

## Research Article

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# Territorial Defence, Comprehensive Defence and Total Defence: Meanings and Differences in the Estonian Defence Force

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**Abstract:** Defence policy and related activities, such as territorial defence and comprehensive defence, are considered a matter of national priority and consensus in Estonia since its restoration of independence in 1991. The actual meaning and its content have depended on numerous linguistic and cultural factors. Educational traditions and alliance relations have played an important role as well. In some cases, changes in actual defence policy content first required an ability to change military terminology and outlook. The current study analyses the meaning of territorial defence, comprehensive defence and total defence in official documents and based on focus group interviews among officers of BDCOL and EMA.

**Keywords:** Estonia; deterrence; territorial defence; North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

## 1 Introduction

The security building processes on the eastern flank of NATO have progressed visibly after the 2014 events in Ukraine. Estonian growing investments into territorial defence readiness and capabilities should be seen as recognition of its value in supporting the armed forces in their defence and deterrence priorities.

Defence policy and related activities, such as territorial defence and comprehensive defence, are considered a matter of national priority and consensus in Estonia since its restoration of independence in 1991. However, the actual meaning of territorial, defence, comprehensive defence and total defence has depended on numerous linguistic and cultural factors. Educational traditions in defence force and alliance relations have played an important role as well. In some cases, changes in actual defence policy content first required an ability to change military terminology and outlook.

Next to the consensus within the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF), it is also important how well local territorial defence units are able to find a common language and understanding with the arriving NATO forces in terms of local priorities and the aims of their activities are also extremely important. In recent decades, military developments in Estonia have followed NATO definitions, preferences and assessment systems, drawing on official strategy-level documents of NATO with priorities and needs defined. This has been the way of determining the meaning of defence-related terminology, how it contributes best to progress, and its outcome in terms of sufficient national defence and credible deterrence. A key priority in the development of Estonian defence and its defence forces has been the ability to fit into a solidarity-based deterrence model, to have niche capabilities, to be able to receive allied forces and to assure the local population that the best choices have been made. Accordingly, territorial defence, as well as initiatives towards comprehensive defence and debates on the necessity of total defence, has been relegated.

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Even with integrated NATO deterrence and defence posture, local territorial defence capabilities have critical role in terms of resilience and survival of first wave of aggression. While the existing conventional reserves of NATO member states are sizeable, safe and quick deployment and survival of local defence forces are still critical components in the event of conflict. This might be challenging, considering the limited safe transportation options available in the region and small local military units. However, it is also important to understand how local territorial defence units find a common language and understanding with the arriving NATO forces in terms of local priorities and the aims of their activities. Though the differences might be less important in terms of territory, such differences might be more fundamental in terms of airspace control and waterway control.

Current study will analyse the meaning of territorial defence, comprehensive defence and total defence in theoretical level in official documents as well based on focus group interviews among young officers of Baltic Defence College and Estonian Military Academy.

The current study is composed of four major parts. The first part of the article focuses on the theoretical options and dilemmas of Estonia in terms of territorial defence, origins of concepts, adaptations to Estonian and translation. In the second part of the study, the authors give an overview of territorial defence forces of Estonia, the context of their background and organisational aspects. This covers their tasks in peace, crisis and wartime. The third part of the study will introduce and analyse the results of focus group interviews on territorial defence meaning and priorities conducted among the officers studying at the Baltic Defence College and the Estonian Military Academy in 2020. This process leads to the analytical section of the study, which presents findings and conclusions and allows to draw deductions in general terms related to presented concepts of territorial defence.

## 2 Terminological Definitions and Complications

This study will first define and debate the key terminologies covering territorial defence, total defence and comprehensive defence.

Understanding comprehensive defence, territorial defence and total defence has been dependent on the historical traditions and inertia of military system from where the first independent and re-independent Estonia found itself. It has been the case both in 1918 and in 1991. A brief overview on the terminology in 1918–1940 will be presented first. Military thinking as well as terminology was mostly based on Russian military terminology and understanding of concepts. In 1917, the first national Estonian units were formed in the Russian army. During the First World War, a large number of Estonians served in the Russian army – around 100,000 soldiers, of which more than 2,000 were officers (Kopõtin 2011). In Russian military thinking, the focus was on land forces and their mission to defend the homeland. Sea and airpower, together with non-defensive activities, received less attention. On the other hand, the main enemy of local defence forces was *Baltische Landeswehr* ('Baltic Territorial Army'), established in 1918 and, even as the central enemy of local sovereignty efforts, it contributed to local Baltic military thinking.

In 1991, similar transformations from the Russian/Soviet system occurred once more. The new generation of local military leaders defined and implemented state defence legislation and mostly came from an environment of Soviet education and terminological influence, which made it easier to understand Russian threats while inversely complicating understandings of the NATO defence postures.

