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Researching Baltic security challenges after the annexation of Crimea

Abstract: The article aims to provide an insight into academic and military studies that investigate security challenges in the Baltic region after the annexation of Crimea. To do this in a systematic way, numerous academic and military studies and analyses in this field are divided into six broad categories: literature on conventional threat scenarios in the Baltic region; studies on nuclear escalation scenarios; publications that describe Russian viewpoints in the current confrontation with the West; studies that discuss security policy and security perceptions of the Baltic countries and the national security models of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; studies on anti-access and area denial; and articles that analyse the dilemmas and challenges in association with understanding the essence of deterrence in the context of modern hybrid warfare and the build-up of a viable deterrence model in the Baltic region. In total, about 40 publications from the period between 2014 and 2019 are represented in this article. While some studies are already well known, others have undeservedly remained somewhat overlooked. This article attempts to correct this by highlighting and comparing the results of the most interesting and intriguing studies in this field. Through this, the author strived to maintain a balance between studies conducted both by military experts and by academics.

Keywords: Baltic states; security.

1 Introduction

Although the Baltic countries are safer than ever before as members of the EU and NATO, as well as there has been no direct acts of violence on the part of Russia against Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania over the past decade, the Baltic countries still feel insecure due to its neighbour's actions in testing the credibility of the current international security order in various regions worldwide. These fears culminated in the military conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and in Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014. Both actions have clearly demonstrated that Russia has conducted itself without any fear of retaliation and has planned and executed aggressions with great sophistication, initiative, and agility. Russia's determination to restore its sphere of influence in the former Soviet republics is also the reason why the Baltic countries are afraid that Russia might attack them as well.

Serious concerns about the vulnerability of the Baltic countries are reflected in numerous academic studies and military reports published after the annexation of Crimea. Although Russia was described as a partner and a participant by the military and academic community in the early 2000s and Russia's aggression against the Baltic countries was considered theoretical and rather unlikely scenario, military experts and researchers nowadays suggest various motives, strategies, and scenarios as to why and how Russia could attack the Baltics to realise its geopolitical ambitions. Next, practical questions have appeared in recent studies and reports, for example, such as: Can Russia be deterred in the Baltic region? How should NATO respond to the Russia's 'escalation to de-escalate' strategy? What is the impact of mutual anti-access and area denial (A2AD) in the current confrontation between Russia and the West? Could the combination of joint resources of the Baltic countries and military cooperation between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania be a solution for ensuring regional security?

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The discussion on security challenges in the Baltic region has also contributed to a more general debate on how credible is the deterrence strategy of the transatlantic security alliance at all, and how deterrence should work in a multipolar world or in case of a hybrid conflict. All these topics have come forth not only in national strategy documents of the Baltic countries and of the NATO Alliance, but also in recent academic studies and military reports on security challenges in the Baltic region.

The aim of this article is to provide an insight into the academic and military studies investigating such security challenges in the Baltic region after the annexation of Crimea. Some reports, such as the war-gaming study on Russia's potential invasion of Baltic countries published by the RAND Corporations (see Shlapak and Johnson, 2016), are already well known among both military experts and academics and have received a lot of feedback. In total, about 40 publications are represented in this article, published over the 2014–2019 period. The selection of articles is subjective, based on author's individual preferences. However, the author was trying to maintain a balance between studies conducted by military experts and academics. This would allow covering both theoretical and practical aspects of the discussion.

This study is structured as follows. Section 1 covers the literature on conventional threat scenarios on the part of Russia against Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Section 2 provides a selection of studies on potential nuclear escalation scenarios. Section 3 focuses on the publications that describe Russia's viewpoints in the current confrontation with the West. Section 4 introduces some studies that discuss the security policy and security perceptions of the Baltic countries and national security models of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in confronting Russia's regional ambitions. Section 5 briefly addresses recent studies on anti-access and area denial, sometimes used as a new 'buzzword' in debates and discussions on security in the Baltic region. Finally, section 6 concludes the literature overview by highlighting some studies that analyse the dilemmas and challenges in association with understanding the essence of deterrence in the context of modern hybrid warfare and building-up a viable deterrence model in the Baltic region. The last section provides an overall conclusion.

