "tripwires" – in the Baltic states and Romania to deny Russia a speedy victory should it expand its revisionist agenda to challenge NATO Allies, either conventionally, through military force, or unconventionally with so-called "little green men".[2] The idea behind this proposal was simple: to compound the effect of the UK and US nuclear deterrent – known as deterrence-by-punishment – with forward deployment, so-called deterrence-by-denial.[3] A year later, at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO adopted a posture remarkably similar to what HJS recommended. The eFP was born.

Achievements

Through its deployment in Estonia, the UK's objective has been to deter hostile activities on NATO's north-eastern flank. UK troops were consequently embedded within the Estonian 1 Brigade for training, manoeuvres, and daily routine. According to Commander UK forces in Estonia, Colonel Clayton MBE, the eFP ensures deterrence-by-denial thus:

> At the strategic level, the UK […] provides a change in the risk calculus for any adversary. The Estonian Defence Minister stated how it takes the military option for Russia off the table, particularly in Estonia with [the] UK and France being nuclear powers and both sitting on the UN Security Council. This provides a huge amount of weight at the strategic level. Second, at the tactical level, having a highly capable all-arms battlegroup, integrated with Estonian plans, provides a very credible role in the Estonian defence plan. Deterrence-by-denial prevents the tripwire being used.[4]

However, some are less sure of this deterrence effect. Asked whether a consensus view exists that the eFP mission is practicing deterrence-by-denial or is simply proving

2 J. Rogers and A. Martinescu, "After Crimea: a new geostrategy for Eastern Europe?", Henry Jackson Society, 1 September 2015, https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/after-crimea-towards-a-new-british-geostrategy-for-eastern-europe/

3 On deterrence theory in a Baltic context, see J. Rogers, "Reinforcing deterrence through societal resilience: countering hybrid threats in the Baltic region", in E. Cusumano and M. Corbe (eds.), *A civil-military response to hybrid threats*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp.259-280.

4 Interview by authors, 5 February 2020.

a "tripwire", a UK Intelligence officer who served in Estonia responded rhetorically, "I suppose the question is 'consensus' among whom"? He added:

> Calling it a tripwire is an oversimplification. If Russia did invade, sure it may function like that, but there is a depth to the mission in terms of integration, outreach, mutual training, and the enduring commitment which gives value far beyond simply being there for the sake of being there.[5]

Crucially, though, simply "being there" is precisely one reason why deterrence is a continued success in Estonia. Questions about the mission's sustainability abound, with comparisons being drawn to the UK Army of the Rhine (BAOR) and its deployment between 1945 and 1994. Like Battlegroup Estonia (BG EST), the BAOR partly derived its credibility and reliability as a deterrent force from the length of its deployment. One serving Infantry Company Commander who acted as a liaison officer in the eFP told us that long-term investment and a larger-scale deployment must be developed if BG EST is to be a credible deterrent. Colonel Clayton highlighted a real desire to increase the infrastructure in the eFP mission, within the local area where BG EST operates, including improving ranges and certain training facilities. This modest uplift in defence infrastructure would strengthen deterrence.

Another reason the UK mission has been successful is its integration of the contributing nations within the UK-led battlegroup. Specifically, the relationship between the UK and the French, a key strategic partnership, has only been strengthened throughout the eFP experience. This has been personality-led between sub-unit commanders. Contributing a Company of Infantry to BG EST on four-month rotations, the French have proved a robust addition in Estonia – aside from the seamless integration with the Danish contingents – leaning into joint training with their UK counterparts, eager to share experiences.[6] Indeed, Denmark has cooperated successfully with the UK in Helmand, southern Afghanistan.[7] As part of the relief-in-place when new units rotate into BG EST, the UK forces plan and execute a week-long training package with their incoming contributing nation unit.[8] For example, in 2019, A Company 1 Mercian conducted the first such training package with the French Foreign Legion and then with the French Marines. UK troops led a live-fire tactical training package with the French at the company level. Indeed, the ability for sub-unit commanders to plan, rehearse, and execute manoeuvres at Company level-plus, with an emphasis on combined-

5 Interview by authors, 8 February 2020.

6 Focus group by authors, 5 March 2020.

7 For a personal account of UK forces working alongside and within a Danish command structure at sub-unit level during kinetic operations in Helmand, southern Afghanistan see "A case study – the Danish Army", *Think Defence*, 16 December 2011, https://www.thinkdefence.co.uk/2011/12/a-case-study-the-danish-army/

8 Interview by authors, 5 March 2020.

arms and mission command, is an experience most junior officers do not get outside of this environment. BG EST has thus provided UK units with the ability to regularly rehearse and refine their own tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) in environments other than southern England or the plains of Canada. Fighting in woods and forests (FIWAF) has not been conducted in detail by the UK Army for over 20 years. Training in Estonia and Poland is helping to rewrite UK doctrine at the Land Warfare Centre.[9]

One dynamic whereby the mission has exceeded expectations is by influencing and supporting the Russian-speaking Estonian community, estimated to constitute approximately 26 percent of the population and as much as 90 percent in some towns in the north-eastern county of Ida-Virumaa.[10] BG EST has reached out to engage with the Russian-speaking community in Estonia since it first arrived in 2017. Colonel Karus, Commander of the Estonian 1 Brigade, said: "It comes down to human interaction and the enhanced forward presence troops have helped change the social fabric of the country and are making people feel more secure".[11] Such engagement with the wider population includes military stands at events and fairs; charity work; conversation and English-language clubs in schools and colleges; and, conducting fitness lessons. For Colonel Clayton, these activities delivered "the softer message for NATO not being aggressive to the local population".[12]

Shortcomings

Still, UK mission is falling short in several areas relating to pre-deployment training, the nature of the threat, and interoperability and integration with Estonian forces.

Pre-deployment training

The UK has so far been unable to achieve a far more theatre-specific training outcome due to the environmental challenges and the nature of the threat. Consider how much of the pre-deployment training to Estonia is conducted on the open plains of Canada as part of the UK Army's Training Unit in Suffield (BATUS), Alberta, or on the rolling hills of Brecon in southern Wales or Warminster in southern England. Neither training area approximates the Estonian terrain, which causes two unique problems for UK troops. Although Estonia's forestry blocks are dense and complex, existing UK TTPs deal with open wooded terrain. Moreover, UK armour is ill-suited to Estonia's swampy and boggy ground, particularly

9 Interview by authors, 5 March 2020.

10 D. J. Trimbach, "Lost in conflation: the Estonian city of Narva and its Russian-speakers", Foreign Policy Research Institute, 9 May 2016, https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/05/lost-conflation-estonian-city-narva-russian-speakers/

11 "Winning the war of words", *Soldier,* February 2020, p.7.

12 Interview by authors, 5 February 2020.

in winter. The training grounds that the UK uses cannot prepare armoured personnel to handle the problems Estonia's complex terrain gives massed armoured units.

Once UK soldiers arrive in Estonia they must accordingly spend time learning how to operate in the Baltic environment. Often, sub-unit TTPs will be consistently tweaked and refined as the deployment goes on. A UK officer who served in the Battlegroup in 2019 said:

> Operating in a new environment was a challenge – the forests in Estonia are very different to the woodblocks of Brecon, and the cold weather changes the way we can conduct fighting in woods and forests (FIWAF) very substantially. Ongoing development of doctrine and TTPs was key here.[13]

A serving Company Commander from 2019 echoed this sentiment:

> The challenge, realised once we were in country, that the ability to train accurately for the Estonian terrain was inhibited by the UK/Canada training estate. Our TTPs evolved significantly once we were there.[14]

Indeed, Estonian troops have had to assist UK forces when the latter have become bogged down in, or run into difficulty with, the Baltic terrain.

A more suitable environment for pre-deployment training would not only produce more successful training prior to deployment, but also could reduce the time troops spend training once deployed in Estonia. UK doctrine recognises FIWAF to be a complex terrain. Whilst these are practiced and rehearsed at sub-unit level, there should be greater scope for a more sophisticated, suitable training environment that can handle the Estonian terrain.

The nature of the threat

The current emphasis in pre-deployment training is the ability to integrate armour and dismounted infantry to work within 1 Estonia Brigade to delay an armoured advance over Estonia's eastern border, before it reaches Tallinn. Yet, the most likely course of enemy action would not be a mass armoured advance over the border, much of it made less-passable by the River Narva and Lake Peipsi. Instead, current Russian doctrine and recent military-political action in Ukraine suggest that Russia would use pockets of civilian-military forces to distract, confuse, and undermine the Estonian public.[15] To annex Crimea, Russian Special Forces did just this, thereby shaping domestic and international audiences.[16]

13 Interview by authors, 8 February 2020.

14 Interview by authors, 10 March 2020.

15 On the difficulties of describing and labelling Russian military doctrine, M. Galeotti, "I'm sorry for creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'", *Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/

16 C. Bartles and R. McDermott, "Russia's military operation in Crimea", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol.61, No.6, 2014, pp.57-58.

However, BG EST does not train enough for this more-likely conflict scenario, often conceptualised by NATO as "hybrid warfare".[17] This is because of the lack of a civilian population (CIVPOP) during the pre-deployment exercises conducted in BATUS. With the emphasis on armour, mobility, and live firing, current training does not account for this more-likely Russian military threat against the eFP. Reacting to both an armed and unarmed civilian population, inserted and controlled by Russian Special Forces, with the objective to cause civil unrest, is a highly likely enemy action, for which BG EST is underprepared to handle.

When recounting his unit's pre-deployment training in Canada, a serving Lieutenant Colonel, who deployed to Estonia in 2017, asserted:

> [BATUS] is not well designed for operating against full hybrid scenarios. BATUS has always been a largely conventional warfighting training establishment. Over the years they have started to include actors recruited locally, often French speakers so we have to use interpreters. The problem is how much it would cost to hire the thousands of "local nationals" that it would take to make it realistic. Also, there is no scope for influence activity and outreach – these people don't really hold the convictions that they are supposed to be playing, so it would be very hard to measure whether you actually "influenced" them.[18]

A serving Company Commander added:

> In all honesty, we acknowledged this ["hybrid" threat] challenge […] but it did not factor into how we trained […] The practicality of how an Armoured Battle Group is structured and trains is in direct tension with the modern nature of the threat. There was little ability to train to a meaningful level against the TTPs that have been exhibited in recent conflicts in […] Eastern Europe. For example, operating in the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) or counter unmanned aerial systems (UAS) training was absent, not because we were not cognisant of the threat but because we did not have any TTPs to train to, other than micro-tactical actions (camouflage and concealment, etc.).[19]

The pre-deployment training experience could thus be improved by relocating a period of the training – not least the MST phase – from Warminster, UK, to the Grafenwoehr Training Area, Bavaria, Germany. As the largest NATO training facility in Europe – which the UK Army already uses – it offers a closer theatre-specific training experience for UK troops deploying to Estonia. In addition to an expansive forest environment, it provides urban facilities with large numbers of civilian populations with whom exercising troops can

17 M. Galeotti, "Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'?", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.27, No.2, 2016, pp.283-301.

18 Interview by authors, 3 February 2020.

19 Interview by authors, 10 March 2020.

interact. This has the potential to replicate aspects of the more realistic threat-scenario in Estonia, with capacity for influence operations and civil unrest. These are some of the very aspects of below-threshold conflict witnessed in the early stages of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 for which the UK Army, at Battalion level, neither trains nor rehearses. Instead, the focus still remains the high-threat, low probability of a Russian armoured advance across the border. Interestingly, this sentiment was voiced enthusiastically by members of the UK Army who were deployed to Estonia in 2019.[20]

Integration with the Estonian Defence Forces

The eFP has aimed to integrate both framework and host nations into one another's training, thereby improving the overall combat efficiency of the multinational battlegroups. Presently, a disconnect exists between the level of integration experienced between UK troops and their Estonian counterparts. UK forces are currently enabling integration of the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF), and work alongside them on UK-led exercises and manoeuvres. However, the Estonian-led integration of UK forces is limited, despite the UK forces falling under 1 Estonia Brigade for training and day-to-day tasks.

Notwithstanding successful training conducted by both UK forces and the EDF, including the annual "Spring Storm" exercise, there remains "more to improve tactical interoperability", to quote an armoured infantry Company Commander.[21] In operational terms, there are three levels of interoperability, as defined by current UK defence policy: de-conflicted, compatible, and integrated.[22] Currently, the level of interoperability between UK and Estonian forces could be described as compatible, whereby forces can interact with each other in the same geographical battlespace in pursuit of a common goal. Another Company Commander who deployed to Estonia in 2019, shares this view, explaining that, at the operational level, the principal interoperability challenge is communications and signals (CIS) and battlespace management.[23] Accordingly, UK forces and the EDF operate "alongside each other but not together".

UK troops who have served in Estonia told us that their time there would be more effective if they had been able to embed with their Estonian counterparts on training exercises. This would allow them to see the EDF's training and tactics, helping to bridge

20 Focus Group by authors with members of 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment who deployed to Estonia, January-October 2019, 5 March 2020.

21 Interview by authors, 10 March 2020.

22 Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, "Joint Doctrine Publication 0-20: UK Land Power", Ministry of Defence, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/619991/doctrine_uk_land_power_jdp_0_20.pdf, p.40.

23 Interview by authors, 10 March 2020.

a potential gap that exists at the tactical level of interoperability. Directly embedding UK forces within sub-unit Estonian command for brief periods of training would also assist with situational awareness and combat effectiveness for the Battlegroup as a whole.[24] UK and US forces do this already, whereby personnel from each force embeds with their counterpart rank and unit. Directly embedded with the unit for several weeks on training exercises, the soldiers are – by the end of the experience – so fully integrated with their opposite number's TTPs that they are able to lead live attacks with members of the opposite force under their direct command.[25] Exercises like this foster mutual trust, respect, and overall operational efficiency; BG EST could develop them, taking the eFP model forwards.

Nevertheless, both the UK and Estonia have learnt much from working together since 2017. In November 2019, both countries sought to share best practice through an inaugural two-day symposium hosted by BG EST.[26] Drawing together officers and soldiers from across the eFP nations, the workshop facilitated discussions across a wide range of theatre-specific topics, including interoperability, strategic communications, FIWAF, joint fires, and employing engineer assets. There, working groups shared key lessons, subsequently creating action points to refine and perfect performance (or, sometimes just as importantly, what not to do) so as to feed into the next battlegroup. As the first such instance of a collective lesson sharing exercise and platform for eFP development, the UK is exploring how to make the deployment more sustainable. If this symposium were to be held annually, it would enable a structured and regular platform to share the collective wealth of knowledge learnt through successive battlegroups rotating across the eFP.

Conclusion

Despite domestic political instability in the UK – one nation-wide referendum (Scotland, 2014), one UK-wide referendum (EU, 2016), three general elections (2015, 2017 and 2019), and three prime ministers since 2014 – the country's commitment to regional security in the Baltic, as well as the wider European continent, has remained steadfast. Successive UK governments have reaffirmed this commitment. In 2015, the Strategic Defence and Security Review pledged that UK's Royal Navy's Trident missiles would be used both for self-defence and for "the defence of our NATO Allies".[27] A year later, Sir Michael Fallon,

24 Focus Group by authors with members of 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment who deployed to Estonia, January-October 2019, 5 March 2020.