Between 1992 and 2004, the dominating thought in state defence was the total defence idea with the usage of all available resources. Between 2004 and 2011, this model was adopted with assets and needs based on NATO membership. Between 2012 and 2020, state defence has been based in the separation of territorial defence implemented by Defence League and active military activity conducted by two infantry brigades with the assistance of NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)<sup>1</sup> forces.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

## 2.1 Total Defence

For Estonian territorial defence, the concept of total defence (Estonian: *totaalkaitse*) is not linked to any NATO terminology and has no one-on-one conceptual equivalent in the alliance; however it does have some German and Soviet roots and components even in its contemporary application. Total defence is provided in context rather than in definition of outcome. In this way, 'Total defence is the permanent readiness of state's civilian structures, local governments, the Defence Forces and Defence League, and the mental, physical, economic, and other potential of the whole nation to resolve crisis and coordinated and united action to prevent and deter a threat of an attack for nation's survival' (Ministry of Education, State Defence Textbook, 2012). The term was widely used in the 1990s as a possible option for the state defence concept; however, it was dropped in the 2000s in favour of an integrated NATO defence and deterrence posture, thus adopting a comprehensive approach.

Next to the German and Soviet roots, in its understanding of total defence, Estonia can also be seen as a follower of the Nordic countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway. The post-Second World War security policies of those countries had been designed along the logic of total defence. Inasmuch as the concept saw total defence as territorial, one can already see the interesting coexistence, if not, amalgamation, of the two terms. Already after the restoration of independence in the early 1990s, the term 'total defence' was later on specified in the Military Defence Strategy (2001) stating that total defence is the permanent psychological, physical, economic and other types of readiness of the state and municipal institutions, defence forces and the whole society to manage crises. The main idea behind total defence is the mobilisation of resources of the whole society to defend the state in times of crisis and war.

Often, next to the parallelism with territorial defence, the content of total defence is also being conflated with comprehensive approach. It is nevertheless somewhat questionable whether the concept of total defence in its essence should be directly attributed to the comprehensive approach to national defence because the overall context of both approaches has changed. In principle, total defence as a term arose by mirroring the qualities of modern conflicts that presume geographically and chronologically limited reach of the 'hot conflict.' This allows the society to gather behind its military to support its defence forces in a 'total' manner. Modern hybrid conflicts do not allow so concrete a limitation of a conflict, rather witness the impossibility to draw a clear line between times of conflict and peace.

Therefore, the Estonian total defence concept in practice relates more to total societal efforts in support of the military in war than to a truly interagency approach. This is especially as the concept of integrated/comprehensive defence seems to extend the domains of activity of total defence (see Jermalavičius et al. 2014, p. 56), meaning that in theory, there is a qualitative difference between the two concepts.

However, such a qualitative difference is often not recognised in Estonian discussions on comprehensive approach to national defence. Next to that, the country-specific context blurs the picture even further. Although in Scandinavia the term total defence is used in reference to the mobilisation of all resources to defend the state/society from all threats that can damage it, it is mainly used in Estonia in the context of defence forces and military threats (see Jermalavičius et al. 2014, p. 85). Therefore, the difference is made at a practical level but not in ideological terms in Estonia.

## 2.2 Comprehensive Approach

The comprehensive approach (Estonian: *kõikkehõlmav lähenemine*) is a NATO concept adopted in Estonian after 2004, and it has two distinct explanations. Next to the promotion of international security cooperation, a comprehensive approach to national defence,<sup>2</sup> based on resilience and deterrence, is regarded as one of the essential foundations of Estonia's defence policy.

Based on a 2010 NATO COPD, the comprehensive approach can be described as a means to ensure a coordinated and coherent response to crisis by all relevant actors (NATO 2010). National defence and the corresponding preparations are considered the tasks of many different institutions and people from the public and private sectors, including civil society (National Defence Strategy, 2011, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Hereby terminologically referring to the most commonly used explanation of comprehensive approach as a 'coordination or interaction between various actors and organisations with the aim of generating coherent policy and action during periods of crises or disaster or in a post-conflict environment' (see, e.g. Hull, 2011, p. 5).

The other explanation is more elaborate, stating:

NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, underlines that lessons learned from NATO operations show that effective crisis management calls for a comprehensive approach involving political, civilian, and military instruments. Military means, although essential, are not enough on their own to meet the many complex challenges to Euro-Atlantic and international security. Allied leaders agreed at Lisbon to enhance NATO's contribution to a comprehensive approach to crisis management as part of the international community's effort and to improve NATO's ability to contribute to stabilization and reconstruction. (NATO 2012)

The emergence of Estonia's comprehensive approach is perhaps best visible when compared to the last two National Security Concepts, wherein the concurrence of security areas with ministerial division of responsibilities was replaced by a wide task-based approach (National Security Concept 2010, 2017). The 2017 National Security Concept also introduces the concept of resilience, which surfaces prominently throughout the document and is elaborated in a separate subchapter (National Security Concept 2017). The two key concepts that the security and defence policy documents of Estonia rely on are whole of government and whole of society (National Security Concept 2017, 2), bringing together the two essential elements of the comprehensive approach paradigm and the idea of resilience. It is important to realise that these new conceptual imports are relatively well received by the society. The idea that national defence should be a joint task of the entire society is also highly supported in Estonia – according to the recent public opinion survey from March 2018, 78 per cent of respondents approve of this view whereas only 6 per cent oppose it (Kivirähk, 2018). Therefore, the expectations of Estonians run high concerning the comprehensive national defence model, thereby demonstrating the volitional resilience of the bulk of the population.