2 Literature on conventional threat scenarios in the Baltic region

Probably, the most well-known recent study discussing conventional threat scenarios of Russia's invasion of the Baltic countries is a research report published by the RAND Corporation, '*Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defence of the Baltics*'. The RAND Corporation is a non-profit multidisciplinary think tank with its main emphasis on national security challenges and economic and social policy. The report conducted by David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson in 2016 is almost iconic in a way that it could be called a wake-up call for the transatlantic security alliance to revise its current security and deterrence posture as well as to update the Alliance's strategy in protecting the Baltic countries. The study reports the results of a series of war games conducted by the RAND Arroyo Centre in 2014–2015 to investigate the possible outcome of Russia's invasion of the Baltics at some point in the near future. The outcome of the report is shocking, arguing that as postured in 2016, the Alliance cannot successfully defend the Baltic region. The study indicates that across multiple games, the longest time that it would take for Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga is 60 hours. The article concludes that such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of equally undesirable options. However, these simulations also suggest that it would require about seven brigades, including three heavy armoured brigades, to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic countries and to change the strategic picture as seen from Russia's viewpoint (Shlapak and Johnson, 2016). This report may also be considered as a landmark in a way that it is often used as a basis for further discussion and argumentation, as far as the credibility of the NATO alliance's deterrence posture is concerned.

However, potential threat scenarios are discussed in other studies. For example, another study published by the RAND Corporation, '*Hybrid warfare in the Baltics: Threats and potential responses*' by Andrew Radin, confirms the results of the report by Shlapak and Johnson (2016) that the Baltic countries are vulnerable in terms of imbalances in conventional forces. Radin differentiates between three types of Russia's aggression, such as non-violent subversion, covert violent actions and conventional warfare supported by subversion, and concludes that Russia will most likely have difficulties in using both non-violent tactics and covert violent action to destabilize the Baltic countries. However, the study argues that the Baltics are vulnerable as regards Russia's local conventional superiority is concerned. The

article suggests that a large-scale conventional Russian incursion into the Baltics, which is legitimized and supported by political subversion, would rapidly overwhelm NATO forces postured in the region. However, Radin takes a somewhat different approach in suggesting how to deter such attacks and makes three broad recommendations: first, the security forces of the Baltic countries need to be strengthened, second, a more sophisticated and subtle strategic campaign should be developed, including support for Russian-language television stations backed by the governments of the Baltic countries and third, actions should be taken to mitigate the risks that a NATO deployment in the Baltic region will increase the potential for low-level Russian aggression (Radin, 2017). The policy conclusions of these two studies alone clearly demonstrate that the same challenge could be solved in many different ways.

Hypothetical threat scenarios and computer-assisted simulations are discussed in other studies, e.g., in the '*Baltic Security Net Assessment*' conducted jointly by the Potomac Foundation and the Baltic Defence College (Petersen and Myers, 2018). The publication offers a comprehensive insight into the operational level of opposed forces involved in a potential confrontation, campaign simulations, strategic and tactical axis in the region, and so on. Therefore, it should be particularly intriguing to those readers interested in detailed description of the balance of powers in the Baltic region and in strategic and tactical challenges in association with the Baltics.

It should also be noted in this respect that the most recent reports of the RAND Corporation are more modest in their assessments compared with the results of the previous studies. For example, a study by Scott Boston and co-authors entitled '*Assessing the conventional force imbalance in Europe: Implications for countering Russian local superiority*', argues that based on their analysis, there is no reason to believe that Russian conventional aggression against NATO is likely to take place. However, they also emphasize that steps should be taken to mitigate potential areas of vulnerability in the interest of ensuring a stable security relationship between all NATO members and Russia. The authors conclude that NATO has sufficient resources, personnel, and equipment to enhance conventional deterrence against Russia (Boston et al., 2018).

More specifically, most conventional threat scenarios clearly point to the same problematic issue: the possibility that Russia could isolate the Baltic countries from its Western allies by closing the 'Suwalki gap' (called also 'Kaliningrad corridor'), a 110–115 kilometre wide land border between Lithuania and Poland. One of the most comprehensive studies on this matter is a research by Leszek Elak and Zdzislaw Sliwa, '*The Suwalki Gap – NATO's fragile hot spot*'. The article analyses various characteristics of the Kaliningrad region from the military perspective as well as suggests in a very detailed manner the potential tactics that could be used in military aggressions within the Suwalki gap. Elak and Sliwa conclude that the loss of the land connection between the West and the Baltic countries would allow Russia freedom of action over an extended period of time. Furthermore, they argue that if the terrain is lost, it will require significant efforts to control the area again. The authors stress that the Kaliningrad region is critical for Russia to gain time, which is the third important operational factor supporting other two factors, such as space and force, enabling the desired speed to reach the desired end state (Elak and Sliwa, 2016). This issue is further elaborated, for example, in the articles '*Kaliningrad: A useless sliver of Russia or the cause of a new Fulda gap?*' by Vaidas Saldžiūnas (2016), '*Why it would be rational for Russia to escalate in Kaliningrad and Suwalki corridor?*' by Viljar Veebel (2018d), '*Kaliningrad oblast as the forward anti-access/area denial hub*' by Zdzislaw Sliwa (2018), and others.