25 Personal experiences of co-author Robert Clark while working with the US Army in June 2017.

26 Interview by authors, 5 February 2020. The UK-organised symposium took place in November 2019 in Tallinn.

27 "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015", HM Government, 2015, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_

the then Defence Secretary, pointed out that "Although we are leaving the European Union", Europe "is our continent", from which "we are not stepping away".[28] And Boris Johnson, the current Prime Minister, likened Britain's post-Brexit role as that of a "flying buttress".[29] These words, while important, are made real by the UK's ongoing strategic and operational commitments to NATO's eFP.

and_Security_Review.pdf

28 J. E. Barnes, "UK to send formidable force to Eastern Europe", *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2016, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-k-to-send-formidable-force-to-eastern-europe-1477440062

29 J. Murphey, "Brexit news latest: Boris Johnson vows to be 'flying buttress' for Europe as he aims to woo Emmanuel Macron", *Evening Standard*, 22 August 2019, https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-news-latest-boris-johnson-vows-to-be-flying-buttress-for-europe-as-he-aims-to-woo-emmanuel-a4219191.html

4

Estonia as host nation

Kalev Stoicescu and Martin Hurt

Like Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, Estonia has hosted a rotating presence of a US company-sized contingent since April 2014. Precipitating this development was Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea as well as the Kremlin's incitement and support of so-called separatists in the Donbas region. The Alliance complemented those companies along with other NATO assurance measures. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO members agreed to establish the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Poland and the three Baltic countries. It is appropriate, three years after the eFP battlegroups were first deployed, to assess how the host and contributing nations understand eFP, and their expectations for the future building upon experience gained so far.

This essay describes the importance of eFP for Estonia, lists its main achievements, suggests a number of potential improvements to be considered, and identifies several lessons learned. By strengthening its deterrence posture, NATO has signalled to Russia that an attack on any of the four nations would immediately trigger a military reaction of the rest of the Alliance.

The eFP's strategic role

Estonia joined NATO in 2004. However, despite Estonia's participation in NATO operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere and its close defence cooperation with key Allies like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, the enlargement remained essentially political. Playing down Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008, NATO Allies did not deploy forces to the new member states. The only exceptions were the Baltic Air Policing mission, which until 2014 was conducted solely from Šiauliai, Lithuania, and the reconstruction of some air bases, including Ämari Air Base in Estonia. The presence of Allied forces in Estonia and elsewhere on NATO's eastern flank became not only a political but also a deterrence-related necessity in 2014 in the context of Russia's so-called resurgence. Assurance of the Baltic states and Poland is necessary, but sufficiency – in

terms of fulfilling the aim of avoiding conflict with Russia in the Baltic region, or elsewhere – is only achievable through credible deterrence against a resurgent Russia.

Estonia highly values the eFP and its defence cooperation with the Allies that make up the battlegroup. As an eFP host nation, Estonia has increased its yearly defence budgets since 2016 over the required 2 percent of the country's GDP in order to cover expenses related to Host Nation Support (HNS) – that is, the construction of modern infrastructure as well as enlargement of training areas. The United Kingdom is the Framework Nation of the eFP BG EST (Battlegroup Estonia), with France and Denmark alternating yearly as contributing nations. All four nations have a long history of close and diverse military cooperation. In addition, Iceland contributes its expertise in strategic communications to the battlegroup. Both military and civil authorities often express the opinion that Estonia could not have wished for a better mix of framework and contributing nations.

Like those in Latvia and Lithuania, BG EST has more than just a "tripwire" effect of deterrence. In contrast with Poland who already has a relatively large military, BG EST is a major complement to the actual defence capabilities of national forces. The UK-led BG EST clearly has an operational mindset, one that is reflected in Estonia's national defence plan. Furthermore, BG EST helps to improve the political and military cooperation between Estonia and the UK, France, and Denmark in other contexts such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the French-led Operation Barkhane in Mali.

The potential failure of NATO's deterrence is not an option even if the Alliance has the capabilities to defend itself against a possible Russian aggression. Russia has a substantial numerical advantage in the Baltic region, and it could undoubtedly overpower the relatively weak defences of the Baltic states. NATO would then face the prospect of costly operations to restore its territorial integrity in the region. Russia would seek to hamper military reinforcements of Allies by using its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) and long-range precision strike capabilities. It would also target critical civilian and military assets of NATO countries. NATO would ultimately prevail, but the results for Estonia and the other eastern flank nations would be devastating. That is why deterrence should not fail and the Allies should make all necessary efforts to strengthen it. Only a credible deterrence posture can deter Russia.

The eFP corresponds well to these requirements. Given the limited size of the armed forces of the Baltic states, and its role as a deterrent, the eFP battlegroups would also help defeat a limited incursion by Russia. They would need, however, quick reinforcements in case of a large-scale attack that comes with relatively short warning.

Stronger defence cooperation

The UK and Estonia have a long history of close bilateral cooperation that dates back to 1918 when UK forces lent their crucial support to Estonian forces fighting off Bolshevik attacks.[1] For the last decade this cooperation was manifest in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan where troops from both countries served side-by-side in Helmand Province. After ISAF ended in 2014, the level of cooperation dropped. With the deployment of the BG EST in 2017, it was reinvigorated. Many UK and Estonian officers have previously served together in Afghanistan and/or at various NATO headquarters. In some cases, they even know each other personally, which is of great help today.

The UK-led BG EST is integrated into the 1st Infantry Brigade of the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) located in the Tapa camp, about 70 km east of Tallinn. The integration of multinational forces in Estonia is in fact two-fold – the about 300-strong contingents rotated alternately by France or Denmark are integrated into the 800-strong UK contingent. The UK perceives a clear advantage of having a single partner at a time, be it France or Denmark. Additionally, Iceland contributes to the eFP command element in Tallinn. It has taken almost three years to fully integrate BG EST and to create all necessary routines.

The Estonian Ministry of Defence and the EDF believe that the current mix of capabilities of BG EST, including the heavy armour and infantry fighting vehicles, corresponds with the eFP mission.[2] This satisfaction is unsurprising given how this mix was decided at the Warsaw Summit: the deployment of combat-capable battalion-sized mechanised battlegroups, with the Framework Nations and the contributing nations deciding which equipment to bring. Countering the lower end of a hybrid scenario encompassing disinformation, cyber-attacks, and other forms of covert action is the task of Estonian law-enforcement agencies, including the Security Service and the Police and Border Guard. If necessary, the latter can be augmented by the Estonian Defence League (EDL), a 26,000-strong voluntary national defence organisation that frequently exercises. For example, EDL volunteers supported the Police and Border Guard during the COVID-19 outbreak. Only as a last resort would regular EDF units be employed in a supporting role under the command of civil authorities. The role of BG EST in such a low-end scenario is, therefore, difficult to envisage. Instead, the role of BG EST is to demonstrate combat capability so as to deter military aggression.[3]

1 R. Rosenthal, "Estonian war of independence", *Estonica,* 3 October 2012, http://www.estonica.org/en/History/1914-1920_The_First_World_War_and_Estonian_independence/Estonian_War_of_Independence/

2 Interviews by authors, December 2019 and January 2020.

3 Interviews by authors, December 2019.

Estonia has maintained a relatively large reserve based on compulsory military training. The annual training cycle of conscripts in the Estonian land forces ends with the brigade exercise "Spring Storm" conducted in May. It now involves BG EST. The conscripts receive warm and cold weather training, as do the UK and French/Danish eFP contingents, depending on the time of their deployment ("Spring Storm" or winter camp). Winter training is a necessary and positive experience for the UK troops in Estonia, as it is not conducted at home, but usually in Norway. UK troops usually rotate every eight months, which coincides with the Estonian conscription cycle and with two French four-month rotations (from March 2020 the UK rotations will last six months). Therefore, even the yearly process of training Estonian reserve units (battalions) is synchronized with the rotations of eFP contingents that are actually combat-ready upon deployment to Tapa. The UK and French/Danish contingents are deployed to Estonia at a high readiness level, which they develop through training until the end of their rotation periods. Estonia tries to be able to conduct bigger scale live firing exercises on its central training area. It currently is under expansion, but its capacity will not be enough for a whole brigade. Large scale exercises will, therefore, continue to be conducted in Ādaži, Latvia.

BG EST has incrementally stepped up its cooperation with the EDL. Joint exercises have clearly raised the quality of EDL territorial forces. The largest exercise in 2019 involved 350 UK and French servicemen and 750 Estonian and Lithuanian volunteers. Advancing UK and French mechanised companies have offered EDL personnel realistic simulations that are important for exercising territorial defence against an opponent that uses heavy armour in Estonia's dense forests. The EDL Regional Command North has embarked on a new multi-year training cycle that will benefit increasingly from the presence of BG EST. Other EDL forces are yet to discover the training opportunities offered by BG EST. But this is not a one-way street: BG EST also sometimes trains with the EDL since EDF units manned with conscripts are not always available for exercises.[4]

According to officials interviewed by the authors, the eFP contingents are generally satisfied with the facilities provided by Estonia in the Tapa camp and the training areas.[5] Estonia has invested heavily in new infrastructure. In 2019, the Estonian Ministry of Defence conducted a welfare study in this regard that flagged only minor complaints or desires like no British sausages for breakfast. It also highlighted satisfaction with the living conditions in the barracks, sporting, and other recreational facilities. The Ministry of Defence adopted an action plan in order to address shortfalls. A UK-style mess and a swimming pool in

4 Interviews by authors, February 2020.

5 Interviews by authors, December and January 2020.

Tapa will eventually be opened.[6] BG EST commanders, the UK commander and French or Danish deputy commander, and personnel are routinely engaged in various social activities around Estonia like sporting events, conversation clubs, and even Estonia's song festival. Community outreach involves Tapa and other local municipalities and helps bring local people, of which some are Russian-speakers, and NATO forces closer.

The Allied contingents thus enjoy a high visibility in Estonia, with BG EST being very active on social media. Strategic communications are well coordinated with the Estonian Ministry of Defence and the EDF headquarters. The public perception of eFP in Estonia is certainly linked, and very similar, to the general attitude towards NATO that is highly positive. Indeed, for the last twenty years the Estonian Ministry of Defence has conducted public opinion surveys on national defence twice per year. According to the survey conducted in autumn 2019, 65 percent of the respondents believe that NATO has taken sufficient measures to ensure the security of Estonia and 73 percent support the presence of NATO forces in Estonia.[7] Whereas 90 percent of Estonian speakers are in favour of the presence of NATO forces in Estonia, only 37 percent of non-Estonian speakers agree. 45 percent of non-Estonian speakers disapprove of NATO's presence. 62 percent believe that BG EST generally makes the country more secure. The most frequent words that are chosen to describe BG EST troops in Estonia are "professional", "friendly", "well intentioned", and "polite". To be sure, Russia has targeted Allied forces in Estonia with disinformation. One such incident involved a team claiming to represent a Russian news channel visiting Tapa and interviewing officials of the municipality. The result was a distorted news show claiming that Allied troops were frequent clients of prostitutes in Tapa.[8]

The mayor of Tapa and other officials express great satisfaction with the presence of the EDF in general and with BG EST. The military has been present in Tapa since the early 1920s. The EDF is the largest employer in the area, making it significant for the local economy. Tapa and the Ministry of Defence regularly identify areas of common interest, such as development of local infrastructure (including roads, the heating network, water supply, and a swimming pool), and the Ministry supports such projects financially in case there are tangible benefits for the EDF. BG EST is very visible in the area and the mix of personnel from the United Kingdom, France, and Denmark has enriched the community.[9]

The four eFP battlegroups are related not only in terms of their similar deterrence and

6 Interviews by authors, December 2019 and January 2020.

7 Public Opinion and National Defence: Report to the Ministry of Defence, October/November 2019, https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/sisulehed/avalik_arvamus/report_fall_2019.pdf, pp.80-82.

8 Interview by authors, February 2020.

9 *Ibid.*

defence tasks, and their subordination to the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) through the two divisional HQs, but also by their common desire to share experiences and to conduct different types of joint exercises. To that end, the UK-led BG EST organised a symposium in October 2019 in Estonia, with the participation of all other eFP battlegroups.

Considerations for the future

Estonia would certainly wish to strengthen the eFP but there are certain political considerations and practical limitations that must be heeded. One obvious political consideration is avoiding unintended escalation in the Baltic region and not offering Moscow any pretexts for accusing NATO of going beyond deterrence sufficiency – that is, by building potentially offensive capabilities. The NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 (NRFA) is an important political factor in this context, even if Estonia considers it to be outdated and made obsolete by Russia's actions.[10] After all, the security environment in the Baltic region has deteriorated significantly due to the speedy and massive increase in Russia's posture in its Western Military District (WMD) in the past ten years. Russia has conducted large scale strategic exercises like Zapad-2017 and provocative "snap" exercises. It introduced new equipment and offensive weapons first in the WMD. NATO has, however, continued to respect the NRFA. The forces that NATO and the US have deployed on a rotational basis to the Baltic states and Poland are neither permanent nor substantial, unlike Russia's regional posture.[11]

NATO's posture in the Baltic region has considerable room for adaptation in accordance with the NRFA. It would be reasonable to assume that up to a brigade could be stationed in each of the Baltic states without violating that agreement. Still, a Cold War-style defence posture that involves large-scale forward presence and the basing of large numbers of US ground troops on NATO's eastern flank, particularly in the Baltic states, would not be desirable politically. The Allies also wish to retain the flexibility to use their armed forces to address a variety of challenges. Most Allies also commit troops to NATO's reaction forces and different out-of-area operations, as in the Sahel, where Estonia participates in Operation Barkhane.[12]

The US is certainly the most militarily capable of the Allies. The quantity and quality of the US military are beyond those of all other NATO members. The US military presence has thus

10 Founding Act, NATO, 12 October 2009, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm?

11 Under EDI, which succeeded the European Reassurance Initiative, the United States has significantly increased its military posture in Eastern Europe: M. Shevin-Coetzee, *The European Deterrence Initiative*, Washington, DC, The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019, pp.6-12.

12 The reaction forces are NATO Response Force, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, and the NATO Readiness Initiative.

a far larger deterrent effect than that of the rest of the Alliance. The US military presence and visible commitment to defending NATO's eastern flank, including Estonia, is what matters most to Russia. Moscow's official narrative leaves no doubt about these considerations since it claims that US presence in the region is destabilising.[13] Russia's responses to the deployment of US military assets to the Baltic region also confirm this judgement. Russia's Baltic Fleet, for example, largely ignores NATO's Standing Maritime Groups, but it pays particular – and often aggressive – attention to any US presence in the Baltic Sea.[14]

The US is currently present to the south of the Suwałki Gap, as a Framework Nation for eFP and through the European Deterrence Initiative in Poland. It is not at a comparable scale in the north. In a crisis situation, the US forces would be expected to undertake the main operational task of seizing and securing the Suwałki area. However, the current US force posture could be regarded by Russia as an indicator that the security of the Baltic region is – in fact – split by the Suwałki Gap, and that US defence commitments to Poland are greater than they are to the Baltic states. Nevertheless, even a modest deployment of conventional US forces to Estonia or Latvia (in addition to Lithuania, which would be far more quickly reinforced) would convey an important political signal to both Allies and Russia that Baltic territory enjoys the same strategic value as that of all other Allies, including the US.[15] Prepositioning equipment for larger US deployments at an appropriate location in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania would reinforce this message and demonstrate more resolve. NATO's presence in the Baltic states should therefore be supplemented with US combat units. US forces should participate in eFP in one or more Baltic states. Alternatively, predictable, continuous, and enduring rotational deployments of US combat forces to all of the Baltic states would also send a strong deterrence message. The US should, meanwhile, preposition equipment for larger deployments at an appropriate location in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania.

The potential basing of additional ground troops would currently be challenging because of limited infrastructure and training opportunities. Although new infrastructure could be built relatively quickly, the establishment of new training areas would be more time-consuming. As an alternative, deterrence could be increased by deploying other capabilities, such as ground-based air defence units with a smaller footprint.