What is even more noteworthy is that the Estonian definition explicitly identifies the comprehensive approach as a NATO concept. However, unlike the NATO term, the Estonian explanation emphasises civil–military cooperation and integrity more. The comprehensive approach is described as a 'NATO concept, based on the principle that in a changed international security environment, national security can be ensured through close cooperation between the military and civilian sectors, both in terms of internal and external security' (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2008). There have been at least three competing versions of translating comprehensive approach into Estonian; next to '*kõikehõlmav lähenemine*', '*laiapindne lähenemine*' and '*laiapõhjaline lähenemine*', but the last two are seen as inappropriate from 2008 in connection to the NATO concept of the 'comprehensive approach' (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2008).

This specificity becomes important in differentiating national concepts and NATO concepts. The Estonian term of *laiapindne riigikaitse* is the appropriate wording for *riigikaitse lai käsitus*, e.g., comprehensive national defence, elements of which are identified by the 2010 National Defence Strategy as a way of guaranteeing national security by comprehensive approach which also covers non-military (*mittesõjaline*) activities and presupposes a strong internal security (Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2010). The comprehensive national defence is a part of broad security concept (Estonian: *avar julgeolekukäsitus*), a national term. The closest related NATO term would be civil-military cooperation. The latter is also mentioned in AAP-6 (NATO glossary of terms), while the comprehensive approach as a concept is not defined, as it is used in the definition of counter-terrorism. However, in practical terms, all versions of comprehensive approach and comprehensive national defence translations still find use in Estonian military communication and one of the aims of focus group interviews was to clarify if young officers are able to explain the reasoning behind different terminological outcomes.

### 2.3 Territorial defence

Territorial defence has been translated into Estonian as *territoriaalkaitse*, but alternatively the word *maakaitse* also has been used in earlier years, which can be translated word-for-word as 'land defence'. This emphasises the importance of defending the land and omits airspace or territorial waters, though the definition clearly states the importance of defending the whole territory of the country: '[Territorial defence is] a form of military defence in which the entire territory of a country is protected by all available military forces.' The Estonian definition of territorial defence is part of the concept of comprehensive national defence, the purpose of which is to participate in the military defence of the state and to support internal security, and for this purpose, all the principles of the concept of comprehensive national defence are applied to the extent specified by legislation (Estonian Defence Forces 2017).

Estonian territorial defence is based on the following principles: (a) the defence forces are divided into two parts, those being general units and territorial defence units; (b) the country's territory and units are divided into military-territorial formations; (c) on the basis of the military-territorial formations, management is organised in a way that allows its functioning even after the collapse of the national defence system in crisis situations, e.g., when the political or centrally coordinated military leadership is interrupted or NATO assistance is delayed (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2017). Also, territorial defence is not directly linked to NATO terminology. As a concept, it is not defined in AAP-6 (NATO glossary of terms).

Drawing on this and the two preceding sections, one can perceive how the terms total defence and comprehensive defence help define territorial defence. On the one hand, territorial defence partly mirrors the logic of total defence, whereas total defence offers its military-oriented focus, territorial defence can be seen as a practical way of applying it. On the other hand, when juxtaposing territorial defence with comprehensive defence, we see a sort of command matrix appearing. Territorial defence refers and focuses on geographical units, comprehensive in its turn on different domains or fields. This shows the complexity of the Estonian defence system and has both advantages and disadvantages. Its advantage is the way of combining special military foci with a modern comprehensive paradigm. Its disadvantage is the practical problem of clarity of the priorities, and it may be difficult to understand if the main purpose of a unit is indeed the territory or special domain/field of state/society.

### 3 Theoretical Options for Estonia in Choosing a Territorial Defence Model

The concepts of creating territorial defence forces (TDFs) are neither new nor exclusively linked with the current century, as throughout history, they have had important role in defence of territory of many nations involving the broad range of societal groups. They were closely linked with the overall concepts of national defence or ad hoc voluntary groups related to resilience and resistance against aggression and later on to fight occupation forces. As such, the units, formal or informal in nature, operated often in the regions from which their members were coming from; therefore, they were fighting for local societies and their own households and families. It acted in supporting motivation and dedication to act decisively. Such examples as when population was actively involved in guerrilla warfare were presented in history, e.g., by resistance of Spanish and Russian people against Napoleonic invasions or later Russian resistance against fascist (German) occupation. However, territorial defence forces are not only prepared for guerrilla warfare, as those training is linked with preparing them to support operation of regular armed forces such as light type units.

Conceptually, the term 'territorial defence' means something different in each country and 'evokes different memories and it has multifaceted political, organizational and strategic connotations' (Roberts 1976, 34). Finland, for example has extensive experiences in this aspect, as organizing the national defence in a way that the enemy would face the resistance of local force to hinder attack by attacking flanks and lines of communication (Tillotson 1993, 276). Partisan tactics could be effectively utilised when terrain and local conditions support it. The delay operations and exhaustion of enemy troops allows for the denial of seizing crucial terrain and infrastructure, and in the long term, it creates supportive conditions for counterattack by friendly armed forces.