3 Studies on potential nuclear escalation scenarios

The question whether Russia would use its nuclear forces in the Baltic region has also intrigued many academics and military experts recently. One of the most radical discussions in this field is a blog post by Loren B. Thompson, '*Why the Baltic states are where nuclear war is most likely to begin*'. He argues that the likelihood of nuclear war between Russia and the United States is probably growing and is the reason why it is most likely going to start is a future military confrontation over three Baltic countries. Thompson describes eight reasons why nuclear weapons could potentially be used in future warfighting scenarios with regard to the Baltics and argues that according to the bottom-line scenario, the East–West conflict escalates into the use of nuclear weapons in the Baltic area, and neither side of the conflict understands what actions might provoke nuclear use by the other. Thompson comes to a somewhat surprising conclusion – at least in the eyes of the Baltic countries – that the United States needs to reassess the situation, suggesting that it

would make no sense to tie security of the United States to countries of 'such modest importance that are situated in such unpromising tactical circumstances' (Thompson, 2016).

Potential nuclear conflict escalation scenarios are in more detail discussed in another publication, a NATO playbook entitled '*Preventing escalation in the Baltics*' by Ulrich Kühn. The author argues that the risk of escalating a wider conflict between Russia and NATO is dangerously high particularly in the case of the Baltic countries because it would be difficult for NATO to defend the region. Kühn suggest three possible escalation scenarios, i.e., deliberate escalation, inadvertent escalation, and accidental escalation. All three scenarios also involve nuclear threats; however, two of the scenarios stop short of actual Russian nuclear-weapon usage (Kühn, 2018). The analysis provides an interesting hypothetical construct for the experts at both the transatlantic and local levels, as it points to many practical issues in regard to the nuclear deterrence from the NATO's political decision-making process to the role of domestic policies in tackling such a crisis.

Conflict escalation scenarios that involve nuclear capabilities are discussed also in other studies. For example, in a study called '*Reducing the risk of nuclear war in the Nordic/Baltic region*' by Barry Blechman and co-authors, two scenarios of conventional war ending in the exchange of nuclear weapons are constructed (namely, 'Escalation in Estonia' and 'Regional War'). Although the authors emphasize that the scenarios are purely illustrative and the probability of nuclear use is low, they argue that it is useful to reduce these risks even further and suggest two initiatives, such as a strengthening of the Alliance's conventional military capabilities and particularly the ability to move quickly into the Baltic region, as well as to establish a Baltic nuclear weapons free zone, or at least examining the possibility to do so (for further discussion, see Blechman et at., 2015). Jüri Luik and Tomas Jermalavičius in their article '*A plausible scenario of nuclear war in Europe, and how to deter it: A perspective from Estonia*' point to various alarming signs, e.g., Russia's large-scale exercises incorporate limited nuclear strike scenarios against NATO as part of Russia's 'escalation to de-escalate' strategy; Russia is expanding the range of its tactical delivery systems, the country's political rhetoric includes nuclear threats toward the West, and so on. They emphasize that the Alliance's range of response options to such threats and limited nuclear war scenarios has shrunk considerably and that the Alliance lacks a collective will to call those threats a bluff (Luik and Jermalavičius, 2017).

A large part of the research in this field more or less considers it likely that Russia could use its nuclear forces in the Baltic region. However, there are also articles that oppose this conviction. For example, Viljar Veebel and Illimar Ploom in '*The deterrence credibility of NATO and the readiness of the Baltic states to employ the deterrence instruments*' disagree with the idea that the Baltic countries could be under potential nuclear attack, which could in turn evolve to a nuclear war. They argue that although Russia and NATO as potential conflict parties have a striking capability, it would be irrational for both of them to execute a nuclear strike even as a measure of last resort. The authors stress that it is hard to believe that Russia has any rational motivation to use nuclear weapons in the Baltic countries because a large share of the population in the Baltic countries are Russian-speaking. Likewise, in case of a potential conflict, territorial proximity of Russia and the Baltic countries, as well as Russia's possible further ambition to legitimate the annexation comes into play. The argument of irrationality applies also to the NATO alliance as it would raise a question about morality and escalation should NATO consider using nuclear attack as a preventative measure. In addition, there are several logical gaps in the chain of arguments justifying the use of nuclear weapons against Russia if the latter has fully or partially invaded the Baltic countries. The authors hereby point to the following questions: First, how could the strategic use of nuclear weapons against Russia be believable in a regional conflict? Second, how would it help to solve the conflict which has already started? Third, what would be the possible positive outcome for NATO, having initiated mutually assured destruction with Russia to stop the occupations of Baltics? (Veebel and Ploom, 2018a).

The above-mentioned study by Viljar Veebel and Illimar Ploom points to an intriguing issue, namely the radically different understanding and perceptions of nuclear deterrence in various countries. Two other studies have further elaborated this topic: first, an EU-wide survey of the attitudes towards nuclear issues conducted by the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) 'Eyes tight shut: European attitudes towards nuclear deterrence' from December 2018, and second, a country-specific study on the expectations of the political and military elite of Estonia and Latvia on nuclear deterrence of the NATO alliance by Viljar Veebel '(Un)justified expectations on nuclear deterrence of non-nuclear NATO members: the case of Estonia and Latvia?' from August 2018.