The credibility and the deterrent effect of eFP could also be improved without increasing

13 See "NATO, US military buildup in Black, Baltic Sea is dangerous, Russian senator warns", TASS, 8 October 2019, https://tass.com/defense/1081998

14 H. Lange, B. Combes, T. Jermalavičius, and T. Lawrence, "To the seas again: maritime defence and deterrence in the Baltic Region", ICDS, April 2019, p.15.

15 On what might be achievable in this regard, see A. R. Vershbow and P. M. Breedlove, "Permanent deterrence", Atlantic Council, 7 February 2019, pp.40-43, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/permanent-deterrence/

the number of capabilities deployed to the Baltic states and Poland. For political reasons, a number of troop-contributing nations have chosen to view eFP more as a reinforced assurance measure rather than an effort to deter Russia. They have so far placed more emphasis on training than on other preparations that could help repel aggression. More frequent tabletop exercises would help familiarise military and political decision-makers with the overall purpose of eFP and particularly with the tripwire function.

Ensuring increased understanding among military and political decision-makers may not be sufficient for eFP to be successful in the future. All NATO nations should work on improving public awareness of, and support to, the role of NATO, including eFP, in maintaining peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. All four eFP host nations do take their commitments seriously, spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence, and contribute to operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere side-by-side with the Framework Nations and other Allies. However, there is no room for complacency, and more is needed from all Allies to ensure that NATO will meet the needs of the evolving security environment. In parallel, eFP could still benefit from some finetuning regarding motivation and welfare of servicemen and women. BG EST has not faced any noteworthy disciplinary problems and restrictions are nowadays more relaxed than when the force was deployed in 2017. Nevertheless, there may be room for relaxing restrictions even further. Letting service men and women carry the service medals that they are presented with after finishing their tour to Estonia may improve motivation and welfare.

Conclusion

The main lessons learned by Estonia relate to the benefits and the efforts that come from hosting an Allied battalion-size battlegroup. The main benefit obviously involves the increased deterrence. NATO has signalled to Russia, that an attack on any of the four nations would immediately trigger a military reaction of the rest of the Alliance even though much more work is needed to enable rapid reinforcement. The deployment has also strengthened bilateral cooperation with the UK, France, and Denmark and offers them and the host nation useful training opportunities. Much effort has been required to integrate BG EST into the 1st Infantry Brigade, to develop supporting infrastructure and training areas, and to coordinate training and exercises.

5

Canada as framework nation

Christian Leuprecht, Alexander Moens, and Alexander Lanoszka[1]

As a smaller ally far from Europe, Canada is not an obvious choice for being a Framework Nation. Yet NATO's goal to enhance the security of its Allies on the border with Russia has precedent in Canada's century-long strategic commitment to Europe. Close cooperation with the United States and with NATO Allies is the essence of Canada's defence posture. Russia upending Europe's post-Cold War order in 2014 was a direct challenge to Canada's strategic interests. Canada's strategic relationship with Europe is second only to the United States. It has a vested interest in the territorial integrity of NATO Allies, which, if compromised, risks undermining European unity and stability.

Canada's interest in Europe transcends security and defence. Canada recently negotiated a Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union (EU). Though modest in overall volume of trade, the political symbolism of the CETA allows for deeper trade relations. The crisis with Russia re-ignited a sense of principle and purpose for Canadian involvement in Europe. Canada's relationship with NATO and the EU is not only about interests but also a set of values given how NATO fosters a rules-based international order that is guided by "the principles of individual liberty, democracy, and the rule of law...".[2] Moreover, Russia's actions in Ukraine and its threatening posture towards the Baltic nations also resonates in Canada. Over one million Canadian citizens – and voters – identify as being of Ukrainian descent. Many other Canadians trace their ancestry to the Baltic states and other Eastern and Central European countries that had

1 This study draws partly from C. Leuprecht and J. Derow, "Conceptions of deterrence: the eFP's political and military posture", in M. Ozawa (ed.) "The Alliance five years after Crimea: implenting the Wales Summit pledges", *NDC Research Paper 7*, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2019; C. Leuprecht, J. Sokolsky, and J. Derow, "Paying it forward: Canada's renewed Commitment to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence", *International Journal*, Vol.74, No.1, 2019, pp.162–171; and from A. Moens, J. Waugh, and C. Turdeanu, "NATO's rlace in Canada's interest-focused and rules-based international order", *The Riga Conference Papers*, Riga, Latvia Institute of International Affairs, 2019.

2 NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Preamble, 4 April 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm/

been subjected to the Soviet oppression. Accordingly, there was considerable domestic pressure for Canada to act.[3]

By taking on the role of Framework Nation in the largest multilateral mission to contain Russia since the end of the Cold War, Canada is signalling that NATO remains a top defence priority. Among the four Framework Nations, Canada leads and integrates the most multinational force while bolstering domestic resilience to counter Russian information operations that endeavour to undermine the cohesion of the Alliance. Notwithstanding challenges relating to sustained warfighting, domestic and political ambivalence about the mission in Canada, the eFP's Latvian Battle Group highlights the promise of effective multilateral cooperation without direct US participation.

Setting up the eFP

Although Canada had played an important role in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, there was a sense that the then Conservative government under Stephen Harper eventually soured on NATO. Allies' caveats often left Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar exposed.[4] Ottawa did not participate in the post-ISAF Resolute Support mission and ended its contribution in the Airborne Warning and Control System mission.

Since late 2015, however, Canada has reinforced its role in NATO, with its commitment being most tangibly expressed in its role of eFP Framework Nation to Latvia. What explains this assignment? The Afghanistan experience came in handy when deciding who would be responsible for what state. The United Kingdom had already worked with Estonia, and Germany with Lithuania. Poland has long had close defence and security relations with the United States. This narrowed down the options to four potential states with the necessary multinational headquarters capacity and experience to lead the mission in Latvia: France, Spain, Italy, and Canada. France was already engaged in Mali and at home as part of anti-terrorism activities. Spain was amidst an election without a government that had the legal authority to commit. Italy was preoccupied with NATO's southern flank.

Canada became the default. Eastern European allies wanted to see Canada commit to the eFP in Latvia. Canada had already vowed to defend the interests of the Baltic states in the event of an armed attack. Moreover, Operation Reassurance had enlisted a Canadian presence in the region since April 2014, conducting exercises and interoperability training

3 D. Sanders, "How Ukrainian politics became the most Canadian of politics", *Globe and Mail,* 5 July 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-how-ukrainian-politics-became-the-most-canadian-of-politics/

4 D. P. Auerswald and S. M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan: fighting together, fighting alone*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2014.

in Poland and the Baltic states. Given Canada's presence and experience in the region, Allies anticipated that Ottawa would surely contribute. Importantly, the foreign policy articulated by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau highlighted a renewed Canadian dedication to multilateralism. In the words of a senior policy adviser, this dedication to multilateralism resulted from "Trudeau's brand of internationalism, which blends small l-liberal idealism and interest-based realism".[5] It was clear from Justin Trudeau's first interactions with Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in 2015 that Canada would continue to oppose Russia's actions in Ukraine. The appointment of Chrystia Freeland as foreign minister in 2017, given her unique understanding of Ukrainian culture and resolve to maintain the liberal international order, further strengthened the perception that the Trudeau government would stand by Eastern European NATO Allies.[6] At the same time, this mission was ready-made for Canada to mitigate persistent complaints from Washington about NATO burden-sharing.

Indeed, Canada ended up being the last Framework Nation to be determined. Most observers believe that the Stephen Harper government, which lost the October 2015 election, was reluctant to commit to another NATO mission. However, both "friends of Canada" on the inside of NATO and President Barack Obama by direct phone conversation with the Canadian Prime Minister advocated with the Canadian government to commit to lead a multinational effort in Latvia.[7] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had also requested Canada's participation. One complication was the government's concern that a relatively large military undertaking – by Canadian standards – could hamper the newly elected government's promised commitment to return to peacekeeping by contributing, for example, to the UN mission in Mali. Canada would not be able to sustain two major missions in two different regions. However, a day after US President Obama explicitly courted a larger NATO commitment from Canada in a speech before the Parliament of Canada, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan announced Canada's commitment as the eFP Framework Nation for Latvia, stating: "Canada stands side by side with its NATO Allies working to deter aggression and assure peace and stability in Europe".[8]

Some 400 Canadian troops began deploying in early 2017, led by the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. By February 2019, Battlegroup Latvia (BG LVA) consisted of

5 R. Paris, "Justin Trudeau and Canadian foreign policy", in N. Hillmer and P. Lagasse (eds.), *Justin Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p.18.

6 *Ibid*., pp.22 and 46.

7 Confidential interview with Canadian policy official by authors, 21 May 2019.

8 Quoted in O. Dzadan, "Canada to send troops to Latvia to bolster NATO forces in stand against potential aggression from Russia", *National Post*, 30 June 2016, http:// nationalpost.com/news/politics/canada-to-send-troops-to-latvia-to-bolster-nato-forces-instand-against-potential-aggression-from-russia

roughly 1,400 troops with eight participating NATO member states. Sizeable Spanish, Polish, and Italian subcomponents featured prominently inside the Canadian battlegroup as did smaller contingents from other European allies.

Canada now leads the most multinational battlegroup ever put together in the NATO context below the level of a Brigade.[9] Such a highly visible multilateral role nicely suits Trudeau's stated multilateralism. Seasoned observers surmised that the multinationalism of BG LVA was the result of competing demands on a country with a modest defence budget and thus relatively small pool of Canadian capacity and personnel. The mission provides the Canadian Armed Forces and other established medium-sized NATO partners with an opportunity to train with new and less capable member states. Canada is thus making common cause to learn to work together and harness synergies as yet another way to enhance burden-sharing within the Alliance: these countries, or a subset, might henceforth be able to deploy more effectively on future missions.[10]

In May 2018 the Canadian government decided to renew its eFP lead nation role for an unprecedented five years, until March 2023.[11] It also increased the number of Canadian troops from 455 to 540. The decision came a year before the existing commitment in Latvia would run out.[12] It reflects Ottawa's concern for not only the situation in Latvia and the eFP, but also the fate of NATO itself, Canada's role in it, and, indeed, the future of Canadian defence policy. In light of the highly critical public relations battle waged by the White House over Allied defence spending, Ottawa had incentives to placate the White House by doubling down on its current commitments. Hence Ottawa agreed to lead NATO's advise and assist mission to Iraq. Canada's level of participation in NATO missions had far exceeded its contribution to UN peacekeeping despite the new Liberal government's earlier musings about the latter.[13] It took nearly two years for the Canadian government to come through with its modest, six-month, time-limited contribution to the UN mission in Mali – a commitment that ended in 2019.

9 Confidential interview with Canadian official by authors, 11 June 2019.

10 C. Leuprecht, A. Lanoszka, A. J. Derow, and K. Muti, "Future multilateral cooperation: leveraging the NATO enhanced Forward Presence two years on", in A. Spruds, M. Andzans, and S. Sraders (eds.), *Riga Conference Papers 2019: NATO at 70 in the Baltic Sea Region*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, pp.15-31.

11 "Operation Reassurance", *Government of Canada*, 15 November 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html

12 C. Leuprecht *et al.*, "Paying it forward", p.167.

13 J. R. McKay, "Why Canada is best explained as a 'reliable ally' in 2017", *Journal of Transatlantic Studies,* Vol.16, No.2, 2018, p.137.

Assessing the Canadian-led Latvia mission

The eFP deployment deters Russia by means of a multilateral allied military presence, but as said in previous chapters of this volume, hesitation exists in calling it a tripwire force. Latvian forces used to be augmented by small units of rapidly rotating US and NATO forces. Now, there is a continuous multinational presence of more than 1,100 soldiers composed of nine NATO Allies.

Multi-nationality poses a challenge to military efficiency, and thus the credibility of deterrence. By spreading risk, however, it reinforces political deterrence, which is just as important an offset. Canada's leadership in the BG LVA has introduced a high tempo of training as well as adaptive military diplomacy to enhance multinational cooperation. Two times per year, BG LVA goes through a certification process, which is arguably more stringent than in the other eFPs, to qualify as "fully integrated and battle ready". This level of interoperability below the brigade level is unprecedented in NATO.

Canada has also been dispelling Russian influence operations. Specifically, Russian disinformation tactics have sought to delegitimate the eFP among the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. In the first year of the eFP, Russian-speaking media outlets accused NATO troops of polluting the environment and inflating real estate prices. By 2019, Russian-language attempts at disseminating false news had been on the wane. Information attacks focussed on NATO in general rather than the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) mission. In 2020, however, COVID-19–related information attacks surged: CAF members were allegedly bringing the virus to Latvia.[14]

Canadian countermeasures push out messages that debunk false claims that Russian actors level against CAF members and the CAF mission in Latvia. The CAF works with local authorities, such as the Latvian Ministry of Defence, to set the record straight on troops spreading coronavirus. In collaboration with other NATO partners, the CAF neutralizes false narratives with accurate counter-narratives. Although reactive and limited in reach, Latvians seem to appreciate having the CAF in the country, notwithstanding Russian efforts to convince them otherwise. CAF members prioritize engaging with locals so that Latvians can understand the CAF presence and how CAF members measure up against the negative narratives spread by Russia.[15]

14 Interview with multiple Canadian officials and officers in Latvia, June 2018 and 24-28 June 2019; and C. Pinkerton, "Canadians lead fight against Russian disinformation in Latvia", *iPolitics*, 18 June 2018, https://ipolitics.ca/2018/06/28/canadians-lead-fight-against-russian-disinformation-in-latvia/; and M. Brewster, "Canadian-led NATO battlegroup in Latvia targeted by pandemic disinformation campaign", *CBC News*, 24 May 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/nato-latvia-battle-group-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-disinformation-russia-1.5581248

15 M. Montgomery, "Canadian NATO soldiers in Latvia targeted by disinformation campaign", RCI, 25 May 2020, https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2020/05/25/canadian-nato-soldiers-in-latvia-nato-targeted-by-misinformation-campaign/; and Brewster, "Canadian-led NATO Battlegroup".

The extent to which Canada has been proactive in the battle of ideas for the hearts and minds of the Latvian people is an important complement to effective military deterrence. On the one hand, Canada set up Task Force Latvia headquarters (TFL HQ) in Riga with continuous officers and staff to assure continuity of communication and progress across battlegroup rotations. Housed in the Latvian Brigade's HQ, it creates a permanent liaison. Although the BG LVA rotates every six months, officers in the TFL HQ are typically on three-year rotations. On the other, the Embassy, the TFL-HQ, and BG LVA have taken a "whole-of-government" approach. Political, economic, and military actions and messages are integrated and transmit the same themes. In terms of civil-military relations, the aim is to thwart Russian claims that NATO is an occupier and to reassure Latvia's ethnic Russian minority that NATO does not threaten any aspect of Latvian society. It forges domestic resilience in the face of persistent Russian influence operations by showing that NATO is a good citizen that is ultimately there to help Latvia help itself. The message is taken across Latvia to community and civil-society events.

All eFPs, including BG LVA, face the challenge of how NATO is capable of reinforcing or retaliating should it be confronted by adversarial aggression. In terms of covert and hybrid threats, the eFP is, of course, not the first responder. Still, the TFL is aware of Latvian plans and ready to assist if called upon. In the case of a large-scale attack of conventional forces on Latvia, the eFP task of "deterrence-by-denial" could be reinforced. It needs sufficient deterrence effect so that "the punishment imposes costs on an adversary that are greater than the adversary's valuation of the gains through action".[16] NATO is aware of vulnerabilities in reinforcing the Baltic missions. It must overcome the growing Russian capacity to deny NATO access to redeploy forces from the centre to the periphery of the Alliance on short notice. For the VJTF to support such a multinational battlegroup as the one led by Canada is key to the eFP's credible deterrence posture. To this effect, NATO is setting up a wider division-level command and control structure as well as Joint Support and enabling command and function nearer the geographical location of the eFPs.

