

Trouble with the Neighbors: The Baltic States' Perspective on Security After the Annexation of Crimea

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The Russian Federation's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula has broad implications beyond Ukraine. This paper assesses the perspective of the three Baltic countries on their security environment after the annexation of Crimea. The research briefly assesses the security history of the three Baltic republics. It then qualitatively analyzes government documents, official statements, and publications by, and interviews with, scholars and policymakers to determine how recent Russian behavior has affected the perspective of the Baltic states, and how they have affected NATO and the EU. This paper finds that, from the perspective of decision-makers in the Baltic states, the annexation of Crimea vindicated those who had expected such behavior. It further determines that the cohesion of the Baltic states has leveraged the EU and NATO to refocus attention on their eastern flank.

INTRODUCTION

The three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia occupy a unique political, cultural, and geographical position in Europe's contemporary security architecture. They represent the frontier of the European security community on the doorstep of Russia, and are currently the only former Soviet republics to accede to the European Union (EU) and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a major shift in Europe's security environment, one that this paper will analyze from the Baltic perspective. The contemporary assessment by the Baltic states of their participation and role in Europe's security architecture is fairly unified. They view NATO as an instrument of collective defense and an alliance of shared values, rather than one forged purely out of military necessity. They share similar views of the EU, which they see as a significant (although less tangible) security dimension that derives from their integration with the rest of the European community of nations, a view not necessarily shared by the other EU member-states, who see mainly economic benefits of membership.¹

The Baltic states are similarly unified in their assessment of Russia's view of geopolitics, and of Russia's general intents in their neighborhood. They see Russia as a state seeking to reconstruct a sphere of influence that encompasses its immediate neighbors—most especially Soviet successor states. They find that Russia believes that NATO threatens its security, a view validated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and ongoing participation in operations in eastern Ukraine. However, Baltic states differ in their assessments is of the gravity of the Russian threat posed to them, and what the

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nature of any such threat may be. These differences in assessments exist both between the three Baltic states and between different factions of each society at the professional and the public level within them.

This paper will qualitatively analyze statements and articles by, and interviews with, scholars and policymakers in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, to ascertain the prevailing views in them towards the European and transatlantic institutions in which they participate, their role in said institutions, and the threat posed by Russia towards those institutions generally and their nations specifically. The paper comprises two sections. The first is an assessment of the European security architecture, which will be further divided into subsections on NATO and on the EU. The second is an assessment of Russian behavior, which will be divided into subsections on Russian intentions and strategy and on how threats from Russia would likely arise.

BALTIC PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

A discussion regarding Baltic perceptions of a potential Russian threat must first examine the security architecture in Europe and analyze the Baltic perspective on institutions of European security and their roles in such institutions. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact at the end of the Cold War left NATO as the guarantor of the security for much of Western and Central Europe and seemingly removed the threat that had dominated European security thinking for over four decades. The alliance also engaged in political and military outreach to non-NATO nations, as well as in collective security functions outside of the European neighborhood. Meanwhile, the establishment of the EU, replacing its predecessor—the European Community—had obvious political and economic benefits much of Europe. More tangible security benefits pertain largely to aspects of internal security through institutions such as the European Police Office (Europol). There is also the European Defence Agency (EDA), tasked with fostering defense cooperation and improvements in and among EU member-states (as well as Norway, a non-EU state which opts into EDA programs).² While the EU does take on certain hard security elements, it does not function as a defensive alliance, though Article 42.7 (referred to as the “Solidarity Clause”) states, “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.”³ This indicates a precedent for collective self-defense and, in turn, underscores the pragmatic benefits to each state inherent in the alliance.

BALTIC PERSPECTIVE ON NATO AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ALLIANCE

The three Baltic states have major security concerns with regards to Russia. While these concerns are rooted in assessments of Russian intentions, the relative military weakness of the three Baltic states compounds such fears. There are significant gaps between the capabilities that the Baltic states require to defend themselves and those that they actually possess. Therefore, they see one of the key functions of NATO

as a mechanism for filling these capability gaps. Martin Hurt, the deputy director for the International Center for Defence and Security (ICDS) in Tallinn, said,

“You join NATO, and you bring whatever assets you have. It was evident that the Baltic states didn’t have, and would never have, all capabilities, but [...] I think that’s something that goes for every ally. Probably not the U.S., but most of the others have capability gaps for which other allies need to step in and cover them. Thus, that’s the whole essence of NATO. I mean, if everybody were able to defend themselves, then NATO wouldn’t exist.”⁴

Kalev Stoicescu, a research fellow at ICDS, echoed these sentiments, stating that only the nuclear states of the alliance had the military strength to defend themselves independently of NATO and adding that membership in the alliance has enhanced Baltic security beyond what was the states thought attainable throughout the years prior to their accession.⁵ These notions are explicitly stated at the policy-making level, as the defense concepts of all three Baltic States note the importance of NATO’s ability to augment their defense capabilities.⁶ Therefore, is a recognition at an official level that certain capabilities are unobtainable by the Baltic states alone, yet simultaneously are integral to their defenses. It is in this domain that NATO explicitly operates.