The first survey, '*Eyes tight shut: European attitudes towards nuclear deterrence*', concludes that European countries remain unwilling to face the renewed relevance that nuclear deterrence ought to have in their strategic thinking and that national attitudes remain similar to those attitudes that dominated at the end of the Cold War. The study also

shows that there are significant differences in the attitudes towards nuclear deterrence among the EU members. The survey results differentiate between five groups of countries, such as 'true believers' (the UK, France, Poland and Romania), 'neutrals' (Ireland, Austria, Malta, Cyprus and Finland), 'conflicted' (Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany), 'pragmatists' (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Italy), and 'conformists' (Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Greece, Denmark, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal) (Rapnouil et al., 2018). This ECFR survey is an outstanding research in this respect that there are not so many studies conducted in this area that cover in a comparable manner so many countries.

The second study '*(Un)justified expectations on nuclear deterrence of non-nuclear NATO members: the case of Estonia and Latvia?*' offers an in-depth discussion on the expectations of Estonia and Latvia on nuclear deterrence. As a follow-up of the ECFR survey, the article suggests that the political leaders and military experts of these countries appear to be strongly convinced that NATO is ready to use nuclear weapons to protect the Baltic countries. The main argument existed in a belief that without appropriate response, the Alliance will end its existence as a provider of collective security. Next to that, the survey respondents in Estonia and Latvia shared an understanding that the Russian leadership is convinced that NATO and particularly the political leaders of the United States are determined to use nuclear weapons to defend the Baltic countries. At the same time, the survey respondents in Estonia and Latvia stated that the Russian leadership has no rational reason to use nuclear capabilities against the Baltic countries and the NATO forward presence units. Similarly, it was assumed that Russia is afraid to conduct a tactical nuclear strike in the region in order to avoid escalation and retaliation (Veebel, 2018a). This particular study is a good example of a somewhat simplified and abstract way of thinking of those countries which have no nuclear capabilities on their own, but rely heavily on the deterrence effect of the nuclear capabilities of other countries.

Finally, a large part of the literature in this area deals with the assessment of NATO's nuclear policy and the credibility of the nuclear component of the Alliance's deterrence model. Many authors are relatively critical in this respect. For example, in '*Post-Warsaw analysis: What NATO said (or didn't say) about Nuclear Weapons*', Steve Andreasen, Simon Lunn, and Isabelle Williams point to the various shortcomings in the NATO 2016 Summit Communiqué. They argue that the nuclear language in this document is a significant step back from the previous strategic concepts (see, Andreasen et al., 2016). Simond de Galbert and Jeffrey Rathke in '*NATO's Nuclear Policy as Part of a Revitalized Deterrence Strategy*' stress that NATO conducts nuclear exercises, not linking them to NATO's conventional exercises, and does not practice the transition from conventional to nuclear conflict. At the same time, Russia definitely sees its nuclear forces as a tool in pursuing its political objectives, uses related rhetoric in its statements to intimidate neighbours and NATO members, and often includes simulated escalation from conventional conflict to the use of nuclear weapons in its own military exercises (de Galbert and Rathke, 2016). A critical view on the shortcomings of the Western nuclear deterrence model definitely helps one to improve the Alliance's deterrence concept and, in the long term, to take control over the security situation in Europe again.

4 Research on Russia's viewpoints in the current confrontation with the West

To understand the roots of the current confrontation between Russia and the Western countries and to predict the dynamics of hypothetical conflicts in the future, some authors have investigated Russia's motives, strategic behaviour and policy choices.

Most of the studies in this field use the keyword 'Gerasimov doctrine', referring to Russia's chief of the general staff, General Valery Gerasimov. Relying on Gerasimov's article 'The value of science is in the foresight' published in 2013, Molly K. McKew states in the article '*The Gerasimov Doctrine*' in POLITICO that Russia has taken tactics developed by the Soviet Union, blended them with strategic military thinking about total war and developed a new theory of modern warfare. The article argues that the objective of Gerasimov doctrine is to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict within an enemy state. McKew also suggests that Russia has used Gerasimov doctrine in practice for the past several years in Ukraine as well as that Russia has made attempts to influence domestic politics and security of its neighbouring countries, referring to Georgia, Estonia, and Lithuania in recent years (McKew, 2017). This view is also confirmed in '*Russia's perception warfare*' by Tony Selhorst. He analyses Estonia's relations with Russia in 2007 and the

lessons of the Georgian war and suggests that Russia has developed the Gerasimov doctrine in Estonia and Georgia, having applied it in Ukraine. On the basis of these examples, Selhorst differentiates between six phases of conflict from Russia's perspective and concludes that although Russia uses a conventional force in its operational concept that is superior and with which victory is almost certain, it does not want to employ the forces as such for its near-abroad policy. To quote Selhorst:

'Major combat is an undesired escalation as Russia seeks a psychological victory, not a physical one./.../The culminating psychological effects of the reflexive control approach, like disorientation, suggestion and concealment need to overcome the provocation. At the end, it will cause exhaustion, paralysis and a perception of despair among the political and military leadership. These created perceptions and misperceptions set the leadership up for the final phase of the Gerasimov doctrine: resolution' (Selhorst, 2016).