Theoretically, territorial defence could be divided into three categories (Makar and Novoskoltseva 2016; Rieker 2002, 21–38). The first is based on the armed forces model ready to execute combat missions with them or to be sent abroad (such as for the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom). The second group is presented by small nations with the goal of protecting and defending critical objectives, facilitating the mobilisation of regular armed forces and of their operational deployment and manoeuvre (such as for the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also Norway, Denmark, and Belgium). Finally, the third category belongs to neutral nations with a broad range of tasks, including guerrilla warfare in the case of occupation (Finland, Sweden and Switzerland). The tasks and organisation of units within the categories mentioned above differ during peace, crisis and war, and quite often, those are overlapping. There are many tasks related to providing support to local communities, e.g., facing consequences of natural disasters. The need to involve population more into defence matters and lack of personal reserves such as cancelling conscription was also recognised. In the context of the role of territorial defence in response to non-military or 'hybrid' threats, the topic is very often mentioned after 2014. According to Ryszard Jakubczak, it is purposeful as,



The only approach to weaken the effectiveness of aggressors in conducting hybrid operations is the properly developed territorial defence system, because TDF formations can be widely deployed at the local level and could operate strategically based on principles typical for unified command while maintaining a large dose of autonomy at the local level. (Jakubczak 2016, 42)

For territorial defence forces, the challenge is, of course, response time; therefore, their constant readiness is critical, as reaction time in the case of military aggression will be limited. Their role is additionally related to building reserve capabilities by training their members and volunteers and it is regulated by national laws allowing or releasing them for such duties by companies. In parallel, TDFs strengthen the link between society and the armed forces. As volunteers come from all groups of societies and possess a variety of personal and professional skills, their roles could be enhanced beyond the outcome of regular training based on their initiatives and imagination. As TDF units are voluntary, the motivation and readiness to dedicate their fate to national defence is high, and proper education and the shaping of a pro-patriotic spirit must nevertheless sustain it. It is important as Estonia aims to raise the number of members significantly.

Contribution of territorial defence units is also valuable in terms of unconventional threats and conflicts. They are creating new capabilities such as the cyber units or psychological support detachments. The common characteristic here is the planned investments in enhancing combat power, more intensive exercises with regular units of respective armed forces and procurement of more sophisticated weapon systems, especially anti-tank capabilities taking into account the type of forces of potential aggressor. The limitation is, however, the voluntary character of territorial defence forces as their capabilities and combat power could achieve only specific level and not comparable with professional soldiers'. Next, more advanced systems require more training to operate and use them within specific structures and joint operations. It causes territorial defence forces to have specific tactics and ability to perform delay operations using the terrain to their advantage.

Michael Clemmesen (2000) has stated that the territorial defence is not a preferred option; it is more effective in deterring an aggressor before it enters a territory of a country. However, such an option is not always achievable by relatively small nations when facing stronger opponents. In Estonia when considering defence scenarios, it was decided to build forces that could defend sovereignty and provide continuous resistance during longer conflict (Laaneots 2000, 94). A similar approach has been undertaken in Lithuania and Latvia. All nations have continued these processes, successively adjusting forces and capabilities to evolution and changes in their security environment. In that context, it is worth mentioning that even Russia decided to create a National Guard in 2016 after analysing these type of forces in other nations and based on own historical experiences (Śliwa, Veebel, Lebrun 2018).

#### General Framework and Components for Estonian Territorial Defence model

Although the potential threats are similar for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, these countries have adopted different national defence models, including expectations and investments to territorial defence. While Estonia has followed a total defence approach with a strong focus on territorial defence, compulsory military service and a reserve army, Latvia has opted for a solely professional army with a considerably smaller amount of supporting manpower, and Lithuania has used a mixed system. The Estonian and Latvian defence models constitute an intriguing pair as representing the opposing variants in terms of territorial defence whereas Lithuania represents a compromise between them.

Estonia uses a mixed model of professional military contingent, conscript army and reservists. The professional military contingent includes about 3,400 active servicemen, referring to professional soldiers as of 2018. The only unit which is composed of only the professionals and does not employ any conscripts is the Scouts Battalion under the composition of the 1st infantry brigade, which represents the main component of the Estonian land forces. Scouts Battalion has rapid response capability and is prepared for independent combat. It also has a high readiness to participate in international operations led by NATO, the United Nations and the European Union and considerable experience in doing so with repeated company deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other battalions under the composition of the 1st infantry brigade are partially based on the reservists with recent conscripts experience. The 2nd infantry brigade has been established in August 2014 and its anticipated main task is to offer immediate resistance to the enemy during the wartime. However, considerable efforts in planning, resource management and so on are needed to achieve the level of professionalism equivalent to that attained by the 1st infantry brigade. The 2nd infantry brigade is also to a large extent formed on the basis of conscript training battalions during the training year, but with the capacity to develop these further into reserve units. The 2nd infantry brigade is expected to be in its full combat readiness by 2026, latest (Veebel and Ploom 2019).

After the restoration of independence in 1991, NATO membership and the principle of collective defence based on Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty became the main variable defining defence policy objectives for Estonia, as the local political elite was convinced that the Organisation would have a pivotal role in strengthening their independence and sovereignty. After successful reforms and smooth accession negotiations, Estonia and other Baltic States joined NATO in 2004. Paradoxically, this main strategic achievement left the Baltic States without a clear long-term vision of what should be the future of local security and defence policies. NATO repositioned itself from an organisation committed to the principle of collective defence to a multitasking body dealing with issues beyond collective defence, e.g., anti-terrorism activities, peacekeeping missions and crisis management. Similarly, in the early 2000s, Russia was considered as a partner, not as an adversary. Accordingly, in 2004, Estonia did not join the NATO with its primary focus being the principle of collective defence as well as an organisation with the capability and willingness to defend its member states in response to a military attack by an external party.