The Canadian-led BG LVA draws on forces from eight contributing member states – more than twice the contributing states than the other three eFP country deployments. National forces have potentially conflicting rules of engagement and greater variation in military equipment. Accordingly, the inability to pre-position VJTF equipment and troops due to the diverse multinational structure of the eFP battlegroup in an area under imminent or pending threat could prove to be a liability. As several security analysts warn, "[t]he VJTF is not regionally aligned, so if a conflict in […] one area erupts at the same

16 J. Arnold, "NATO's Readiness Action Plan: strategic benefits and outstanding challenges", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.1, 2016, p.82.

time as another crisis requiring a NATO response, the VJTF might be unavailable". The overall combat readiness and capacity of the battlegroups risks being compromised or relegated to "ineffective 'Frankenstein' battalions".[17] Although NATO is addressing these problems and the Canadian-led battlegroup has added more firepower, Canada alone or in conjunction with other Allies could do more to boost the conventional defence value of its mission.

There is also room to enhance cooperation among the four battlegroups. Polish and Lithuanian eFP forces exercise jointly, but others do not. Baltic regional defence cooperation remains fragmented and falls short of realizing its full potential. The three Baltic eFPs could do more to overcome the traditional and historic lack of military cooperation among Baltic states. A recent report by an Estonian think tank observes: "there is a distinct impression that none of the three Baltic states regard trilateral military cooperation as an absolute priority, and that they only invoke its ideals as a matter of political ritual".[18] At one point, each Baltic country's priority was likely to work bilaterally with the United States. As of late, there is a growing sense of each working with NATO. Absent a more robust effort at multilateralism, the security architecture in the Baltic region risks assuming a hub-and-spoke character that encourages strong ties between the United States and local partners to the detriment of weak ties among themselves and among their respective Framework Nations. Even the eFP battalions deployed in the Baltic region risk prioritizing bilateralism between Framework and Host Nations at the expense of wider multilateralism among both Host and Contributing Nations. For example, rather than Canada and Latvia being hub nations within a multiplayer network, each has set up their defence relations as a hub-and-spoke network between one another and each Contributing Nation. Doing so risks missing opportunities to build military and political cohesion among subsets of NATO partners as well as greater resiliency within the Alliance.

The eFP initiative in Latvia, therefore, should encourage the participating states to overcome geographic divides, exchange lessons learned, and develop new skills and expertise, as well as tactical synergies to increase common understanding and interoperability. Enhanced cooperation offers a powerful rejoinder to the criticism that NATO countries are insufficiently bearing the burden of collective and regional defence.

Canada's actions in Latvia also can benefit from better exposure and support on the domestic front. Canada's government could be better at articulating how Canadian actions in NATO advance both Canadian values and interests. The government is making this case on the international stage but seems reluctant to do so at home. Canada's ambitious

17 W. Clark *et al.*, *Closing NATO's Baltic gap*, Tallinn, International Centre for Defence and Security, 2016, p.18.

18 T. Jermalavicius *et al.*, *NATO's Northeast quartet: prospects and opportunities for Baltic-Polish defence cooperation*, Tallinn, International Centre for Defence and Security, 2018, p.186.

pace of NATO deployments in Latvia, Ukraine, and most recently in the training mission in Iraq, and the operational requirements that come with them are only sustainable with broad understanding and support from Canadians. An uninformed public and absence of scholarly work accompanying Canadian policies in NATO leaves the Canadian government orphaned in success or failure.[19]

Conclusion

Canada has committed itself to European security since the watershed year of 2014. Besides the eFP mission in Latvia, Canada is involved with several NATO Allies in a training and capacity-building mission with some 200 troops in Ukraine. A Canadian ship regularly patrols with the two Standing Maritime Groups assigned to the NATO Response Force. Four or five CF-18 fighter jets take turns with various Allies in NATO air policing missions in the Baltic states and Romania.[20] In 2018, Canada agreed to lead the NATO training mission in Iraq, which now includes some 250 personnel.[21] By its active participation in so many missions, Canada is pushing back on the perception that NATO is yesterday's alliance. To the contrary, NATO remains Canada's most important multilateral institution precisely because it acts as a force multiplier for Canada's core interests.

As it doubles down on NATO, Canada now has a greater stake in making NATO's positions tenable. In Latvia, this includes boosting NATO's political and military deterrence value through robust forward defence and demonstrating that the Alliance is resolute in countering aggression against its members. The Latvia eFP mission also allows Canada to optimize inter-operational synergies for future collective deployments elsewhere: a military and political mini-Alliance within the Alliance. Ostensibly, that not only advances burden-sharing, but also raises Canada's leverage in decision-making in the North Atlantic Council about future deployments. Influence in higher allied councils has long been a justification for and assumption about Canadian military commitments, but, except for the early 1950s, Ottawa has never committed sufficient troops to influence allied decision-making since it never really had a distinct policy agenda for which to press. Canada is, however, capitalizing on its expertise in civil-military relations in the Latvia mission. As adversarial influence operations become a staple of the regional and global threat environment, expertise in societal resilience is bound to be in high demand.

19 To change the academic culture of neglect and to prepare Canadian students for careers in defence and diplomacy, the authors are part of a new annual programme called the NATO Field School and Simulation Program. This new academic initiative serves to introduce Canadian and other NATO member university students to NATO's values, processes, and interests by interacting, observing, experiencing, and simulating. See https://www.sfu.ca/natofieldschool.html

20 "Operation Reassurance", Government of Canada, 15 November 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html

21 "Canada to command NATO mission in Iraq for a second year", Government of Canada, 26 June 2019, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2019/06/canada-to-command-nato-mission-in-iraq-for-a-second-year.html

6

Latvia as host nation

Toms Rostoks

This chapter aims to assess Latvia's lessons learned from the three years of hosting the Canadian-led NATO eFP battlegroup at Ādaži – a military base near Riga. Latvia's experience with hosting the eFP battlegroup is peculiar because it has the highest number of countries represented with nine. They are Canada, Albania, Czech Republic, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain, with Iceland set to join in 2020. A major focus in recent years has been achieving force integration at the battalion level, as well as integrating the multinational battlegroup into the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade, of which the battalion is part.

The chapter addresses a number of issues pertaining to the NATO eFP battlegroup in Latvia since 2017. It begins by outlining Latvia's key interests with the eFP before assessing its success. Thereupon, the chapter identifies lessons learned from Latvia's eFP experience as well as potential future challenges.

The analysis concludes that, from Latvia's perspective, the mission has exceeded expectations. One-third of all NATO member states contribute to the eFP battlegroup in Latvia, thereby providing a visible expression of Alliance solidarity. Three achievements of the NATO eFP battlegroup in Latvia deserve mention. First, the battlegroup demonstrates that the Baltic states' security concerns are taken seriously. Second, the battlegroup's presence has helped the Latvian government to reassure the domestic public that NATO's security guarantees are credible. Third, Latvian politicians, government officials, and military have been vocal about how pleased and grateful they are for Canada being the Framework Nation. The reasons are many, ranging from a shared mentality (for example, ice hockey!) to Canada's leadership. Canada's 2018 decision to extend its military presence until 2023 and increase troop numbers has been appreciated in Latvia.[1]

1 T. Wright, "Justin Trudeau adding more Canadian troops in Latvia, extending mission", *Global News*, 10 July 2018, https://globalnews.ca/news/4322396/justin-trudeau-canadian-troops-latvia-extending-mission/

Latvia's aims and interests

Since joining NATO in 2004, Latvia has sought a greater NATO military presence in the country and the Baltic region more generally.[2] Yet, prior to the eFP, the Alliance's only visible military presence had been the Baltic Air Policing mission. Even NATO-led military exercises focusing on territorial defence in the Baltics would have been too provocative. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act prevented anything more than a very limited NATO presence in the Baltics. Even the Russian-Georgian War of 2008 did not fundamentally alter the NATO-Russia relationship. Indeed, the military imbalance on NATO's eastern frontier had already been a great concern for Latvia before 2014, but NATO had no political will to address it. In the meantime, Latvia contributed to the NATO effort in Afghanistan, hoping for NATO solidarity if Russia adopted a more aggressive foreign policy. NATO's change of heart after the start of the hostilities in Ukraine was welcome news in Latvia, as establishing credible deterrence and defence in NATO's eastern flank through the placement of multinational battlegroups in the region was unimaginable several years prior. Although they are inadequate for defence, they provide conventional deterrence against a potential surprise attack.[3]

Latvia, Canada, and the other contributing Allies share an understanding of the objectives and role of the multinational battalion in Latvia. In 2016, at the Warsaw Summit, NATO member states agreed that the eFP deployments would "unambiguously demonstrate […] Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression". They noted that the battlegroups should be able to "operate in concert with national forces, present at all times in these countries, underpinned by a viable reinforcement strategy".[4]

Still, the deployment of the Canadian-led battlegroup should be evaluated against the backdrop of defence developments that have transpired in Latvia since at least 2010. After joining NATO, Latvia enjoyed a period of economic growth during which defence expenditure increased rapidly, though short of the 2 percent threshold. Thereafter, Latvia experienced a deep recession: its GDP shrank more than 20 percent and its defence expenditure fell by approximately 45 percent.[5] Latvia's economy began to grow again in

2 J. Karlsbergs, Under Secretary of State – Policy Director of the Latvian Ministry of Defence, interview by author, 17 February 2020.

3 R. Czulda, "Enhanced Forward Presence: evolution, meaning and the end game", in R. Ondrejcsak, T. H. Lippert, (eds.), *NATO at 70: outline of the Alliance today and tomorrow,* STRATPOL, 2019.

4 "Warsaw Summit Communiqué", NATO, 29 March 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm

5 D. Kļaviņš, Ž. Ozoliņa, and T. Rostoks, "Foreign policy 'on the cheap': Latvia's foreign policy experience from the economic crisis", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol.45, No.4, 2014, pp.435-456.

2011, but the defence sector saw no immediate gains due to the lack of political support. The contrast with Estonia was stark. Latvia's defence spending was around 1 percent of GDP in 2014, whereas Estonia's was at 2 percent. Even after Russia's annexation of Crimea, disagreement abounded as to how quickly Latvia could increase defence spending. The original plan was to reach 2 percent by 2020. The government, however, decided later to achieve that target in 2018 when a slower increase became clearly untenable in both political and practical terms.[6]

The Latvian military had to acquire new capabilities, participate in more military exercises, increase its overall manpower, build military infrastructure, make the national guard (*Zemessardze*) a more capable fighting force, and provide host nation support (HNS) to the eFP battlegroup and to other troops coming to Latvia for military exercises. Accordingly, various issues such as conscription, defence procurement, and NATO and Russian military training exercises have become a regular feature of public discussions. The re-established presence of Canadian land forces in Europe (this time in Latvia) reinforces the notion of "one for all and all for one" and compels Latvia to invest in previously neglected capabilities.[7] Although the eFP battlegroup has not had a huge impact on the development of the Latvian armed forces, its presence is aligned with Latvia's key foreign and security policy objectives.

Achievements

Some observers argue that the multinational battlegroups are either a tripwire force or a speed bump.[8] This characterization assumes that the battlegroups, even acting in concert with local forces, are too small to defend against an overwhelming and well-prepared military attack on the Baltic states.[9] Thus, their primary function is deterrence, not defence. The Latvian approach is different. Officials acknowledge that the main function of the battlegroup is to deter Russia, but the aim has also been to squeeze as much as possible out of the eFP battlegroup in terms of both deterrence and defence. Latvia has facilitated both integration within the battlegroup itself and its integration into the Latvian Land

6 T. Rostoks, "Building deterrence internally and externally: is Latvia capable of becoming David"? in A. Sprūds, E. Vizgunova, S. Broka, (eds.), *Latvian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2019*, Riga, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2019, pp.109-122.

7 BGen. I. Lejiņš, Latvian Army Assistant Chief of Staff, Joint Force Development, interview by author, 18 February 2020.

8 C. Leuprecht and J. Sokolsky, "Canada's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics: an enduring commitment to transatlantic security", in A. Sprūds and M. Andžāns (eds.), *Security in the Baltic Sea region: realities and prospects: The Riga Conference Papers*, Riga LIIA, 2017, p.126.

9 One study claims that NATO efforts in the Baltic region would likely succeed only if Russia is not strongly motivated to act against the Baltic states. See M. J. Mazarr *et al.*, *What deters and why: exploring requirements for effective deterrence of interstate aggression*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2018, pp.55-86.

Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade. These efforts have raised the deterrent value of the battlegroup and have arguably rendered it more automatic. Thus, it is more than just a tripwire.[10]

The military effort to create a capable fighting force has been successful. Internally, the battlegroup undergoes an arduous process of certification, at the end of which, it is certified as fully integrated and battle-ready. Interoperability is achieved through extensive preparations for each rotational deployment whereby commanding officers from each country meet months before the beginning of their deployment to Latvia and plan for how they will work together. Because a rotation comes every six months, the certification process is carried out twice a year. In terms of how the mission is defined, the commander of the Canadian contingent, Lt. Col. Michael Reekie, has highlighted that he does not perceive the mission in Latvia as a training mission. Instead, the objective of the mission is to deter the potential aggressor. The activities and military exercises in which the Canadian military unit participates while in Latvia have also been perceived as a rehearsal and not just training.[11]

Externally, the multinational battlegroup is integrated into the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade, including at the planning level. The deputy to the commander of the brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Sandis Gaugers, is a Canadian, and each department of the brigade's headquarters includes a representative from contributing nations. Representatives from the countries involved participate in the planning process as well, thus sharing expertise that the Latvian military might lack. The battlegroup is also an integral part of the national defence plan.[12] The relationship between the NATO battlegroup and the Latvian National Armed Forces is one of synergy. Integration is not just a formality. The battlegroup supports the brigade, and the brigade supports the battlegroup.[13] The battlegroup contributes capabilities that Latvia is lacking, and the Latvian armed forces can support the battlegroup's operation. The Allies usually contribute their best forces, and these are highly motivated for the mission.

Military training has been another benefit to hosting the eFP battlegroup. Latvian troops have the opportunity to train with their Canadian, Italian, Spanish, Polish, and other counterparts, and thus acquire an improved understanding of capabilities that the

10 Some interviewees stated explicitly that the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia is a not a tripwire force. BGen. I. Lejiņš, Latvian Army Assistant Chief of Staff, Joint Force Development, interview by author, 18 February 2020.

11 LCol. M. J. Reekie, Remarks to participants at the State Defence Seminar in Ādaži by the commanding officer of the eFP battlegroup in Latvia, 13 January 2020.

12 Col. S. Gaugers, Commander of the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade, interview by author, 4 February 2020.

13 BGen. G. Kerlins, Deputy Operational Commander for Operations, interview by author, 4 February 2020.

Latvian military does not have (e.g., tanks).[14] However, hosting the Canadian-led battalion has not resulted in a concerted effort to procure military equipment from Canada. Latvia has procured armoured tracked military reconnaissance vehicles (CVRTs) from the United Kingdom, howitzers from Austria, and Black Hawk helicopters from the United States. Latvia takes pride, though, that *AirBaltic* – the national airline of Latvia – has procured more than twenty Airbus A220-300 aircraft made in Canada.[15]

Put together, the presence of the Canadian-led battlegroup has exceeded Latvia's expectations. It has been a visible expression of NATO solidarity, has provided deterrence against Russia, and strengthened political and military ties, not only between Latvia and Canada, but also between Latvia and other participating nations.