Some authors suggest that Russian foreign policy involves elements of threat to neighbouring countries. For example, Olga Oliker and co-authors cover the topic in another study published by the RAND Corporation in 2015, '*Russian foreign policy in historical and current context: A reassessment*'. The authors interpret Russia's recent actions in Ukraine in the light of the historical development of Russian foreign policy and reach several intriguing conclusions. They argue that Russia's general attitude toward Ukraine is largely consistent with historical Russian (and Soviet) thinking about security interests and foreign policy over the past three centuries. However, as Oliker and co-authors see it, the historical patterns of Russian foreign policy are insufficient by themselves to fully explain Russian actions in Ukraine, as the country's behaviour has recently been marked by unnecessary actions that have limited, rather than enhanced, Russia's ability to achieve its historical goals and interests. The authors conclude that Russian foreign policy today is also influenced by other factors, like Vladimir Putin's unchallenged policymaking role and his personal viewpoint regarding recent events in Ukraine (Olikier et al., 2015).

Although there are many studies arguing that Russia has invented a non-linear, high-tech military strategy in the form of 'Gerasimov doctrine', there is, however, one author who strongly opposes this idea. This is Mark Galeotti, who has shared this view in several articles, e.g., '*I'm sorry for creating "Gerasimov doctrine"*' (Galeotti, 2018a), or '*The mythical "Gerasimov doctrine" and the language of threat*' (Galeotti, 2018b). He was the first analyst in the West who published the partial translation of the Gerasimov's text in his own article '*The "Gerasimov doctrine" and Russian non-linear war*' (Galeotti, 2014). His views have been a subject of lively discussions and debates recently among military experts and academics because he offers a different perspective next to the 'traditional' interpretation of Russia's actions by the Western world. In this respect, all of Galeotti's articles are definitely worthy of a closer examination.

Many authors have also contributed to the discussion on Russia's potential ambitions in the Baltic countries. Different views have been suggested both by academics and military experts on what could support or hinder Russia to realize its ambitions in the Baltics. To bring some examples, studies by Tomas Jermalavičius (e.g., '*Deterring Russia: Twists and turns of the strategic debate*'; see Jermalavičius, 2018), Kalev Stoicesku ('The Russian threat to security in the Baltic Sea region', see Stoicesku, 2018), and Zdzisław Śliwa, Viljar Veebel, Maxime Lebrun (e.g., '*Russian ambitions and hybrid modes of warfare*', see Śliwa et al., 2018) are definitely worth reading. To further expand the horizon, in the article '*Russia's neo-imperial dependence model: Experiences of former Soviet republics*' the common features of both the Georgian war and the Ukrainian conflict are applied to assess potential threats for other former Soviet republics, such as Armenia, Belarus and Georgia. The article draws some interesting conclusions about Russia's neo-imperial dependence model, the current stage of the dependence cycle and the pre-conditions for the target state to escape the dependence (see Veebel, 2018b).

To conclude, the author would like to attach particular importance to an article which offers an in-depth insight into the way Russians understand the concept of war and what meaning it has in Russian society. The article is called '*Do Russians want war?*' by Andrei Kolesnikov, published in 2016. Kolesnikov discusses the meaning of war in the former Soviet Union's and Russia's collective consciousness, describes the ways that Russia 'sells' the war, and plays around with the strategies of how the views of the focus groups of the surveys are changed. Kolesnikov concludes that the modern Russian political regime has elaborated a concept of war that enjoys considerable public support and that the Kremlin has been able to foster a mythological sense of heroism when it comes to war. As he states, all of this helps to convince the public that external aggression is actually part and parcel of a defensive war or part of a series of simple, low-cost military operations. Kolesnikov argues colourfully that 'for Russians, war has replaced the refrigerator and the television', meaning that war has outstripped other concerns among Russia's domestic population. Finally, Kolesnikov concludes that Russia's permanent war footing has become the primary means for Russian elites to keep themselves in

power, and this discourse – wars that are fair, defensive, victorious, and preventive – constructs the foundation for a heavily personalized regime (Kolesnikov, 2016). Kolesnikov's statements overlap with the views of other authors, e.g., Gudrun Persson, Christopher Coker, and so on.

