

Forward Resilience: Protecting Society in an Interconnected World Working Paper Series

The Case for Forward Resilience in the Baltic States

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Resilience is a high priority for a society if it is unable to meet five security tests.

Does it perceive the threat, or is there failed or no threat analysis?

Can it remove or mitigate threats, or are there weak or no pre-emptive strategies?

Can it deter the threat?

Can it shield oneself against the threat, or does it lack adequate defensive capabilities?

Can it dodge the threat, or do geographic or other constraints render that difficult?

Today the answer is "no" to four of these five security tests. Since January 2014, NATO 'west of Berlin' belatedly, and only partially, recognizes a severe military threat to the three Baltic states. However, it cannot today say yes to the other four tests, and they are decisive. Over time some of these weaknesses may be addressed, but for the time being they are a fact. Thus 'forward resilience' for the Baltic states is currently highly relevant.

The Baltic Challenge

The challenge to the three small Baltic NATO states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is a Kremlin that clearly shows that it is hostile to the North Atlantic community, including both the EU and NATO, uses brute force including war to achieve its aims, and is building a military dominance in Europe, and certainly in the Baltic region.

At the same time, NATO has concluded that it currently cannot defend the three small Baltic states.

First, Russian military forces facing the Baltic are too big and powerful for the handful of NATO brigades still capable of fighting to match them. In the Zapad 2013 maneuvers held next to the Baltics, for instance, Russia fielded two Army Headquarters, one Division and twelve Brigades, along with logistic, air, naval and tactical nuclear support, for a total force of some 100,000 men. As of the summer 2017 NATO standing forces in the three Baltic states will amount to some 20,000 men, all basically light infantry, and it will take months for the handful of VJTF brigades to even reach the Baltic region. With Russian forces within kilometers of the border and now developing very high readiness levels, NATO currently cannot reinforce the Baltic states in time.

Second, Russia is building up an anti-area/access denial (A2AD) zone around the Baltic which can seal off the three Baltic states from NATO reinforcements. More importantly, their increasingly sophisticated and deeply integrated air defense systems make it make it difficult

and costly to engage U.S. air power, which is the only NATO force that can deliver decisive force in time.

Finally, and most crucially of all, Putin has built up a complete nuclear dominance in Europe, allowing him to exert a degree of nuclear coercion that would break NATO. Since the late 1990s Russia has fielded four new theatre nuclear missile systems (the Iskander-M MRBM (700 km range), Iskander-K GLCM (1,500 km), Kalibr SLCM (2,600 km) and Rubezh IRBM (2,000 km) and simulated their use in several military manoeuvres (Zapad 2009, Zapad 2013 and more). It has simulated nuclear bomber strikes against Sweden and has threatened Copenhagen and Norway with nuclear attack. Most important of all, it is clear that the Putin regime has thought long and hard about how to use nuclear force in Europe.

In contrast liberal Europe is a nuclear void. There are virtually no NATO nuclear forces (less than 200 aging B-61 gravity bombs left over from the Cold War), there is questionable linkage to the U.S. global nuclear deterrent, there are no military and civil preparations for a nuclear crisis or war, and our political leaders are completely unfamiliar with both military power politics and nuclear war. Thus, and this is the most crucial factor, there is no NATO nuclear strategy or political consensus on how to respond to nuclear coercion. In nuclear terms we are headless chickens.

That NATO would crack under nuclear coercion under these circumstances can be forecast with absolute certainty if we compare the current Western nuclear void with the massive efforts on both sides of the Atlantic required and made to ensure credible nuclear deterrence in Europe during the Cold War. Today there is virtually no hope that NATO could reach consensus agreement in the event of a nuclear crisis with Russia, including the threat of nuclear attack.

The Baltics are thus dangerously exposed. Currently their military security rests on their minute national defense forces and the three symbolic multinational NATO battle groups of around one battalion to be deployed to each state in 2017 and their tenuous political deterrence value. Second, and weightier, is the fact that for Putin an attack on even part of a Baltic state would be a game changer. It would constitute an outright declaration of war against NATO and western Europe. And while the odds are that both NATO and the EU would collapse in such a crisis, such a venture is still fraught with considerable uncertainty and downstream risks for the Kremlin. Moreover, as Putin learned in the Ukrainian Donbas, even the most surgical plans can go very wrong.