In Estonia, both the systematic development of the national defence forces and debates on national security guarantees are based on the fear of potential Russian aggression. In the event of a conventional conflict, the early stage of survival and defence are mostly based on the local military forces. However, Baltic security and defence models have significant limitations concerning fundamental defence and deterrence. Bearing in mind that all three models are oriented towards guaranteeing territorial defence, the practical question remains whether in real terms they are aimed at: (a) defending the geographical territory of countries to avoid all possible losses of territory; (b) defending the countries' territories to the fullest extent possible while accepting some losses or (c) providing sufficient deterrence to avoid any attack. From the perspective of the armed forces, the preferred option would surely be the third alternative; however, the credibility of the current models to provide reliable deterrence is questionable (Veebel 2018).

Estonia has a strong tradition of voluntary formations coming from interwar period and the beginning of the 1990s. This tradition is linked to Estonia's small size and population and the type of military capabilities, as it has focus on land forces, and in reality, it does not possess air and navy components of armed forces. Therefore, the effort of the whole society is critical in creating abilities to resist any aggression. As Estonia is realistically not able to defend its sovereignty alone, considering the available military capabilities of the Russian Western Military District and those of the Baltic States, the membership in NATO and European Union became foreign policy priorities.

It is not only exclusively about those two important international organisations, as strategic partnerships with the United States of America and the United Kingdom and support for transatlantic links have played an important role, based on an understanding of capabilities to deter threats against the Baltic States, especially from Russia. It was recognised in President Obama's visit to Tallinn in 2014 when he stated, the 'defence of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defence of Berlin and Paris and London' (Obama 2014). President Trump recognised the quick increase of Baltic military budgets to 2 per cent (Estonia already in 2015), which was one of the leading topics for him during NATO summits. Estonia has also created close partnership with US National Guard in Maryland to strengthen relations and to exchange experiences.

The main role in implementing territorial defence aims and goals is given to Estonian Defence League. In practice, it means the duty to lead defending activities outside of active war zone where two infantry brigades and eFP forces are stationed. Defence League is also expected to play higher role in a starting stage of conflict as full mobilisation of regular and reserve force is seen needing at least 48 hours and arrival of first allied reinforcements around 4–5 days. From integrated NATO defence perspective, Defence League is seen as having limited role outside Estonian territory, temporary missions have been conducted but its central role is related to local territorial defence. Main advantage of Defence League from governmental perspective is its affordable price tag for securing wide territory for longer period if needed.

Estonian Defence League (Estonian: *Kaitseliit*) was initially established as self-defence organisation on 11 November 1918. However, after the start of the Soviet occupation in 1940, it was disbanded and many of its members were killed or deported to Siberia. With renewed independence, it was reactivated in 1990; what is significant is that this occurred 18 months before the formal announcement of Estonian sovereignty. Therefore, it is an organisation with longstanding historical traditions allowing it to be deeply rooted in societal mindset, triggering wide support for its membership and activities.

One of the related effects is the presence of the Estonian Defence League's structure of voluntary associations: 'Women's Voluntary Defence Organization' (Estonian: *Naiskodukaitse*), the Girl-Scout-type organisation 'Home Daughters' (Estonian: *Kodutütred*) or the scout-type patriotic youth paramilitary organisation 'Young Eagles' (Estonian:

*Noored Kotkad*). The first one receives medical training, field catering and basic military training. The last two are not defence organisations, but their volunteers have an independent programme they follow, and it is not linked directly to military aims. Their role is rather to develop patriotic and national spirit.

‘The Estonian Defence League Act’ (Estonian Parliament 2016) regulates legal status of the Estonian Defence League and its role in defending the independence of Estonia, its constitutional order and the safety of citizens. Membership in Estonian Defence League is voluntary, but for many citizens, it is a matter of pride and honour to be among ranks. As such, prestige is presented by the fact that to be accepted as a member, the recommendations from two active Estonian Defence League members are required and every member pays a small voluntary contribution. The organisation is voluntary and independent and has its own collegial bodies, which exercise the management and control of the organisation personnel, budget and resources. Nevertheless, the Commander of the Estonian Defence League is directly subordinated to the Estonian Chief of Defence, who has the authority to command the troops/units composed of Estonian Defence League members, which are assigned to the EDFs during wartime structures via Commander of Estonian Defence League. The total number of Estonian Defence League members is estimated to be 16,000 and with the support associations it counts some 26,000 organised in 15 regional commands, which are organised in four regional defence commands (Estonian Defence League 2019). The estimated Estonian wartime structure is as many as 25,000 individuals, and the reserve pool is estimated to reach 60,000 men. This regionalisation is followed for operations in well-known terrain during peace, crisis and war. The advantage is that the natural environment and urban terrain support unconventional operations by trained and properly equipped troops. The estimated budget of Estonian Defence League counts approximately 8 per cent of the overall military budget, and the funds dedicated to this formation have grown during last years. It is mainly spent on personnel costs, peacetime operations and maintenance, limited infrastructure construction and training. It does not include major investments in weapons, ammunition or equipment, since that part of budget is covered by the Estonian Defence League.