In more detail, in '*Russia and Baltic Sea security: A Background*', Gudrun Persson analyses both Russia's doctrinal thinking and its political rhetoric in a comprehensive manner, differentiating between the strategic level ('an encircled Russia'), policy level (discussion of the country's path of strategic solitude, an increased anti-Western stance, and Russia's Sonderweg, i.e., 'special path' in a globalised world), various ways of how Russia defines conflicts and wars (e.g., differentiation between an armed conflict and a military conflict and between three different sorts of war: local, regional and large-scale war) and Russia's views about the use of soft power as an instrument of statecraft. She also suggests that there are specific features of Russian national identity, such as priority for the spiritual over the material, collectivism, historical unity between Russian people, the country's historical heritage, and an inevitable corollary that subjects of history are defended by the armed forces in Russia. To quote Persson, 'In the Russian world, death is beautiful and that to die for one´s friends, one´s people, the Fatherland is beautiful' (Persson, 2018).

Christopher Coker argues in '*The West and Russia: Another Front in the New Cold War?*' that 'in Russia, the social contract between people and the state is the restoration of a sense of national destiny, a historic role.' Moreover, he emphasises that 'an agreement to disagree is not Russia's position', referring to, e.g., harassment of Sweden (unspecified threats if it even aspires to join NATO), regular incursion into the airspace of the Baltic countries, regular Zapad exercises, and other measures Russia has exploited to put pressure on its neighbours (see, Coker, 2018).

To sum up, because of its irrational behaviour, Russia is mostly 'a big mystery' for Western countries. Any research that describes Russia's vision of its role in international politics, analyses country's military doctrine and military thinking, and provides an insight into Russia's aims and strategies in current regional and international conflicts contributes to piecing this complex jigsaw puzzle called 'Russia' together.

5 Recent studies on security policy and security perceptions of the Baltic countries and on national defence models of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

Today's instable security situation as a result of Russia's recent actions has both revealed the vulnerability of NATO's deterrence posture as well as proved challenging for the national defence models of the Baltic countries. This has in turn motivated many academics and military experts to investigate the changes which have taken place in security policies of the Baltic countries after the annexation of Crimea as well as to analyse the key elements of the national defence models of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

A study by Dovile Jakniunaite, '*Changes in security policy and perceptions of the Baltic states 2014–2016*', provides a comprehensive analytical overview on the dynamics of security thinking in the Baltic countries in recent years. The article reflects the main changes in security policies and perceptions of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and concludes that changes were mostly visible in security measures. The author suggests that security discourse of the Baltic countries intensified during that period as well. Jakniunaite also argues that in the recent years, the bulk of the efforts of the Baltic countries was directed towards their partners and towards convincing them about the reality of threats and the need to take some concrete measures. One consequence of these changes has been the militarisation of security policy and its discourse in the Baltic countries (Jakniunaite, 2016).

In a wider context, a deeper look at the security environment of the Baltic countries could be found in '*Security dilemmas of the Baltic region*' by Anna Antczak and Zdzisław Śliwa. This study focuses on the linkages between geostrategic insight and the security situation in the Baltic region. The authors conclude that the situation in the Baltic region remains complex in the coming years as Russia continues to use its pragmatic approach to meet its own aims. Thus, it could be expected that Russia maintains the pressure both on its individual neighbours and on the Alliance as a whole. The authors suggest that NATO's forward military presence in the Baltic region should be linked to an efficient dialogue with Russia, which would keep 'the door open'. However, the Alliance's political discourse must be accompanied by showing real power (see, Antczak and Śliwa, 2018).

For those who would like to go in more detail, the key aspects of the national security and defence policy and the country's recent efforts in strengthening its military capabilities in case of Latvia are comprehensively described, e.g., in the article '*Latvia's security and defence post-2014*' by Toms Rostoks and Nora Vanaga (see Rostoks and Vanaga, 2016) and for Lithuania in the article '*The impact of the conflict in Ukraine on Lithuanian security development*' by Linas Kojala and Vytautas Keršanskas (see Kojala and Keršanskas, 2015).

National defence models of the Baltic countries have gained a lot of attention among both academics and military experts as well. A comparison of national defence models of Estonia and Latvia is presented in '*Deterrence Dilemma in Latvia and Estonia: Finding the Balance between External Military Solidarity and Territorial Defence*' by Māris Andžāns and Viljar Veebel. Both countries have adopted different approaches in deterring the same opponent: while Estonia uses a total defence approach with a strong emphasis on territorial defence, a compulsory military service and a reservist army, Latvia has opted for a solely professional army with a considerably smaller amount of supporting manpower (see Andžāns and Veebel, 2017). These two countries constitute an intriguing pair as far as discussing the security choices of a small country bordering an aggressive and resurgent neighbour are concerned.