The Baltic states are thus living dangerously. If NATO cannot currently defend them we must prepare the dirty default option, which is resilience. For the Baltic states this can be divided into two sorts:

- ***Sovereign and existential resilience***, focusing on the survival of the nation in the most extreme circumstances such as outright invasion.
- ***Functional resilience (Forward Resilience)***, focusing on the ability to absorb shocks and pressure under more normal circumstances, short of massive military invasion.

Sovereign and Existential Resilience

Sovereign resilience is related to protecting the vital core of the nation. It includes protecting the national spirit, independence and territorial integrity. Ideally such resilience rests on retaining at least a part of the national territory and population free from occupation. As noted above, such territorially based resilience is almost impossible for the Baltic states to achieve should Putin launch an all-out military attack. They are too small and too vulnerable to trade space for time, and unlike the Ukraine they cannot keep part of their territory and population independent and sovereign.

Under these circumstances we need to shift from sovereign resilience to existential resilience. This is far more severe. It also focuses on preserving the vital core – the national spirit and identity – but now without retaining part of the territory and population. This is similar to the resilience shown by France and Norway, for instance, during the Second World War, when their homeland was occupied but a legitimate national identity was retained outside the national borders. This involves:

- **Survival** Ensuring the political core of the nation can survive by evacuating the government and parts of the political elite to retain a legitimate government in exile, as well as other key cultural and symbolic value assets.
- **Endurance** Ensure the continued legitimacy of the vital core in exile, by legal, symbolic, cultural and informational means.
- **Revival** Pressure Russia in various ways to withdraw, from sanctions to outright war, until Baltic sovereignty is restored. Once this is achieved, facilitate the return of legitimate authorities and restore a functioning state.
- **Peripheral** Receive a possible flood of Baltic refugees.

Baltic Functional (Forward) Resilience

Russia is systemically applying pressure against our social, economic and technological foundations. This is pure Sunzi and his notion of *Shi*, or shaping.¹ It is also an evolution of the sophisticated Soviet ‘correlation of forces’ concept and related ‘active measures’ campaigns,² now considerably upgraded as part of the Russian ‘New Generation Warfare’ or ‘Multidimensional Warfare’.³ This is also a form of warfare that involves less risk for the Kremlin, and hence is more usable. In fact it is already taking place today.

Forms of Russian functional pressure focus on weakening a targeted state and society to the point where minimal force is needed to impose one's will. This includes enlisting, coercing,

¹ See Ries, chapter 1 in this volume, and Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things. Toward a History of Efficacy in China* (Translated by Janet Lloyd). New York: Zone Books, 1999, p. 317.

² For a useful outline see James H. Hansen, *Correlation of Forces. Four Decades of Soviet Military Development*. New York: Praeger, 1987, pp. vii-xix.

³ (For a useful outline see Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight. New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations” (Translated by Robert Coalson), *Military Review*, January-February 2016: pp.23-29. Originally published in Russian in *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013; also Charles K. Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right,” *Military Review*, January-February 2016, pp. 30-38, especially the diagram on p. 35.

confusing, frightening, weakening, damaging and challenging the authority and legitimacy of the target in every way. This can be pursued in various ways:

- **Multitool:** all types of cyberoperations, from information warfare to sabotage.
- **Political and social:** subversion, information operations and infiltration of individuals, politics and groups.
- **Events:** creating or manipulating diplomatic, political/legal, criminal and other events to justify action, destabilize and intimidate.
- **Infrastructure:** Using or damaging economic and technological infrastructure.
- **Economic pressure** and a host of other functional and social means.

All of these are transnational and many are functionally two-way, which is to say that they extend deeply into other NATO societies through everything from trade to politics.

In an interlinked networked world this social and functional warfare affects everyone's security, not just the direct target. And if it fails, it requires resilience. Until liberal societies, in particular those in NATO, learn how to play this game, we will steadily lose ground to the Putin regime. In fact, we are doing so already, as we watch the erosion of the liberal social and political order. This is admittedly driven by deeper socioeconomic trends of our own making, but Putin can and is exploiting them skillfully.