Shortcomings

Are there shortcomings associated with how the eFP battlegroup has performed so far? To start with, the deterrent potential of the battlegroup is limited. In other words, "the tripwire does not deter, the Alliance does".[16] Ensuring interoperability between forces from many NATO member states and embedding them in military forces of the host nation may have a substantial deterrent effect. However, this is likely to be limited because eFP battlegroups deter through nearly guaranteed escalation if the tripwire force comes under attack. Unless NATO demonstrates the ability to gain access to the Baltic region, even in the face of heavy military resistance, the eFP battlegroups themselves may not provide a sufficient deterrent.[17]

Integrating the eFP battlegroup in the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade may have far-reaching consequences regarding the sensitive issue of who makes the decision to deploy forces and the circumstances under which they are deployed. Considerable tension exists between two decision-making logics: political and military. Militarily, NATO would benefit from the eFP battlegroup's integration in the Latvian military. It strengthens deterrence by conveying the signal that if military aggression occurs, then escalation will

14 The contribution of Canada as a Framework Nation in terms of the number of troops (the number of troops was increased from 450 to 540 troops in 2018) is less than the contributions of Great Britain and Germany in Estonia and Lithuania, respectively. Other contributors such as Spain, Italy, and Poland provide capabilities that Canada cannot give to the mission in Latvia.

15 The contract was originally with Bombardier, but the decision to buy state-of-the-art airplanes from Bombardier was made well before Canada became the Framework Nation for Latvia.

16 M. Zapfe, "Deterrence from the ground up: understanding NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Dilemma", *Survival*, Vol.59, No.3, 2017, p.157.

17 M. Zapfe, and M.C. Haas., "Access for Allies"? *The RUSI Journal*, Vol.161, No.3, 2016, pp.34-41. Interviewees from the Latvian military have emphasized this point. BGen. G. Kerlins, Deputy Operational Commander for Operations, interview by author, 4 February 2020.

follow almost automatically.[18] The Latvian military would counter the aggression, and other NATO member states would be involved because their forces are part of Latvia's national defence plan. Politically, however, NATO member states have the last say with regard to when and how their forces are used in military conflict. Thus, some Allies might back out of the conflict and refuse to respond militarily after Russia uses military force against Latvia. Due to the large number of countries in the Latvian eFP battlegroup, the possibility of this happening is non-trivial.

Hosting the NATO eFP battlegroup has added a financial burden on Latvia's already strained defence budget. To be fair, Latvia's defence spending has more than doubled since 2015, but military needs still exceed the means available. Providing HNS is expensive, requiring facilities to be built for troops coming into Latvia. The lack of appropriate facilities meant that Canadian troops had to live in tents at the Ādaži military base. Barracks for the Canadian troops should be completed in 2020, although the Canadians are not enthusiastic about moving into the new premises as they will be less spacious than the tents in use currently. Incurring such expenses is challenging for Latvia given its need to recruit more troops, procure military equipment, train military personnel to work with the newly acquired systems, build military infrastructure, and organize military exercises. Ensuring a greater NATO presence has been a priority though, so Latvia invests heavily in HNS despite the opportunity costs.[19]

The public visibility of the eFP battlegroup has also been a concern.[20] Public opinion in Latvia has been mostly favourable towards the presence of NATO troops, although Latvians and Russian-speakers are divided on most questions related to national security. A 2016 public opinion survey indicated that the public was in favour of Latvia taking the lead in creating a military deterrent against Russia, with Latvia's NATO Allies taking a more supportive approach.[21] Moreover, the public views the NATO military presence in Latvia as contributing positively to national security. In 2019, 61 percent of respondents felt that the presence of NATO troops in Latvia strengthens security, whereas 22 percent thought that it negatively impacted national security. These numbers have been largely constant

18 Regarding the potential conflict scenarios in which the eFP battlegroup in Latvia might be involved, consensus exists that troops from other NATO member states would only be involved in a case of major military conflict. Canadian (and other) troops would not be involved in hybrid war-like situation.

19 Calculating the financial cost of providing HNS is difficult. The Ministry of Defence estimates that military infrastructural investment amounts to approximately €50 million annually. Not all of it can be attributed to HNS, but providing HNS is certainly costly. Latvia's defence budget currently stands at €630 million.

20 Canada's contribution to Baltic regional security has been a low visibility issue in Canadian public debates. Unsurprisingly, the visibility of troops is almost always higher in the receiving state than in the sending state. Latvian decision-makers are relatively unbothered because the government-to-government relationship between Latvia and Canada has worked well in recent years.

21 Public opinion survey commissioned by the Centre for Security and Strategic Research, June 2016.

since 2015.[22] Regarding the presence of the Canadian-led eFP battlegroup, 45 percent of respondents had positive views. 18 percent held negative views.[23]

Another concern relates to the potential misbehaviour of NATO troops and staged provocations. In this respect, the eFP battlegroup has been largely spared of negative publicity since 2017. There have been no major incidents involving troops from the represented nations, largely thanks to the extensive instruction troops receive before the rotation and the restrictive rules they face when stationed at the Ādaži military base. Although troops need not always stay at the base, policies are in place to limit the use of alcohol and other substances. Thus, local coverage of the battlegroup has been overly positive; that is, the media provides extensive information about military exercises and engagement with communities across Latvia.[24]

Lessons learned

There are several lessons learned in light of Latvia's eFP experience. The main lesson is that Latvia can count on its NATO Allies. Since 2014, NATO has changed its approach to Russia, reassured the Baltic states, and took measures to deter Russia. The approach has been to deter Russia without provoking it. There has also been a concerted effort to build capabilities that would support the eFP battlegroup in Latvia, although much remains to be done. The diverse, multinational composition of the Canadian-led eFP battlegroup also sends a very strong political statement that both deters Russia and reassures the Latvian public.

Canada has been praised for its substantial financial allocation for the mission, as well as its adequate manning of the mission. The impression left on Latvian political decision-makers and the military has been that Canada takes its obligations seriously. Latvia could not have wished for a better Framework Nation. Although many observers assume that the Baltic states would rather have a US military presence, having the United States as a Framework nation would have likely made integrating American troops with the troops of the other contributing nations more difficult. Hosting Canadian troops is less controversial than hosting US troops because the political relations between the sending state and the receiving state would have been more hierarchical, invoking fears in the public that Latvia's autonomy would be reduced. US troops are nevertheless present in Latvia on a rotational basis to provide extended deterrence, as well as for military exercises, despite not being part

22 Public opinion survey commissioned by the Latvian Ministry of Defence, data from 2015 to 2019.

23 *Ibid.*

24 The eFP battlegroup in Latvia has not been spared of incidents which, unfortunately, are part of the military profession. Two Albanian ordnance engineers suffered lethal injuries in an explosion in May 2019. A fatality in December 2019 was a Polish soldier who collapsed while jogging.

of the local eFP battlegroup.

Determining whether deterrence has worked is difficult. Still, the deployment of the eFP battlegroup to Latvia has arguably not made the regional security environment worse. Russia's reaction to deployments has been moderate, with no escalation in either rhetoric or military measures.[25] Moreover, Russia has consistently expressed bewilderment regarding the Baltic states' concerns over the possibility of Russian military aggression. Although such statements cannot be taken at face value, Russia's overall behaviour demonstrates that it has refrained from using the deployment of eFP battlegroups to the Baltic states as a pretext for stoking tensions in the Baltic region.

Conclusion

Latvia's experience with hosting the NATO eFP battlegroup has been largely positive. The experiment of integrating forces from diverse NATO member states may interest the Alliance as a whole. During the Cold War, there was integration on the division level with brigades from several countries, but the NATO eFP experiment indicates that successful integration can also be achieved at the battalion level. This may have broader implications for NATO's future operations. What works in Latvia in the context of the eFP, may work elsewhere. Integration on the battalion level has not been seriously considered before but has been routinely practiced at the Ādaži military base over the past few years. What was initially regarded as a weakness is increasingly being seen as a strength.

There are, however, lingering questions regarding numerous aspects of the battlegroup in Latvia and the NATO eFP more generally. The battlegroup has been created under specific historical, political, and military circumstances, and it is likely to be overtaken by developments in the international security environment at some point. In 2018, Canada extended its commitment to lead the eFP battlegroup until 2023. It remains to be seen whether this NATO arrangement proves to be durable. At this point, it is hard to imagine NATO continuing the same rotational multinational arrangement every six months, ten years from now. Deterrence has to be applied for a considerable period of time; for now, NATO's Canadian-led eFP in Latvia remains a temporary strategy.

25 B. Frederick *et al.*, *Assessing Russian Reactions to US and NATO Posture Enhancements*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2017.

7

Germany as framework nation

Heinrich Brauss and Nikolaus Carstens

The decision taken by NATO's leaders at their 2016 Summit in Warsaw[1] to enhance the Alliance's military presence in the Baltic region and to deploy multinational battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland was seen by many as the most visible element of NATO's efforts to strengthen its deterrence and defence posture.[2] For the first time the Alliance deployed combat-ready army formations on the territory of Eastern European countries on a persistent basis.

This chapter presents a German perspective on the eFP mission. The core argument is that the eFP mission has been indispensable for strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence posture in the Baltic region. Nevertheless, the German-led Battlegroup Lithuania (BG LTU) has had to grapple with several operational challenges throughout its deployment.

Strategic context

In 2014, the security environment in and around Europe fundamentally changed. For NATO, new challenges and threats primarily emerged from two strategic directions. To the east, Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea profoundly altered the conditions for maintaining security in Europe. To the south, the "arc of instability" and violence stretching across North Africa and the Middle East fuelled terrorism and triggered mass migration, which affected the stability of Europe. These two major challenges are different, but equally important for the security of Allies. NATO therefore agreed to a dual approach: significantly strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence posture and projecting stability to its southern neighbourhood, primarily by supporting partners there.[3] As a consequence, NATO must be able to respond to multiple challenges and threats from several regions, including on short notice, to ensure it has the

1 "Warsaw Summit Communiqué", NATO, 9 July 2016, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm/

2 "NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", NATO, March 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_04/20190402_1904-factsheet_efp_en.pdf/: "NATO's battlegroups form part of the biggest reinforcement of NATO's collective defence in a generation".

3 "Warsaw Summit Communiqué", NATO.

right forces in the right place at the right time.

This is particularly relevant with a view to Russia, which has shown it is prepared to use military force to attain geopolitical goals. Its foreign and security policy actions are designed to restore Russia's great power status on par with, and as a rival of, the United States and, at the same time, to achieve control over "zones of privileged interest"[4] in Russia's neighbourhood – at the expense of the sovereignty and security of its neighbouring states. Moscow is pursuing a policy of confrontation toward the West to undermine the existing security order. Its hybrid operations, including disinformation, cyber attacks, subversive actions, continued military build-up, and large-scale exercises on NATO's borders, are designed to destabilise Allies from within and intimidate them from the exterior.[5] As part of its doctrine and as regularly rehearsed in the biannual Zapad exercises, Russia prepares for regional wars at its periphery, including using nuclear means.

Countering Russia's strategy – aim and purpose of eFP

Initially, NATO's response focused on preparing the gradual reinforcement of those Allies located along its border with Russia. The Readiness Action Plan, agreed upon at the NATO Summit 2014 in Wales,[6] comprised a range of air, maritime, and land adaptation measures, including reinforcing the NATO Air Policing Mission over the Baltic states; tripling the size of the NATO Response Force to become a high-readiness joint force of some 40,000 troops – with its "spearhead", the multinational Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), of some 5,000 troops ready to move its initial elements within a few days; enhancing the readiness of the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast (HQ MNC NE) in Szczecin, Poland in charge of collective defence planning in the Baltic region; preparatory measures for reinforcement (infrastructure, prepositioning of equipment and supplies); advance planning for reinforcement in five regions along NATO's border; enhancing NATO's exercise programme; expanding NATO Early Warning and Airborne (NAEW) and Short-Range Nuclear Forces (SNF) engagement in the region, starting exercise and training programs (TACET), rotating forces and capabilities through the region under the aegis of the forward presence (for example, in 2016 and 2017 Germany rotated a Deployable Control and Reporting Centre (CRC) to Latvia for air surveillance and system training of operators) and establishing a strategy on NATO's role in countering hybrid warfare.

4 "Interview given by President D. Medvedev to Channel One, Rossia, and NTV", President of Russia, 31 August 2008, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/48301

5 D. Johnson, "General Gerasimov on the Vectors of the Development of Military Strategy", *Russian Studies Series 4/19*, NATO Defense College, 30 March 2019, http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=585#

6 "Wales Summit Declaration", NATO, 5 September 2014, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

However, a comprehensive analysis of Russia's posture showed that exclusively relying on reinforcement was insufficient due to a number of geopolitical and military factors. First, in a war, the Baltic states could be detached from the remainder of NATO's territory if Russia managed to block the so-called Suwalki corridor between Kaliningrad and Belarus. Second, Russia has achieved military superiority with conventional forces in the Baltic region. Significant Russian high-readiness forces can be massed within a few days on Russia's western border. Third, there is a critical time-distance gap between a possible deployment of superior Russian forces and a build-up of substantial Alliance forces for reinforcement. Moscow has thus the option of launching a pre-emptive attack, supported by cyber-attacks, a disinformation campaign and subversive actions on Allied territories, and achieving a land grab before NATO can effectively react militarily. Fourth, Russia's anti-access/area denial capabilities in Kaliningrad – multiple air defence systems, long-range artillery, long-range precision strike capabilities and electronic warfare systems – could in a conflict impede or prohibit the movement of Allied ground, air, and maritime forces into and across the Baltic region. Finally, the deployment of new ground-based intermediate-range nuclear-capable cruise missiles (SSC-8) underpins Russia's capability to strike key targets across Europe, leaving US territory unaffected and thus signalling Moscow's aim to decouple Europe's security from US extended nuclear deterrence. Russia might conclude it could confront NATO with a fait accompli and convince it to stand down for fear of nuclear escalation and could thus achieve a strategic success without a long war. NATO must therefore be able to deny Russia any options for achieving its desired strategic effect. Accordingly, NATO is pursuing three primary goals: foster resilience against malicious cyber activities and disinformation, refuse Russia the option of seizing territory with conventional forces in a short war, and counter Russia's nuclear threat. To this end, NATO has established and is implementing a comprehensive long-term programme.[7]

In this context, the decision to enhance NATO's forward military presence is significant. The four eFP battlegroups deployed to the Baltic states and Poland (led by Canada, Germany, the UK, and the US) send several messages to Moscow. Even a limited incursion would immediately be countered not just with national defence forces but NATO forces, including from the US, the three strongest European nations (France, Germany, the UK) and the three nuclear powers (the US, France, the UK). The four framework nations represent a united commitment by North America and Europe to protecting those Allies. If Russia were engaged with them, it would be involved in a war with the Alliance as a whole and thus face the risk of nuclear escalation with potential incalculable implications for itself. This is deterrence in essence.

7 H. Brauss, *NATO beyond 70: renewing a culture of readiness*, Tallinn, International Centre for Defence and Security, 2018.