The characteristics and vulnerabilities of the national defence model of Estonia are investigated by many local experts, e.g., '*Hybrid or not: Deterring and Defeating Russia's ways of warfare in the Baltics – the case of Estonia*' by Hendrik Praks (see Praks, 2015), '*Estonia's comprehensive approach to national defence: origins and dilemmas*' by Viljar Veebel and Illimar Ploom (see Veebel and Ploom, 2018b), '*Lessons identified in Crimea – does Estonia's national defence model meet our needs?*' by Martin Hurt (see Hurt, 2014), and others.

6 Recent studies on anti-access and area denial

Both military and academic studies discussing the security environment in the Baltic countries often refer to the expression 'anti-access and area denial' (A2AD). Three studies and articles seem particularly interesting in this context since all of them cover the topic from a slightly different perspective.

The first of the three articles is '*Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region*' by Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A Hunzeker. The study assesses the military imbalance and describes some conflict scenarios to show how A2AD and precision weapons threaten extended deterrence. The article is highly important because the quality of the analysis (discussing, among other things, that NATO is contemplating solutions that are unlikely to resolve the problem because the Alliance's current solutions largely involve pre-positioned heavy military hardware, four battalion-sized battlegroups and modest deployments of rotational forces), as well as its policy implications (arguing, first, that although technology is a necessity, it is still an insufficient part of the solution to precision strike and A2AD, and, second, that there are no easy or cheap solutions for answering the A2AD and precision strike threat). The study also highlights that the precision strike and A2AD challenge threatens the United States' long-standing strategy of using forward-deployed ground forces to signal credibility. To quote Lanoszka and Hunzeker:

'If forward-deployed ground forces cannot fend off invaders, their value to allies is at risk of primarily being symbolic. Their mission should not be to perish in the hope that their loss will trigger a wider intervention, but to meaningfully bolster NATO's ability to obstruct Russian forces on the battlefield' (Lanoszka and Hunzeker, 2016).

The second is a study called **'*NATO Adaptation and A2/AD: Beyond the Military Implications*' by Guillaume Lasconjarias and Tomá A. Nagy. The authors suggest that** A2AD deserves to be studied not only through a military lens but also in a wider context, covering other dimensions too. In this way, the particular **analysis addresses** the nature of A2AD challenge within Europe and describes what it entails for the NATO Alliance, to its most vulnerable members, to the Alliance's long-term cohesion and to the prospects for a durable stability on NATO´s Eastern flank. **Lasconjarias and Nagy** conclude that Russia's A2AD build-up strategy has direct implications for the security of the Alliance, mainly in relation to the Baltic countries and Poland. In this respect, they emphasise that while an enhanced forward presence constitutes a valuable new wave of thought (in the name of reassurance and adaptation) for closing the gap of insecurity created by both NATO's continuous neglect of its Eastern flank and the Russian reaction to this neglect, the real challenge for the Alliance still rests in its ability to assure (via adaptation) its most vulnerable members without providing Russia a pretext for a further escalation of tensions. **Lasconjarias and Nagy** also argue that NATO's further orientation towards the objective challenges emanating from its Eastern flank at the expense of addressing

challenges coming the South could politically divide NATO and have a counterproductive effect and that Russia will likely test the resolve and the competence of the Alliance. Finally, they suggest that if NATO would like to be successful in addressing the Russian A2AD challenge, the Alliance needs to find a viable way of how to apply military measures in a politically acceptable and geopolitically advantageous manner (see, **Lasconjarias and Nagy, 2017**).

The third study is called '*Russian Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities – implications for NATO*' by **Tomasz Smura. The study analyses** Russian strategy of deployment of measures within A2AD in key regions as well as operational capabilities of Allied forces. The article argues that Russia has been developing asymmetric means of A2AD and that the consistent deployment of these measures in various regions like the Baltic Sea region, the Crimea, the Arctic, or Syria, is a part of a broader Russian strategy to prevent the operations of NATO forces in the border states of the Alliance and in the regions perceived by Moscow as strategic regions. **Tomasz Smura** suggests, among other things, that NATO countries should develop a common strategy and invest in resources and weapons systems that could break A2AD systems, such as standoff weapons (mainly cruise missiles on air and sea platforms supported by an effective system of real time targeting) (Smura, 2016).

7 Literature on the dilemmas and challenges in relation to building-up a viable deterrence model

A discussion on how to build-up a viable deterrence model should first start with the debate over the essence of deterrence in the context of modern hybrid warfare. The theory of deterrence contains a wide range of dilemmas that could lead to inefficient deterrence measures, a rise in tensions between opponents, and other negative effects. Just to highlight some of these dilemmas, the following questions could be raised: Should one choose a strategy to escalate or de-escalate the conflict? What should be the right balance between morality and efficiency? Should one prioritize strategic defences or deterrence? Should the defence model be focused on resilience-building or on confidence-building? How to be sure that the deterrence is cost-efficient, etc.? These dilemmas are covered, for example, in Mearsheimer (1983), Levy (2003) and others.