An important characteristic of Estonian Defence League is the permission of possessing weapon by its members at their homes, but after completing medical check-up and training concluded by an exam; next it is connected to the requirement to participate in military-type exercises, including those with regular units of armed forces. Units were a matter of ‘snap mobilizations’ and those presented a high level of turnout for their soldiers – reaching 85 per cent and even more (Glinska 2018). This social character influences the wide range of tasks, such typical military assignments as Host Nation Support (HNS), irregular warfare, partisan-type operations, sabotage and counter mobility. Moreover, it is about creating a pro-defence and patriotic attitude within society, improving member skills by continuous trainings and exercises, support for local administration in crisis management tasks, protection of public order and security of key infrastructure (Malysa 2017). The further development of Estonian Defence League is ongoing and according to ‘National Defence Action Plan 2019-2022’, financing will secure the ‘equipping of 6 new Defence League territorial defence companies’, and in 2022, this will include ‘6 light infantry companies will have been added to the significantly more mobile 4 battalions of the territorial defence structure of the Defence League’. These units are part of a wartime structure but are manned and trained by the Estonian Defence League. Next, financial resources will increase, among others, to continue and enhance patriotic education and conduct additional recruitment to meet the needs of more intensive activities. It will be supported by the Estonian Defence League School, which possesses the personnel and infrastructure necessary for the training that will be more intensive in coming years. The complex and well-concerned decisions are connected with the desire to equalise the potential of armed forces and Estonian Defence League, extend membership and lower the reaction time in the case mobilisation. In February 2019, the Ministry of Defence approved the 2020–2023 development plan that showed a trend of continuing investment into Estonian Defence League by an ‘increase to €43 million per year, in addition to investments to be made in the equipment of Kaitseliit-based territorial defence units;’ it is to be achieved in 2023 (Vahtla 2019). This is required as the total number of members is planned to reach nearly 30,000 in 2022, requiring investment into their training, equipment and participation in exercises (Flanagan 2019).



## 4 Focus Group Interviews on Territorial Defence, Total Defence and Comprehensive Defence in Estonian Defence Policy

Focus group interviews were conducted in August and September 2020 among Estonian officers studying in the Baltic Defence College and in the Master's programme of the Estonian Military Academy. Participants received topics in advance and were moderated by the authors of the current article. Interviews lasted 60 minutes. Focus group interview as a data collection method was preferred as it allows a structured but open format of debate, offering participants the options to bring new ideas into discussion. Focus group interviews were not recorded to allow more freedom for participants to express critical views on the subject. Members of the conducted focus group interviews had the ranks of captain or major with service experience in the EDFs for around 10 years.

Topics debated with officers studying in the BDCOL and the EMA were the following:

1. In which aspects does the territorial defence concept overlap according to you with the defence of homeland/fatherland (mainland territory)?
2. How do you define the concepts of territorial defence, total defence and comprehensive defence?
3. How well are the ideas of territorial defence matched/integrated with the ideas of comprehensive defence?
4. Do the officers of the EDFs who speak Russian as their mother tongue understand the concepts of territorial defence, total defence and comprehensive defence differently from Estonian speakers?

### 4.1 Responses: Priorities and Debates with BDCOL Officers

Respondents of the BDCOL were mixed in their response to the question if for them homeland defence posture equals with territorial defence. Similarly mixed were the answers in terms of what is the prior object to be defended by the EDFs (including the Defence League): is it land, people, strategic logistical centres (airfields and harbours) or state institutions? However, the importance of territorial defence by Defence League as the ability to additionally defend anything by regular infantry brigades beyond their active location area (around 100 square kilometres per brigade) was not seen as possible.

At the same time, the main function of regular Defence Force units was to defend certain logistical bottlenecks and buy time for the arrival of allied forces, and the territorial defence of the rest of Estonia was seen as the task of Defence League and the Police Forces.

The territorial defence implemented by the Defence League was seen as having high deterring effect against possible aggression, whereas two regular brigades were seen as having a low deterring effect. Accordingly, territorial defence activities were seen more related to deterrence whereas actual conventional military activities were viewed more in terms of delaying opponents and protecting certain vital points until the NATO reinforcements arrive.

Participants also stressed that they would prefer to have battles in rural or forest areas and avoid in cities. According to the responses, there seems to be no precise plan of how to avoid a fight in cities, but there is still hope that the potential opponent would accept the challenge in an open area, be it country or forest. Hence, there are very little preparations done for territorial defence in cities and the protection of citizens there.

Respondents also raised questions from their side such as 'What about defending harbours and airfields that are the priority in receiving NATO help, instead of protecting big land areas as a part of territorial defence priorities? Are we ready with alternatives options in terms of comprehensive and territorial defence in the case that Russia wants to lock our brigades in remote border area to delay battle and use the situation for conducting surprise attack to harbours and airports?'