One year after the Warsaw Summit, in June 2017, all eFP battlegroups were in place and operational. Currently, over twenty Allies from across the Alliance contribute forces. France has deployed a military contingent, which alternates between Estonia and Lithuania on an annual basis. Allies have already in peacetime granted SACEUR, NATO's supreme military commander in Europe, Operational Control (OPCON) for Situational Awareness, Strategic Communications, and Posture Management. Furthermore, NATO's eFP is complemented by the US European Deterrence Initiative providing, *inter alia*, for an Armoured Brigade Combat Team deployed to Poland on a rotational basis plus a number of enabling capabilities. That being said, the eFP deterrence function must be underpinned by an effective NATO reinforcement capability to deny Russia success in launching any form of regional attack. This capability essentially depends on rapid decision-making, maintaining sufficient forces at high readiness and the ability to move them quickly over great distances to support threatened allies.

eFP military lessons identified – achievements and shortcomings[8]

Since the Wales Summit, German land forces have continuously contributed to the wide range of adaptation measures. However, the establishment of eFP battlegroups marked a new dimension of military demands for the German Armed Forces. During the Cold War, West Germany, located at the edge of the Iron Curtain and exposed to a huge military threat, was benefitting from its Allies' solidarity, resolve, and readiness to defend its territory by staging a significant number of forces in West Germany. Therefore, in light of the potential military threat from Russia and the need for credible deterrence, there was a broad sentiment among German political decision-makers and the population that it was time to show similar determination and solidarity with East European Allies. Ergo, Germany was prepared to take over responsibility as one of the four Framework Nations for the eFP battlegroups and volunteered to provide the battlegroup in Lithuania. In February 2017, the first elements of BG LTU achieved Initial Operating Capability in Rukla, Lithuania, only seven months after the political decision on eFP was taken at the Warsaw Summit.

Multinationality – opportunities and challenges

One of the initial challenges in establishing the force was to find the right balance between the degree of multinationality and operational effectiveness of BG LTU. On the one hand, the number of flags in a battlegroup increases the deterrence effect by sending a message to the potential aggressor that in case of an attack more than one country would

8 The following lessons are based on reports by the German Battle Group (BG) Commanders.

be involved. An attack on Lithuania would immediately engage forces from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway and swiftly trigger a response by NATO as a whole. On the other hand, consistent with longstanding Allied military principles and experience, increased multinationalism within a fighting force creates additional interoperability issues that tend to reduce military effectiveness in war-fighting scenarios.[9]

Taking the deterrent function of BG LTU into account, Germany opted for a multinational force with both fixed and rotating partners. The Netherlands is one of the partners that continuously contributes a manoeuvre company to the fighting force. Due to the long history of bi-national cooperation, it was possible to build on the deep integration that exists between both armies. The same applies to Norway with whom close ties were already formed due to the common tasks in the Initial VJTF(L) 2015 and the VJTF(L) 2019. In contrast, France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Luxemburg, and Norway do not contribute units permanently, but within a reliable, recurring rotation cycle. The current experience shows that multinationality works with well-established partners.

From the beginning, emphasis was put on enabling BG LTU for a joint operation and directing joint fires. The integration of a Joint Tactical Attack Controller in each unit, as well as the availability of a Joint Fires Coordination Group, are to ensure this important capability. In addition, a national reinforcement concept for BG LTU has been established to make additional combat support and combat service support capabilities available in times of a crisis. This allows rapid reinforcement as the situation requires. These reinforcements from Germany are frequently exercised within the scope of the Iron Wolf exercise programme.[10]

Practical experience in exercises of BG LTU has revealed that the manoeuvre companies need to retain their national composition in order not to lose combat effectiveness. In terms of command and control, the exercises conducted so far have demonstrated that with an interoperable Battle Management System, the language skills are sufficient to operate effectively in English from the battalion level down to the company level, whereas the companies should operate in their native language to remain effective. The assessment differs regarding the multinational logistic unit that has been established for BG LTU. In merging logistic capabilities, it was possible to create synergies and save resources, which is required when short on logistic assets due to the operational tempo in most countries' armed forces.

Due to the tight exercise programme and the force's composition involving the same

9 The issue of the right balance has frequently been addressed in the BG Commanders' After Action Reviews (classified).

10 "Reinforcement Concept for the enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Lithuania (classified)", German Army Command, Strausberg, Germany, 15 February 2017.

rotating partners, BG LTU currently serves as a catalyst for overcoming interoperability challenges between the national units concerned that still exist. Significant progress has been achieved in both technical interoperability and developing a common mindset and doctrine. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go until the Alliance interoperability goals are fully achieved. However, the consecutive German-led battlegroups have shown themselves able to fulfil their mission with remarkable combat effectiveness.

Military effectiveness – a cross-cutting challenge

By nature, the eFP battlegroups are limited in size and capabilities, as they comprise roughly up to 1,200 soldiers in each six-month rotation. The full deterrence effect will only be achieved if all levels of command (from the battalion up to the corps level) are able to take over their roles and responsibilities in full in case of a fast-developing crisis. Therefore, as stated above, a convincing Alliance concept for reinforcement remains decisive. Combat support and combat service support forces held at the divisional and corps level of command should also be adequately addressed in this context. Once a consistent reinforcement concept is in place, it will need to be exercised in the region. To ensure coherence, such NATO exercises should be closely coordinated with the US reinforcement plans and activities under the US Defender exercise series. Only by doing that will the magnitude of logistic challenges and the necessary sequence in the flow of forces become clear and ready to be tested and improved. Such an approach will not only send a credible message towards the potential adversary, but also help enhance Allies' own mechanisms and procedures of managing reinforcements.

Accordingly, interoperability issues are not only a challenge for BG LTU itself, but also affect the relationship between BG LTU and the brigade level of the Home Defence Forces. For the time being, the eFP battlegroups and the Home Defence Forces would likely be the only forces in place initially, if the Alliance faced a surprise attack. BG LTU was thus placed in Rukla, co-located with the staff of the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade. This allows for daily interaction and facilitates common training and exercise planning as well as tactical planning. The integration of BG LTU into the Lithuanian National Defence Plan and the synchronisation of that plan with the respective NATO Response Plan has matured significantly.

Although there is to date only caveated tactical command granted for training and exercises as well as strategic communication, BG LTU effectively reinforces the Lithuanian Brigade significantly in terms of quantity and quality of capabilities. Close and daily cooperation gives a sense of full integration into the Brigade structures, thus leaving the Transfer of Authority (TOA) to full Tactical Command (TACOM) from Germany to the

Lithuanian armed forces in times of crises likely to be a formal act rather than a real issue for political discussions. Moreover, ample common training events of BG LTU and the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade prepare both formations for common employments and allow for the development of common tactics, techniques and procedures. Close common preparation in peacetime enhances the effectiveness significantly when a crisis occurs.

In addition, Germany supports Lithuania in its efforts to build up effective artillery capabilities with the modern armoured howitzer 2000 on the brigade level and to integrate its new Boxer fighting vehicle into the army. The affiliation with the German division that provides the eFP units has fostered the binational relationship and provides additional training opportunities for the Lithuanian brigade to enhance its military effectiveness. Partly taking over German doctrine and processes for example in the area of logistics by the Lithuanian army is an important contribution to easing interoperability issues.

Moreover, BG LTU is a catalyst for creating a collective defence and readiness mindset. Until the VJTF(L) and eFP became a prominent task for the German army and helped shift the focus towards collective defence, International Crisis Management was the daily business and shaped the mindset of the German army. Readiness and deployment of battalion and brigade size formations with short notice-to-move timelines was not on everybody's mind and had not been trained specifically for more than a decade.

Regularly rotating the eFP battlegroups as agreed at the Warsaw Summit incurs additional efforts and costs in terms of moving personnel and equipment every six months back and forth from Germany to Lithuania. Nevertheless, these rotations create opportunities. Rotating complete units via train with their entire equipment has increased the routine for tactical units to deploy over great distances and has trained the logistic system throughout the entire German Armed Forces. This fact and the high status of readiness of these units within Lithuania as well as a challenging training cycle and demanding certification exercises have significantly contributed to developing a mindset of readiness throughout the entire German army that is required to meet the challenges of credible deterrence and collective defence.

Countering hybrid warfare challenges

Finally, there is an additional aspect that has led to identifying a wide range of lessons to be learned by the German and Lithuanian army. eFP battlegroups are experiencing the new form of modern warfare. Malicious cyber activities and disinformation campaigns, which are decisive elements of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy, have been experienced by the battlegroups almost on a daily basis. This has been a new challenge for military units, traditionally not well prepared for coping with this kind of threat. Behaviour, procedures,

and capabilities (e.g., PsyOps and Cyber Domain Teams) had to be adjusted. Close liaison between BG LTU and Lithuanian officials has proven vital to counter disinformation. Immediate exchange of information about the facts and a quick, coordinated response are critical. Although there have been several disinformation attempts in recent years, none of them were able to take hold among the population due to the swift common reaction of BG LTU and Lithuanian officials.

While efforts have been made to reinforce the BG LTU's staff with additional expertise, it is important to stress the responsibilities of the other levels of command. Countering this new threat successfully necessitates involvement of all levels of command. As the regional custodian, HQ MNC NE ensures the regional perspective and analysis required for developing the right instruments.

Conclusion

After more than three years of experience with eFP battlegroups in the Baltic region, from a German perspective, one can draw the conclusion that eFP continues to serve as an indispensable building block of NATO's strengthened deterrence and defence posture. Its enduring relevance is reflected, *inter alia*, by the continuing and convincing troop contributions of NATO Allies. The German Army is prepared to continue supporting the Baltic Allies as a Framework Nation for eFP in Lithuania as long as political decision-makers deem necessary.

However, eFP alone is not capable of ensuring credible regional deterrence. It should not be seen in isolation but in the context of all relevant decisions taken at the Wales, Warsaw, and Brussels Summits to strengthen NATO's posture. Significant improvements have been achieved, but the process of adaptation to the potential military threat in the region remains inchoate. eFP must be underpinned by a viable reinforcement capability and a robust command and control capacity that is effectively trained. To this end, the NATO Readiness Initiative must be implemented expeditiously, the NATO Response Force must be further adapted, and the establishment of the conditions for unconstrained military mobility across Europe must be accelerated. In light of the continuous Russian conventional and nuclear build-up, air and missile defence must be improved considerably, and US units should be present persistently in every Baltic state, as they would further enhance the eFP's deterrence effect.[11]

That being said, eFP has proven its importance to prepare the Alliance better for the requirements of collective defence, in particular by:

11 See H. Brauss, T. Lawrence, and K. Stoicescu, "Capability and Resolve – Deterrence, Security and Stability in the Baltic Region", Tallinn, *ICDS Policy Paper*, 2020.

- serving as a catalyst for reducing interoperability challenges on the tactical level;
- effectively contributing to creating a mindset of readiness;
- serving as a test bed for how to cope with hybrid threats on the tactical level.

The eFP mission illustrates the Alliance's ability to adapt swiftly and respond appropriately to the new challenges set by Russia. Lessons identified on a daily basis in exercises and training during eFP deployments continue to inform the efforts made by troop contributing states and the Alliance to improve their instruments of military power. It remains a process in motion for the years to come with a view to ensuring effective deterrence and the ability for collective defence.

8

Lithuania as host nation

Margarita Šešelgytė

Located in a geopolitically precarious region, Lithuania has, throughout its history, experienced severe security challenges, some followed by long periods of occupation. This history has impacted how Lithuania has defined its security interests, seeing the state – and sovereignty, specifically – as the main referent object.[1] Article 5 of the Washington Treaty has helped ensure the defence of the Lithuanian state from major external threats since 2004, but its sufficiency has come under question after Russia annexed Crimea and discussion ensued over NATO's willingness and ability to defend the Baltic states. Lithuanian security documents note that a conventional attack by Russia is one of the most dangerous hypotheticals.[2] Although such an attack is improbable, the dangers remain great because of the severe military balance facing local NATO forces in the Baltic Sea Region. Nevertheless, the eFP deployment, decided at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, improves Lithuanian security. Even the usually reserved former Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė admitted that, in Lithuania's case, for the "first time after our accession to NATO, we have guaranteed serious and long-term military commitments".[3] But, from a purely military perspective, the asymmetry between Russia and NATO is still a problem.

This chapter argues that the real value of eFP Battlegroup Lithuania (BG LTU) should be viewed in combination with other measures, such as the increased frequency and intensity of NATO exercises in the region, strengthened air policing, elevated interoperability of NATO forces, and potentially faster reaction times. The eFP presence is symbolically important as, on the one hand, it reassures the Baltic states and Poland that

1 D. Jakniūnaitė, "Changes in security policy and perceptions of the Baltic States", *Journal on Baltic Security*, Vol.2, No.2, 2016, p.8; and M. Šešelgytė, "A midget warrior: security choices of Lithuania", in R. Rublovskis, M. Šešelgyte, and R. Kaljurand (eds.), *Defence and Security for the small: perspective from the Baltic States,* Reykjavik, Centre for Small State Studies, 2013, p.51.

2 *National Security Strategy of Republic of Lithuania*, 17 January 2017, https://kam.lt/download/57457/2017-nacsaugstrategijaen.pdf, p.5.

3 "NATO viršūnių susitikime – istorinė diena Lietuvos ir Baltijos regiono saugumui", *ietuvos Respublikos, Prezidentas*, 8 July 2016, https://www.lrp.lt/lt/nato-virsuniu-susitikime-istorine-diena-lietuvos-ir-baltijos-regiono-saugumui/25639

they are full-fledged NATO members whose security concerns are taken seriously, and, on the other hand, it deters Russia. Yet, questions about sufficiency linger. This chapter analyzes BG LTU and discusses its aims, expectations, and the interests involved as well as its achievements, its challenges, and the lessons learned from it.

Aims and interests

Amid aggressive Russian actions in Ukraine, the Baltic countries worry that Russia might attack them next. Large-scale defence reforms in Russia and its political behavior *vis-à-vis* Lithuania have strengthened this perception even more among political elites and citizens. Eighty-two percent of Lithuanian respondents defined relations with Russia as bad in a recent survey.[4] The existing military imbalance between Russia and NATO made Lithuanian decision-makers fear the worst-case fait accompli scenario, where NATO is incapable of reacting in time. A Center for European Policy Analysis report shows that Russia's forces in its European territory outmatch the NATO forces located in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, NATO's ability to defend the Baltic states is aggravated by the Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) bubble and hamstrung by the NATO-Russia Founding Act.[5] Compounding the fear of a fait accompli scenario are political considerations about alliance unity and willingness to defend the Baltic states, especially since some NATO members have pursued positive ties with Russia. Therefore, close bilateral military cooperation with Washington has been crucial for Vilnius and so Lithuanian armed forces actively participated in US-led military operations.[6] Lithuania's security stance is strongly pro-Atlanticist, which reflects its politico-strategic calculations, the importance of US hardware for defence procurements, and the need for an integrated regional approach towards defence.

Lithuania has pursued several goals for its defence policy since 2014. The first is to mitigate the existing military imbalance in the region and to ensure NATO's timely and adequate reaction against a potential Russian attack. The second is to reassure members of society that NATO protects them. The third is to establish viable conventional deterrence *vis-à-vis* Russia. The fourth is to strengthen resilience against Russian unconventional warfare. After all, Russia has been conducting so-called hybrid operations that encompass information and cyber interference activities. Such efforts against Lithuania have increased since the Ukrainian crisis began, with the Lithuanian State Security Department warning that Russian information campaigns, cyber-attacks, and other influence operations aim

4 "Apklausa: Lietuvos gyventojai kaip keliančią didžiausią grėsmę įvardijo Rusiją", *DELFI*, 29 January 2019, https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/apklausa-lietuvos-gyventojai-kaip-keliancia-didziausia-gresme-ivardina-rusija.d?id=80231873

5 E. Lucas and A.W. Mitchell, "Central European security after Crimea: the case for strengthening NATO's Eastern Defences", *Center for European Policy Analysis*, No.25, 2014, pp.1-10.