Next to that, the credibility of deterrence seems to be dependent on specific circumstances, but, however, because of its controversial nature, it is difficult to assess under which circumstances and at which point of time deterrence becomes credible. In its essence, deterrence is something that is expected to never occur. This also poses several methodological challenges, such as if deterrence is successful there is no behaviour to see; if deterrence fails, behaviour does occur and can be observed; deterrence theory fails, because while all the conditions for deterrence are present, there is 'no deterrence' (see, e.g. Starr, 2005).

A practical approach to these dilemmas from the perspective of the Baltic countries is discussed, e.g., in '*Deterring Russia: Twists and turns of the strategic debate*' by Tomas Jermalavičius and in '*NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic states*' by Viljar Veebel. The discussion by Jermalavičius is enjoyable in its direct approach to the challenges the Baltic countries are facing; he states that deterrence is a somewhat slippery concept, where next to rational calculations and psychological inhibitions conditioned by particular historical context, chance and luck also play a large role, and he concludes that 'instead of engaging in recurrent soul-searching about our 'fault', pointless hand-wringing about being 'too provocative', and endless debates over whether we attach correct labels or have enough 'evidence' to act, we should be putting in place robust solutions that keep the Kremlin in a box. Russia under Putin is a rogue but fundamentally weak state—and should be treated like one' (Jermalavičius, 2018). Viljar Veebel, in his article '*NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic states*', constructs a hypothetical scenario why, when and how would Russia attack the Baltic countries. Veebel argues that, in a hypothetical conflict, most of Russia's energy will be likely be put into the delegitimization of local political authorities by using the tools of hybrid warfare, which would ideally lead to a situation where the Alliance's forces will disappointedly decide to leave the Baltics. Next to that, Russia's aim during a takeover of the Baltic region would most likely be to maintain as much physical assets and legitimization as possible, and aggressive military activities will be most likely avoided from Russian side. In addition this hypothetical takeover would take place without destroying much of the local infrastructure. The author suggests that the initiation of protests of 'local women and children' against the 'imperialists', including NATO is highly likely, based both on Russia's previous strategy used in Ukraine in 2014 and in Estonia in 2007. To quote the study:

'With a 'little help' from Russia, this should not be difficult, being aware of the public opinion of local Russian-speaking communities. The key element of this strategy is that most likely the Baltic countries will not even recognise when the attack actually started, as well as when, if at all, the Baltic countries/the Alliance has to mobilise. Should the Baltic countries/the Alliance still decide to mobilise themselves, Russia would describe it as an example of opponent's aggressive behaviour, as well as use it as a justification to interfere with the aim to protect 'peaceful local people'' (for further discussion, see, Veebel, 2018c).

8 Conclusions

The wide variety of both academic and military studies investigating the current security environment in the Baltic region after the annexation of Crimea is a clear demonstration that everybody is worried about the possibility that the Baltics could be the next region where Russia might escalate the confrontation with NATO in the coming years. In numerous studies, various conventional and nuclear conflict escalation scenarios are suggested, Russia's viewpoints in the current confrontation with the West are explained, vulnerabilities of the national defence model of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are discussed, and both theoretical and practical aspects of deterrence are considered with full seriousness. Although in the early 2000s when the possibility that Russia would attack the Baltic countries was considered highly unlikely, the security situation in Europe today has changed radically and the strategic and scholarly communities are convinced that Russia will not stop halfway and will sooner or later make a next move in putting pressure on its neighbouring countries. Today, it is not about whether or not it will happen – it is about how soon and where it would happen. In this respect, it is highly important for both the Baltic countries and NATO to be ready should such pressure occur.

This article provides a broad overview of interesting and intriguing studies in this area, which could particularly give food for thought for those military experts and politicians who are interested in or involved in finding the solution to the current conflict in Ukraine or deterring Russia in general. Some studies are already well-known – the so-called must-read studies in this field, like the research report published by the RAND Corporation, '*Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defence of the Baltics*' or Mark Galeotti's articles discussing that there exist no such thing as Gerasimov doctrine. However, since new studies, opinions and recommendations on the confrontation between Russia and the West are conducted and published on a daily basis, some interesting and intriguing studies have undeservedly remained overlooked. The present article pays to them greater attention.

As the academic and military studies discussed in this article have shown, there is no definitive answer to the question of what makes Russia deterred and turning away of its ambitions. Having different viewpoints about this matter – as numerous articles, reports, and studies do – is clearly an advantage, as by enhancing discussion, it increases the chances of success for the Western countries. In this respect, the current literature overview proves useful not only for military experts or politicians, but for all who are interested in security issues in Europe and worldwide.

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