The role of agility and initiative also found attention during the interview. The main starting challenge here is linguistic as 'defence' in Estonian is understood and used as passive or responsive concept, which is often expected to end as only aggression ends. Accordingly, pre-emptive manoeuvre, retaliatory activities or even taking back the land occupied by enemy are not seen essential parts or priorities of state defence. Mixed attitude and emotions appeared in these matters in group; however defensive non-agile approach was seen as having higher moral ground and a benefit inside integrated NATO deterrence posture and according to a comprehensive approach.

Possible challenges and obstacles were foreseen and debated by participants related to the case of a practical scenario in terms of the cooperation of the EDFs and NATO forces.

A central question was if NATO's Danish division HQ or NATO North-East corps HQ will share and understand the aims and priorities of Estonian territorial defence or will push for their own specific goals. It was considered relatively unclear if eFP forces will commit to defence or what mandates or orders they will have at all.

Final debate focused on technical readiness to meet territorial defence and total defence needs and preferences. As per the weapon systems meeting the needs concerning territorial defence, do recent Estonian procurements meet the respective defence needs? Are they about territorial defence with the modern high-tech aspect, about meeting basic needs or meant to support the allied forces who will do the real job? In this question, the answer was clear, Estonia will prioritise its last generation defence solutions integrated from NATO, as the country does not want to follow van Creveld and his ideas about guerrilla warfare and territorial defence. Therefore, preferred approach is comprehensive defence, not total war. The option of territorial defence was seen as suffering from attention and resources also in reason that guerrillas might not need generals to implement their visions on territorial or total defence in the Defence Forces Head Quarters, and their strategic plans and generals do not like too much of guerrillas, their methods and priorities in framework of integrated NATO defence

## 4.2 Responses: Priorities and Debate with Estonian Military Academy Officers

In terms of territorial defence, total defence and comprehensive defence, initial attitudes of respondents were driven from practical and functional limits (mostly financial and population) and abilities. Participants admitted that if certain choices in terms of preferences and possibilities have been made, limited resources mostly caused the perceived insufficiencies in controlling and defending Estonian sea territory and air space, and the priority is definitely that of the homeland/fatherland area. It was stressed that provocations on a land border would be taken much more seriously than systematic violations of airspace and the inability of knowing if the sea border is violated. Dependence on restricted resources is mentally not easy to accept since the lack of coastline defence makes territorial defence vulnerable.

Related to these limited capabilities, it is only natural that victory and immediately successful defence, using territorial defence, comprehensive defence or total defence models is practically impossible and merely buys time with the hope that the allied forces arrive before the country runs out of its defence resources.

How was territorial defence seen to be practically effective? Territorial defence is seen as left to the Defence League while professionals are busy with infantry brigades in stopping advancing enemy forces. At the same time, territorial defence is seen much more understandable concept than NATO deterrence in the Baltic States.

The current insufficiency of resources is not meeting the vision that territorial defence capabilities might be needed tomorrow. Rather, in its responsibility, the Defence League is not given sufficient funds to cover its tasks. Though the tasks were left to the Defence League, the respective sums to support these tasks were not arriving. This makes territorial defence practically difficult to implement with current expectations and priorities.

Integrated Baltic defence was seen as necessary to be effective with the Estonian territorial defence. Here the generational gap among higher officers is seen as a critical variable; the older generation of officers is seen as not willing to cooperate for integrated Baltic defence and prefers to focus on local territorial defence with some elements of total defence. Baltic cooperation is seen as important but not yet as having fully reached the minds of the leadership. Thus, though the focus in state defence is placed rather upon big power allies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, cooperation with the 3B neighbours is rather meagre. In terms of territorial defence, presently there is a high willingness to defend people or the civilians and integrate them to total defence activities. As admitted by themselves, this makes defence more predictable and fragile. Strong statements surfaced that saw that current defence plans mostly defend military personal with almost no plans or resources to defend civilians. Presently, the idea to protect cities is seen as underdeveloped. However, the Estonian Defence League is seen capable enough to protect local citizens.

Regarding the choice between deterrence and territorial defence, military leadership is seen to speak mainly about defence and conventional activities. As to deterrence and defence dilemma, readiness-based 'warning' is a practical priority. In this sense, the aim is to demonstrate that Estonia is ready for a quick response. The ultimate aspect of deterrence in Estonia relies on the fact that while the potential enemy can beat the brigades, it still do not have the state,

i.e., people's hearts and minds will be out of reach, which should be achieved with the combined activities of territorial and total defence.

With regard to the comprehension of terminology, its meaning and content, a visible gap was seen between the younger generation of officers educated in Western military academies and the older generation from the Soviet environment. Soviet-type thinking is seen still as rather influential, changing rapidly only in recent years and current leadership.

In terms of threats to be addressed by total defence and territorial defence rather paradoxically, local Russians are perceived as potential enemies. In this sense, Estonia is understood as a pre-conflict military mission. Russian speakers in Estonia are equalised with Russians who are associated with Pro-Putinism. Accordingly, within this logic, those people cannot be trusted. For the Russophone population, NATO is expected to be (according to interviews) synonymous with the United States. There are no other members with any influence except the United States.

Considering eFP's presence and composition, it was seen to have little function in terms of territorial defence or comprehensive defence while acting mostly as tripwire for allied response in case of a conventional attack. It is generally believed that Russia understands this danger, knowing that a NATO inevitable response would follow. However, in case of fragility in the Alliance, Russia could be quick to seize the moment.