6 Šešelgytė, "A midget warrior", p.33; and *National Security Strategy of Republic of Lithuania*, 2017.

to "antagonize society and reduce its trust in democratic process, state institutions and officials" and to weaken Lithuania's will to resist. While hybrid offensive activities have been employed across Europe and Eurasia, the Baltic countries are particularly vulnerable to such activities as NATO's front-line states.[7]

How BG LTU helps Lithuania to achieve its defence goals

The BG LTU is led by Germany as the Framework Nation and is supported by forces coming from the Netherlands, Norway, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, and Iceland. BG LTU's main role is to reinforce deterrence provided by NATO and, in the case of conflict, to defend the territory of the Alliance alongside national forces. Although these forces are expected to defend Lithuanian territory should conflict break out, their main function is arguably to ensure deterrence by being a "tripwire". Dianne Pfundstein Chamberlain argues that "these small forces are intended to serve as 'tripwires' signaling to Russia that an attack on one of these states would result in immediate escalation to a full-blown conflict with NATO. That is, the four battalions are supposed to convince Russia that moving against one of its Baltic neighbors would not be worth the risk of a wider war with the United States and its European allies" as this "would inflict substantial costs on an attacker and deny it an ability to quickly achieve its objectives".[8] BG LTU reduces the possibility that a conventional conflict is localized and NATO is "cut out", making the worst case scenario of a fait accompli even less likely – a view affirmed by the National Threat Assessment Report.[9] Due to deterrence's psychological nature, even small forces could produce a sufficient effect if the opponent gets a clear signal that an unwanted response would follow any attack. Thus, NATO's unity is one of the core elements useful for deterring Russia, and so BG LTU might be too small to respond effectively to a Russian conventional attack but just enough to dissuade Russian elite from making it. Reinforcing the deterrence effect of BG LTU are the three other eFP battlegroups, and Allied national armed forces in the region.

BG LTU's tripwire function positively impacts other, maybe less visible, but still important pillars of Lithuanian security. First, through training and joint exercises, BG LTU contributes to the modernisation and readiness of Lithuanian armed forces via

7 Department of State Security of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Threat Assessment 2018*, 2018, https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ENG.pdf, p.58; and E. Lucas, *The coming storm: Baltic Sea security report,* Washington, DC, Center for European Policy Analysis, 2015.

8 D. P. Chamberlain, "NATO's Baltic tripwire forces won't stop Russia", *The National Interest*, 21 July 2016, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/natos-baltic-tripwire-forces-wont-stop-russia-17074; and W. Clark *et al.*, "Closing NATO's Baltic Gap*"*, *International Centre for Defence and Security*, May 2016, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/ICDS_Report-Closing_NATO_s_Baltic_Gap.pdf, p.8.

9 Department of State Security, *National threat assessment 2018*, p.58.

improved interoperability and competence in operating military equipment. Second, incoming forces get the opportunity to know the environment and the nature of a threat. With the arrival of eFP forces, the number of exercises has become more frequent and the participants more numerous. The other eFP battlegroups deployed in the region also train together on occasion, thereby enhancing regional cooperation. Third, hosting BG LTU has forced Lithuania to invest more in infrastructure. Between 2016 and 2019, Lithuania has invested around €35 million alone in building the main polygons at Pabradė and Rukla and warehouses in Linkaičiai. Lithuania is planning to invest at least the same amount in the next five years. Fourth, BG LTU has spurred the improvement of administrative procedures for NATO forces to enter Baltic states and to move within them. The permits are now issued in 24 hours for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), in 48 hours for eFP battlegroups, and in five days for other NATO/EU units.

The political elite and members of society appreciate these benefits. A 2017 public survey revealed that over 81 percent of Lithuanians support the permanent presence of NATO Allies on Lithuanian territory and 67 percent believe that BG LTU will help deter adversaries.[10] In 2018, these numbers were, respectively, 83 percent and 76 percent. Strong support for the eFP presence in Lithuania could be partly attributed to society's generally high support for NATO. A 2019 Ministry of the National Defence survey has revealed that 86 percent of Lithuanians positively assess Lithuanian membership in NATO. These numbers were the highest over five years, making Lithuania among the biggest supporters of NATO.[11] Bolstering such positivity is the smart and creative civil-military activities performed by BG LTU. For instance, Dutch soldiers serving in BG LTU on several occasions have provided first aid for civilians.

Going beyond the primary mandate of BG LTU, the role of Germany deserves special attention. Despite various policy differences with Lithuania (e.g., Nord Stream, NATO-Russia Founding Act), Germany has shown strong leadership by assuming the role of Framework Nation. Considering its pacifist strategic culture and powerful pro-Russian lobby, this decision was difficult for Germany and was possible largely due to Chancellor Angela Merkel's strong support. Given these challenges, Germany's participation in the eFP signals Alliance unity and its commitments.

German-Lithuanian cooperation has intensified beyond eFP. With plans to invest over

10 S. Gudavičius, "Lietuviai remia ir narystę NATO, ir Aljanso bataliono", *Verslo Žinios*, 27 January 2017, https://www.vz.lt/verslo-aplinka/2017/01/27/lietuviai-remia-ir-naryste-nato-ir-aljanso-bataliono-dislokavima#ixzz6DqRoE1dD

11 "NATO vertinimas Lietuvoje, aukščiausias per penkerius metus", Ministry of National Defence, 9 January 2019, https://kam.lt/lt/naujienos_874/aktualijos_875/nato_vertinimas_lietuvoje__auksciausias_per_penkerius_metus; and M. Fagan and J. Poushter, "NATO Seen Favourably across Member States", Pew Research Center, 9 February 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/09/nato-seen-favorably-across-member-states/

€100 million, Germany is the biggest investor in Lithuania's eFP infrastructure. Since 2017, Lithuania, together with Germany, has participated in the UN stabilisation operation MINUSMA in Mali. Lithuania has also sent a boat inspection group to a German vessel in the EU-led Operation Sophia. In 2018, it affiliated its Iron Wolf brigade to a German division. In 2020, the Lithuanian and German chiefs of special operations forces agreed on a strategic vision of cooperation. Reinforcing German-Lithuanian military cooperation are procurement contracts. Lithuania and Germany have signed a contract for the procurement of PZH 2000 in 2015 and Boxer fighting vehicles in 2016. The latter is the biggest procurement contract in Lithuania's independent history. Although these decisions were taken prior to BG LTU's deployment and thus not directly linked, defence procurements of this amount usually commit both parties for further cooperation. Moreover, German equipment makes Lithuanian forces more interoperable with their German counterparts. Put together, Germany has improved its standing in Lithuanian society. Opinion surveys demonstrate that Germany occupies first place among Lithuanian strategic partners in defence.[12]

Hybrid threats, involving cyber and information operations, were already a major concern for Lithuania before 2015, but worries about them have intensified ever since. Martin Zapfe has outlined three potential scenarios of Russian hybrid attacks on the eFP battlegroups: crime or accidents, civilian unrest involving Russian-speaking minorities that is Kremlin-supported or directed, and organized violence below the conventional threshold. Still, as Zapfe adds, the eFP battlegroups are not designed for hybrid threats since their "conceptual comfort zone is 'conventional realm'".[13] In Lithuania, dealing with hybrid scenarios is not the responsibility of BG LTU, but rather of the Ministry of Interior, national cyber security or strategic communication capabilities, and crisis management institutions. However, since NATO troops have arrived in Lithuania, they have instantly become targets for Russian hybrid attacks. Two out of Zapfe's three scenarios have already happened in Lithuania. The first incident occurred when the NATO battalion had just arrived in Lithuania. On the eve of Lithuanian Independence Day on 15 February 2017, the speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament received a letter accusing German troops of raping a Lithuanian minor from a foster home. A police investigation determined that this incident was a false provocation. Another incident was directed towards the families of Dutch soldiers who were harassed by telephone calls communicating in English with

12 "NATO vertinimas Lietuvoje – aukščiausias per penkerius metus", Ministry of National Defence, 9 January 2019, https://kam.lt/lt/naujienos_874/aktualijos_875/nato_vertinimas_lietuvoje__auksciausias_per_penkerius_metus

13 M. Zapfe, "'Hybrid' threats and NATO's Forward Presence", *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.4, No.7, 2016, pp.1-4.

a strong Russian accent and telling them to leave Lithuania.[14] These scenarios did not generate wider unrest or dissatisfaction with NATO troops in Lithuania but they have clearly demonstrated that BG LTU can be implicated in a hybrid scenario.

Does BG LTU address the military imbalance?

Although BG LTU might ensure sufficient deterrence *vis-à-vis* Russia through its psychologic effect, Russia's A2/AD bubble, which consists of various ranged Russian air defence systems, could pose problems for NATO. A recent FOI (Swedish Defence Agency) report questions the robustness of Russian capabilities, but NATO might still not be able to react in a timely fashion.[15]

The Suwałki Gap is yet another potential challenge for the Baltic states' defensibility. It is a narrow 80-km land strip on the Lithuanian-Polish border "squeezed" between Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad enclave. If Russia seizes it during the armed conflict, then the Baltic states would be "cut off" from the rest of NATO. Battlegroup Poland is near Suwałki, but small-sized battlegroups may be insufficient against determined Russian forces. Lithuania and Poland have taken other steps to solve the Suwałki problem. In January 2020, they signed an act of affiliation between Lithuania's Iron Wolf Mechanized Brigade and Poland's 15th Mechanized Brigade, with both assigned to NATO's Multinational Division North East headquarters so as to "train and act together in order to protect the Suwałki Gap".[16]

Still, keeping in mind the local military imbalance between NATO and Russia, defensive success might depend on reaction times, which might be hampered either by slow political processes in NATO (and member states) or by the inability of NATO forces to move quickly to the region due to diverging legal systems and unsuitable infrastructure. A RAND study argued that seven brigades "including three heavy armored brigades – adequately supported by airpower, land-based fires, and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities should be deployed in the Baltic states in order to prevent a capture of one of the Baltic capitals during less than 60 hours".[17] Another report more modestly suggested that NATO "must deploy, as a minimum, a multinational 'battalion-plus' battle group with a range of enablers and force multipliers in each of the Baltic states,

14 "Baltijos šalyse tarnaujančių NATO karių artimiesiems grasinimai telefonu", LRT, 9 August 2019, https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pasaulyje/6/1086830/baltijos-salyse-tarnaujanciu-nato-kariu-artimiesiems-grasinimai-telefonu

15 R. Dalsjö et al., Russia A2/AD in the Baltic Sea region: capabilities, countermeasures and implications, Stockholm, FOI, March 2019.

16 "Poland and Lithuania to plan joint Suwalki Gap Defence", LRT, 29 January 2020, https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1137647/poland-and-lithuania-to-plan-joint-suwalki-gap-defence

17 D. A. Shlapak and M. W. Johnson, *Reinforcing deterence on NATO's Eastern flank: wargaming the defence of the Baltics*, Santa Monica, RAND, 2016.

with one nation or an established multinational formation providing its core. Together with the additional US Army presence, which should also be built up to a battalion size in each Baltic country, such a NATO force would be able create a 'speedbump' for Russia, and not act only as a 'tripwire"'.[18] The solution to the military imbalance and other challenges is substantial US ground forces in the Baltic states.

Lithuanian decision-makers agree that the capabilities, will, and speed of the Russian armed forces makes US military power the only instrument able to ensure credible deterrence in the region, either through NATO or on some bilateral basis. The needed US presence is partially assured through temporary formats such as exercises. A US battalion was deployed to Pabradė from October 2019 to spring 2020 as part of US Army Europe Operation Atlantic Resolve. In 2020, the major military exercise, Defender-Europe 20, was expected to take place partly in Lithuania. However, restrictions imposed by COVID-19 reduced its size and geographical scope. The next cycle of exercises is planned for 2022. Although Lithuanian decision-makers are satisfied with eFP, they still seek more US troops. Former Lithuanian Defence Vice-Minister Giedrimas Jeglinskas and retired General Ben Hodges have urged Lithuania to enhance trilateral American-Lithuanian-Polish military cooperation by joining the already signed Joint Declaration on Advancing Defence Cooperation between the US and Poland.[19] eFP has contributed to Lithuania's security by providing a tripwire, but NATO must be ready and capable for rapid deployment, neutralizing Russia's A2/AD capabilities, and defending the Suwałki Gap. US troops in the region and smooth military mobility are essential for these goals.

Lessons learned

Three peaceful years of BG LTU suggest that its general goal – to ensure deterrence from Russia – has been achieved. The National Threat Assessment Report assesses that the ability of Russian armed forces to initiate military conflict and to achieve desirable results rapidly has been diminished. Members of Lithuanian society feel more secure due to the eFP presence. Admittedly, hosting BG LTU has required much investment and learning at the beginning given the logistical challenges with providing host nation support at very short notice. Currently, although there are still many investment projects being implemented, everything is being conducted as "business as usual". However, several challenges remain.

First, deterrence even in the form of a tripwire is effective only if all the defensive elements work cohesively. Gaps exist. One is the unclear relationship between eFP and

18 Clark *et al.*, *Closing NATO's Baltic gap*.

19 B. Hodges and G. Jeglinskas "Kosciuszko's Legacy for the World of Tomorrow", *15Min*, 20 June 2019, https://www.15min.lt/en/article/society/kosciuszko-s-legacy-for-the-world-of-tomorrow-528-1162898

Baltic Air Policing, which has neither a role nor mandate in the case of conflict. If the air-policing mission is absent during the conflict, then eFP forces would lack protection from the air. Lithuania is raising this question on the NATO level and negotiations are ongoing. Second, although the Lithuanian Minister of Defence regulates command and control of eFP forces in peacetime, the NATO Status of Forces Agreement and agreements with the host nation also regulate the status of foreign forces. This legal situation can complicate decision-making during an armed conflict. The North Atlantic Council (NAC) could take the main decisions regarding the use of these forces, but lower-level decision-making might fall under three different commands: host nation, contributing nation, and NATO. Third, although Lithuania prioritizes having US ground forces, implementing this goal is difficult given national infrastructural limits. A US battalion deployed in Lithuania faced challenges using polygons that at once must service national exercise needs and Allies' needs.

Finally, although the security situation has not improved dramatically since 2017, a risk exists that contributing nations' commitments might become subject to political disputes. For instance, had the Exercise Defender-Europe 2020 taken place as planned, Germany would have become a major logistic centre. Bundestag member Alexander Neu harshly criticised the exercise, saying that it "pre-programmed further escalation".[20] Despite a strong commitment to NATO among Germany's security elites, concerns abound that Germany's pacifism and pro-Russian interests might impact German willingness to participate in BG LTU. Over 57 percent of Germans think that their country does not have to send its armed forces in order to protect Baltic states and Poland in the case of Russian attack, 49 percent agree that NATO should not have to launch permanent bases in Eastern Europe and Baltic states.[21] COVID-19 has already undermined regional security, as it reduced the size and territorial scope of Defender-Europe 2020. It might even have a stronger effect if NATO members' economies shrink and defence budgets get cut. Finally, in June 2020, US President Donald Trump announced that the United States will withdraw 9,500 of the US forces deployed in Germany, which, if carried out, might affect Germany's defence considerations and Alliance unity. The eFP may have succeeded so far, but it cannot rest on its laurels.

20 "JAV planuoja karines pratybas, kur dalyvaus 37 tūkst. karių: repetuos dalinių perkėlimą į Baltijos šalis", LRT, 17 October 2019, https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pasaulyje/6/1104229/jav-planuoja-karines-pratybas-kur-dalyvaus-37-tukst-kariu-repetuos-daliniu-perkelima-i-baltijos-salis

21 "Iš Vokietijos – nemalonios naujienos Baltijos šalims Skaitykite daugiau", *DELFI*, 26 April 2016, https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/is-vokietijos-nemalonios-naujienos-baltijos-salims.d?id=71097538

Conclusion

Alexander Lanoszka, Christian Leuprecht, and Alexandra Richards

This conclusion reviews some of the main lessons that the individual contributors have identified from their countries' eFP experience.