To what extent does Estonia's own defence ideas and opinions matter after the arrival of allied reinforcements? There is hope that the eFP respects Estonian priorities in terms of territorial defence. If NATO has bigger and more convincing plans, Estonia would be ready to change to its own. Estonia is still believed to hold a red card to block actions it does not prefer, yet joint force command is nevertheless inevitable. It was also posited that territorial defence might acquire new scenarios. This concerns NATO defence priorities and plans if they are similar to Estonian expectations. The respondents see it depending on the situation. For example, if escalation will presume NATO priorities are expected to dominate, while Estonia needs to give up part of its commanding rights and restructure its capabilities. However, the question can also be about the end state, if it remains the same with NATO and Estonia. Here different layers of NRF come into play; it is seen as in broad strokes that NATO will overtake the brigades of EDFs and the Defence League will remain as the secondary layer. In this case, stabilisation and local support are well developed, better than conventional. Responsibility will be handed over to the arriving NATO forces, and this is perceived as an inevitable fact.

What about the experiences with territorial and total defence in 1939–1940 and the authoritarian pre-war regime? It is claimed that the situation has changed, and the results of it are visible. In addition, this transformation works as a motivator. There were still mutually contradictory debates on what is better in terms of territorial defence compared to the situation in 1939. Does the current political leadership understand the needs and changes in the current situation compared to the failure of 1939?

In future terms, the lack of ministerial cooperation and integrity, with each of them working to their own rhythm, were also mentioned, as Estonia's comprehensive defence model needs one integrated system to work. There is currently no common goal. There is coordination but not yet common planning. Until Estonia achieves planning, there is no comprehensive defence.

## 5 Conclusion

Estonia has followed a total defence approach with a strong focus on territorial defence, a compulsory military service and a large reservist army. Since the restoration of independence in the early 1990s, Estonia has not given up the principle of territorial defence and particularly from the 2000s onwards along with NATO membership has focused on the development of country's initial independent defence capabilities.

Territorial defence and comprehensive defence play a critical role in Estonian defence and deterrence credibility and are viewed as one of the critical elements in the national defence system's response and survival during the early stages of a hybrid conflict. Accordingly, there is a national consensus in terms of the necessity to develop territorial defence capabilities and requirement to dedicate proper resources in a united and coordinated way. This is connected to cost-effect calculus to be taken under consideration by a potential occupant.

However, there are several aspects in terms of meaning, priorities and limits of territorial defence and comprehensive approach, which need both clarification and even a debate to achieve necessary integrity, first among EDF and Defence League, and also with the eFP forces and expected allied reinforcements.

Those questions formed the backbone of focus group interviews conducted during this research.

As indicated by focus group interviews, there emerge two central topics in terms of territorial defence as a part of national defence. When Estonia has an important focus on territorial defence, its actual spending does not follow that logic. Looking at the budget of the Estonian Defence League, it is visible that it is meagre compared to the main Defence Forces budget. What is more, the choice precisely of not channelling sums in building up credible territorial defence can be seen as a decision in task reallocation. The Estonian Defence League was given the sole guardianship over the Estonian territory but budget allocations did not follow this decision. The fully professional conventional brigades remained the only recipients of any credible financial support to their activities.

The second topic that clearly surfaced is the cooperation level between the Baltic neighbours, which problematises appropriate implementation of territorial defence. It must be admitted that the Estonian Defence League and its sister organisations in Latvia and Lithuania have conducted common exercises and are cooperating to some degree, but neither the legal framework for their cooperation nor the appropriate common planning mechanisms and procedures are in place. In a conflict situation in which the borders between the Baltic States would play no functional role, this lack of a legal framework of cooperation could in fact hinder attempts at territorial defence. This is critical for regular armed forces to achieve full operational capabilities and this is the case of Baltic nations as an attack could be done unexpectedly using one of the principles of war – surprise. As a result, territorial defence forces are expected to be ready with the limited combat potential and even psychological preparedness; however, they will play a role in preserving resilience and continuing active and passive resistance. This type of force is very important for small nations as a part of deterrence discouraging aggression against their territory and independence.

However, necessary debates will not be limited with these two central deliberations as modern societies are evolving and threat perception is changing. For example in Estonia, the threat of ‘an extensive or limited military attack against Estonia’ in October 2018 was recognised among respondents as the seventh such incident (20 per cent positive answers; rather improbable 47 per cent; completely improbable 24 per cent) (Kivirähk 2018). The top threats were cyberattack, ‘fake news’ and interference in ‘Estonian politics or economy in order to influence these in their own interests’. To meet the changing needs, the readiness to face non-military threats need to progress visibly, and there are already laws in place that allow for quick and independent reaction at lower levels of the chain of command. Estonia has decided to adapt its territorial defence forces to new threats by making a number of changes in their functioning, depending on the local conditions in each case.

To conclude, although conceptually the territorial defence models of three Baltic nations differ, their role is functionally connected in their ability to conduct operations within well-known terrain and in support of local communities. It is facilitated by growing cross border cooperation creating unified operational area not divided by borders. The support of regular units is another key aspect. Keeping the ongoing investments in mind, they will play a role to face ‘hybrid’ challenges although they will not be able to stop powerful land-air aggression.

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