The chapter breaks down each of these lessons in turn before offering a few critical remarks. After all, as much as our authors believe that the eFP has been a resounding success, we should acknowledge the uncertainty we face in drawing any firm conclusions so far. Yes, Russia has not launched an attack or seriously mounted effective "grey area" offensive actions. And yes, for all of the internal wrangling, NATO has been able to stick together, showing political and military resolve throughout. Nevertheless, despite the evident success of the eFP, its continued effectiveness will depend on an objective and clear analysis of its shortcomings. These shortcomings are not so much found in the battlegroups, as instead in NATO's ability to adapt expeditiously to a new and rapidly evolving threat environment and its implementation of the Readiness Action Plan.

Lessons identified

The chapters of this volume have identified six lessons to be learned from NATO countries' experiences with the eFP deployments.

Lesson 1: multinationality is costly but beneficial

Although NATO states have worked closely in the past, the eFP is the first NATO mission to be multinational below a brigade level. Many chapters in this volume highlight the benefits of multinationality in signalling the Alliance's resolve and unity. Michael Hunzeker (Chapter 1 on the United States) as well as Heinrich Brauss and Nikolaus Carstens (Chapter 7 on Germany) observe that with most of NATO represented in eFP, multinationality bolsters burden-sharing and indicates to Russia NATO's commitment to protecting the Baltic states and Poland. Multinationality thus increases the eFP's deterrent value.

That said, how each eFP battlegroup handles multinationality varies. Toms Rostoks (Chapter 6) analyses Latvia's experience as the Host Nation of Battlegroup Latvia (BG

LVA) – the most multilateral battlegroup. Rostoks explains that BG LVA has achieved a high degree of interoperability between BG LVA's nine contributing nations and with the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade through a rigorous training and certification process every six months. Christian Leuprecht, Alexander Moens, and Alexander Lanoszka (Chapter 5) confirm that, from a Canadian perspective, BG LVA has successfully managed multinationality. They add that the battlegroup's multinationality has had other benefits for Canada including reducing the eFP's demands on Canadian personnel and resources. In contrast, Battlegroup Estonia (BG EST) and Battlegroup Poland (BG POL) use a four-nation structure with one dominant force provider. Chapters 3 on the United Kingdom and 4 on Estonia indicate that this four-nation structure has made joint training and integration of forces in BG EST easier but full integration has not yet been achieved. Piotr Szymański (Chapter 2 on Poland) argues that this structure, while multilateral, limits such negative effects of multinationality as miscommunication, disorganization, and cultural disagreement, resulting in higher readiness and interoperability with reduced logistical costs. Still, multinationality has created more opportunities for Allies to train together and improve interoperability, which is important for combat effectiveness and deterrent effect. Margarita Šešelgytė (Chapter 8 on Lithuania) along with Kalev Stoicescu and Martin Hurt (Chapter 4 on Estonia) note that more training among members of the Alliance within and between eFP battlegroups has increased the combat effectiveness and quality of Lithuania's and Estonia's militaries.

Lesson 2: Host Nations satisfied with their Framework Nation

Some chapters emphasize the importance of the US to regional security and credible deterrence and defence against Russia. In their chapters, Hunzeker and Szymański explain how Poland serves as a regional hub for NATO military activity. BG POL plays a key strategic role in eFP by protecting the Suwałki Gap – the land-bridge between Lithuania and Poland through which NATO ground reinforcements would transit to the Baltics. Szymański notes that concern still abounds among the Baltic states about the lack of a US military presence on their territories. Nevertheless, US forces train and rotate throughout the region. Similarly, Šešelgytė argues that the solution to the regional military imbalance with Russia is a substantial US ground presence in the Baltic region alongside the eFP battlegroups. Stoicescu and Hurt explain that the US is far more military capable than other Allies, which, compounded by extended deterrence, gives its presence a greater deterrent effect on Russia.

Although these chapters call for more US presence within the region, each Host Nation chapter concludes that they are satisfied with their current Framework Nation and the current

capabilities it provides. Rostoks writes that Latvian officials prefer Canada over the US as a Framework Nation because Canadian troops are viewed as less politically controversial, easier to integrate, and state relations between Canada and Latvia can be less hierarchical. Due to the current satisfaction of Host Nations with their Framework Nations, the desire for additional US presence in the Baltics can be interpreted more as a desire for an eFP+ structure whereby eFP capabilities are supported by more US military capabilities.

Lesson 3: low domestic visibility in Framework Nations may be worrisome

The eFP battlegroups have high domestic visibility in Host Nations, but low visibility in the Framework Nations. Leuprecht, Moens, and Lanoszka lament the lack of effort by the Canadian government to inform the public and academics about Canada's current NATO missions and how they reflect Canadian values and interests. Hunzeker and Szymański also flag the domestic visibility of the US's overall involvement in the Baltic region is low among US policymakers and the public. The lack of domestic visibility in Framework Nations could threaten the future of the eFP. Without such visibility and support, states may have trouble justifying the expense and commitment necessary to continue as Framework Nations, especially given COVID-19's budgetary impact. Nevertheless, Hunzeker suggests that in the US, the low cost and near invisible political salience of eFP is not a challenge but a strength as it possibly protects eFP from the fickle attitudes of the Trump administration towards NATO and an aversion of voters to overseas military commitments.

Lesson 4: eFP improves deterrence and defence

Contributors to this volume disagree over whether eFPs constitute a tripwire force, a credible fighting force, or something else. All agree, however, that eFP enhances regional deterrence and defence by raising the costs of aggression for Russia against the Host Nations. Hunzeker, Szymański, and Šešelgytė show that BG POL, by protecting the Suwałki Gap, reduces the likelihood that Russia can cut the Baltics off from NATO reinforcements, making a quick Russian victory less likely. Moreover, many authors note that, while the eFP is designed to deter, they have enough combat capability to slow a Russian advance. Nevertheless, gaps remain. Multinationality complicates the chain of command for many battlegroups, which could create delays and uncertainty during a crisis. Russia's military capabilities could still slow or limit NATO's ability to resupply and reinforce members' forces fighting in the Baltics. Foxall, Rogers, and Clark (United Kingdom) warn of a mismatch between eFP training against the most likely scenario of Russian aggression.

Lesson 5: public diplomacy is essential for countering critical narratives

The primary responsibility for countering so-called hybrid threats lies with the Host Nation, but the eFP has effectively utilized public diplomacy to counter disinformation. Foxall, Rogers, and Clark as well as Stoicescu and Hurt explain that BG EST's effort to engage with the Estonian population through community events and social media have successfully maintained a high degree of public support for the operation despite critical narratives. Leuprecht, Moens, and Lanoskza describe how Canada has taken the additional step to establish Task Force Latvia (TFL) which acts as a permanent Canadian liaison in the Latvian Brigade Headquarters to ensure continuity of communication across eFP rotations. The Canadian embassy and TFL have also adopted a whole-of-government approach, such that all messaging is consistent and integrated. Brauss and Carstens also highlight the need for close coordination between the German-led battlegroup and Lithuanian officials in countering disinformation.

Lesson 6: the NATO-Russia Founding Act is an artificial constraint, but the deployment model succeeds regardless

The NATO-Russia Founding Act largely explains why the eFP operates on a rotational basis. Nonetheless, the current achievements of the battalion-sized, rotational deployment model must be recognized. This model has increased the potential cost of aggression for Russia on NATO's northeastern flank. It has also reassured the Baltic countries and Poland. As Rostoks argues, a deployment of multinational rotational battlegroups to the Baltic countries and Poland was inconceivable before the crisis in Ukraine. Ergo, its shortcomings and constraints of the Founding Act notwithstanding, the eFP signals unity and political will among the Alliance to counter Russian aggression. Accordingly, as far as contributors to this volume are concerned, it has achieved its primary aims and could be even more successful in less restrictive contexts in the future.

Assessing success

Some humility is in order, as we must acknowledge the limits we face in making any definitive statement about the eFP's success. At first blush, by positioning four NATO battlegroups in Poland and the three Baltic states, the eFP raises the costs that Russia would have to incur should it launch a major assault. Whether the eFP is a tripwire force, a combat credible force, or neither, its very existence and composition creates new risks – and new costs – that Russia would have to shoulder if it were to attack. Russia has not launched a military attack on any of the four Host Nations; thus far, the eFP appears to be accomplishing its core mission objective.

But is that really the case, though? Matus Halas provocatively argues that deterrence is not operative in NATO's northeastern flank because Russia has so far simply had little interest in using military force along the northeastern flank.[1] In other words, the risk is containable because it has thus far been limited. Had Russia truly wanted to seize territory from those NATO countries, it could have done so – and may yet try to do so. Ostensibly, NATO still lacks the appropriate set of capabilities needed to defeat such an effort. Although that would leave the eFP not only exposed, but likely destroyed, the real issue at stake is the lack of timely reinforcement of the eFPs by NATO member states as a whole. Besides, Russia continues to pursue actions at the sub-conventional level using asymmetric tactics which, as several authors have noted, do not fall under the ambit of the eFP Battlegroups.

If deterrence is arguably inoperative because of the challenges that come with proving a negative, the notion that the eFP has bolstered alliance solidarity may also be overstated. Despite the participation of over twenty NATO states in the eFP, burden-sharing remains controversial. President Trump has not appeared to factor the eFP in his assessment of how much other members are bearing the burden, preferring instead to focus on defence spending as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product. Germany's participation as a Framework Nation – the only non–English-speaking NATO member state to take on such a role – and all its subsequent investment in Lithuania have not prevented the Trump administration from ordering a sharp reduction in American forces stationed in or operating out of Germany. Instead of repatriating them to the United States though, most of these forces are scheduled to go elsewhere in Europe, including Poland. Whether this transfer will boost the actual deterrence or defence value of the eFP is difficult to gauge. Generally, the White House has not made decisions concerning NATO in relation to any agreed Alliance strategy. Indeed, one aspect that all Framework Nations share is that the eFP's visibility is low, not only in the United States, as Hunzeker highlights, but also in the other Framework Nations.

Counter-factually, it cannot be known how the world would have played out in the absence of the eFP. Russia could have sensed opportunity and been emboldened to launch at least limited incursions into NATO territory had the Alliance declined to adopt deterrence and defence measures at the Wales and Warsaw Summits. Debates over burden sharing might have proven even more divisive without the eFP mission. NATO members along the northeastern flank could have felt alienated from their other allies. That makes it difficult to judge the eFP conclusively.

1 M. Halas, "Proving a negative: why deterrence does not work in the Baltics", *European Security*, Vol.28, No.4, 2019, pp. 431-448.

For the eFP to succeed…

In this volume, we have analysed and compared the four eFP Battle Groups. As a study of specific Alliance action and defence policy, it did not focus on the economic side of security and stability in the four Host Nations and so the fact that the four countries are members of the EU did not take centre stage. But it is, of course, a central premise underlying the entire study. Remarkably, even in this most recent iteration of the NATO Alliance's role in enhancing regional security, collective defence was coordinated with EU investments and policies in the region. This is remarkable because this resembles the "formula" for Europe during the Cold War, and, decades hence, it persists through this day. Alas, the NATO-EU complementarity of roles is less known now among publics in both Europe and North America. It is rarely raised by opinion makers in economic and security policy. A final lesson, from this study is that the overall positive impact of the four eFPs is further evidence that the bedrock of Western policy, with NATO and the EU as twin pillars, has again proven its worth. Take one away and the outcome would likely be vastly diminished.

One could argue that in its successes, inconsistencies and uncertainties, the eFP is no different from NATO itself throughout the Cold War and into the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods. There was never a time when it could be said that the Alliance's strategy, military posture, and internal cohesiveness was such that it was clearly fulfilling its collective defence and deterrence function. The best and truest that could be said was that NATO members remained allied and maintained a robust, though not unassailable, military posture. In doing so, NATO negated the political influence that the Soviet Union's vast and proximate military force might otherwise have exercised over Western Europe. Having thus dulled the impact of the Soviet's most important, yet most blunt, instrument of power, Western Europe was able to rebuild and bring prosperity to is people. If the eFP can achieve the same results in the Baltics and Poland, then, weaknesses and ambiguities notwithstanding, it will succeed.

Annex

October 2020

NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence

NATO has enhanced its presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, with four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. These battlegroups, led by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the United States respectively, are multinational, and combat-ready, demonstrating the strength of the transatlantic bond. Their presence makes clear that an attack on one Ally will be considered an attack on the whole Alliance. NATO's battlegroups form part of the biggest reinforcement of NATO's collective defence in a generation.

The table below illustrates national contributions to the four battlegroups. The personnel and force numbers are based on information provided by contributing nations and may include forces deployed in a support role. Numbers should be taken as indicative as they change regularly, in accordance with the deployment procedures of the contributing nations.

Battlegroup led by the United Kingdom, operating with Estonian forces in Tapa, Estonia		
Contributor	**Troops**	**Forces**
United Kingdom	754	• 1 x Armoured infantry battalion with main battle tanks and armoured fighting vehicles • Supported by self-propelled artillery and air defence assets, engineers, an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance group and logistic support elements
Denmark	209	• 1 x Armoured infantry company • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters
Iceland	1	1 Strategic communications civilian
Approximate total troop number: 964		

Battlegroup led by Canada, operating with Latvian forces in Adazi, Latvia		
Contributor	**Troops**	**Forces**
Canada	Up to 527	• 1 x Mechanised infantry company with armoured fighting vehicles • 1 x Combat support company • 1 x Combat service support company • Support elements • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters and Latvian National Armed Forces Mechanised Infantry Brigade
Albania	Up to 21	Mobility explosive ordnance disposal engineers
Czech Republic	Up to 60	1 x Mortar platoon
Iceland	1	1 Strategic communications civilian
Italy	Up to 200	• 1 x Heavy infantry company with tanks and armoured fighting vehicles • 1 x Reconnaissance Platoon • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters • Support elements
Montenegro	5	• 1 x Fire support team • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters
Poland	Up to 175	• 1 x Tank company • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters • Support elements
Slovakia	Up to 152	• 1 x Mechanised infantry company • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters • Support elements

Slovenia	41	• 1 x Mortar platoon • 1 x Tactical Air Control Party team • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters
Spain	343	• 1 x Mechanised infantry company with tanks and armoured fighting vehicles • 1 x Combat engineers company • Logistic elements • Contribution to battlegroup headquarters
Approximate total troop number: 1525		

Battlegroup led by Germany, operating with Lithuanian forces in Rukla, Lithuania		
Contributor	**Troops**	**Forces**
Germany	527	• 1 x Armoured company • 1 x Mechanised infantry platoon • Combat service, combat service support
Belgium	1	1 x Public affairs officer
Czech Republic	35	• 1 x Electronic warfare element • Support elements
France	275	• 1 x Mechanised infantry company • Armoured platoon with main battle tanks
Iceland	1	Public Affairs Civilian
Luxembourg	4	1 x Transportation team
Netherlands	270	• 1 x Mechanised infantry company • Logistics support element
Norway	120	1 x Armoured infantry company with armoured fighting vehicles
Approximate total troop number: 1233		

Battlegroup led by the United States, operating with Polish forces in Orzysz (Bemowo Piskie), Poland		
Contributor	**Troops**	**Forces**
United States	670	1 x Armoured cavalry squadron with combat service and support enablers
Croatia	Up to 80	Self-propelled rocket launcher battery
Romania	Up to 120	1 x Ground-based air defence battery and support elements
United Kingdom	140	• Light reconnaissance squadron • Logistics support element
Approximate total troop number: 1010		

Approximate total troop number for all four battlegroups: 4732

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