Though there are clear hard security implications of NATO membership, the Baltic states also note an ideological and moral dimension to alliance participation. The Estonian National Security Concept of 2010, in discussing the alliance’s enlargement, argues that NATO expansion “has widened the area based on common democratic values, thus reinforcing European security.”⁷ In 2001, the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced a fact sheet promoting NATO accession. In it, the Ministry declared two of its main reasons for seeking membership as Latvia’s European identity and its respect for democracy.⁸ Moreover, the publication argues, “The reason for NATO’s existence is the defence of certain territories and common values—democracy and the market economy. Purely military considerations about which countries are entitled to be ‘defensible’ and which are supposedly ‘indefensible’ should not determine which nations can thereby enjoy the security and stability that NATO membership brings.”⁹

Tempting as it may be to dismiss these statements as pithy comments made only for public consumption, and therefore without policy implications, there is evidence to indicate that these beliefs are held at the decision-making level, and that they motivated Baltic accession to the alliance. Stoicescu contends that shared core values underpin the modern alliance, arguing, “NATO has proven that it is not simply a military alliance, but it is a political alliance too, and it is a bond between that glues the transatlantic community together. Of course, you always have to think of interests. You have to look at risks. But the question of common values is the one that is so important.”¹⁰ Closely linked with these shared values is a shared identity between

the states. Professor Karmo Tüür argues that, in discussing the national identities of the three Baltic countries, “it is not so much about who we, but who we are not. We are not Russia. This comes first.”¹¹ As a result, NATO membership serves to act as a codification of a non-Russian identity. Hurt approached Estonian national identity in a distinct yet parallel way. Rather than frame accession to NATO as an attempt to spurn Russia, he argues, “I think that it was a way of trying to join the Western community [...] I think we wanted to join the democratic club of free countries. That was the purpose.”¹²

While the idea may be phrased in different ways, there is clear evidence that NATO membership for the three Baltic republics springs both from security concerns regarding their Russian neighbor and a view of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian national identities as European. NATO membership both offers security guarantees to the Baltic states that augment their standing defense capabilities and affirms their European history, identity, and heritage. Furthermore, these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. The concept of national sovereignty in all three Baltic states is firmly rooted not only in their security, but also in their national identity. Both factors motivate NATO membership because they both factors are intertwined. The occupation also further entrenched their view of their nations as European, compelling them to seek security by aligning not with their eastern neighbors, but with their western ones. Ideology and security cannot, therefore, be viewed or examined in isolation.

BALTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE EU AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE UNION

The Baltic countries generally accept that membership in NATO was necessarily linked with membership in the EU—that, from a politically and militarily strategic point, to be a member of one organization or the other would be far less effective than to be a member of both. This view of dual membership as essential stems from a recognition that membership in one without the other would result in gaps in security. In discussing the European security community, Boyka Stefanova, a professor of European politics at the University of Texas—San Antonio, writes, “A particular security organisation (NATO) is the main security provider, and in Europe’s case the security institution is not coterminous with the actual network of most transaction flows (the EU).”¹³ To phrase this sentiment differently in order to reflect its nuances, while NATO deals in security, the main advantage of EU membership to the Baltic states is economic, a view that the public in those countries largely shares.¹⁴ This view is common among those with a peripheral interest in and knowledge of the Baltic states’ membership in both groups. Such a view does not, however, fully translate to decision-making levels in those countries.

While the Baltic states undeniably view NATO as a guarantor of their security, they ascribe a security function to the EU as well. However, most see the EU’s security role as less central than that of NATO. Even so, the way the Baltic states (and other states near Russia) view the union is noticeably distinct from Western European views. Hurt observes,

“When other countries join the EU [...] , it’s much about economic growth and so on, to be part of a single market. I think that, if you look at the Baltic states, [...] there was another reason, and that was to become a member of the club so that we could say that we’re together with our neighbors and friends, and we left our enemy behind us. Now, the economic growth and [...] the other benefits from joining the EU are also there, and they’re important, but I think that we also saw a security dimension that many countries had not really seen who want to join the EU—especially, the further you go from Russia, the more you see the other reasons for joining the EU.”¹⁵

The State Defense Concept of Latvia also explicitly references the security functions of the EU through the Solidarity Clause, stating that “the EU for Latvia is an additional instrument for strengthening national security and defense.”¹⁶ Additionally, the Baltic states view the EU as a mechanism for tying together non-NATO states whose security is still intertwined with and integral to that of the Baltic region as a whole—namely, Finland and Sweden.¹⁷ The Baltic states therefore perceive that, in a limited sense, the provision for the common welfare of EU states creates incentives for EU members to enhance the security of other member-states. Additionally, the EU does fill a crucial security role that NATO does not address, but this tends to largely focus on matters that could be classified as internal security—and even here, the Union acts largely in a support role for its member-states.

Despite a view by the Baltic states of a designated security role for the EU, they do not ascribe the same weight to the EU’s perceived security functions as they do to NATO. A number of those at the decision-making level have historically seen EU membership as insufficient to guarantee their security, and it is evident that there is a gap between the rhetoric on the EU’s security role and the value that policymakers in the Baltic states assign it. The reasons behind this stem from the differences in how the security roles of NATO and the EU have manifested themselves. NATO members routinely train and cooperate in preparation for Article V territorial defense missions, something for which there is no analogous EU endeavor.

The Baltic states draw clear distinctions between the benefits of EU membership and participation in NATO, assessing the alliance as the primary guarantor of their security. Their assessment of the EU as an essential aspect of the security of Europe generally—and, by extension, the Baltic region—separates them from their other European counterparts. The confluence of security concerns and shared ideals between member-states motivated the accession of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the EU just as it motivated their pursuit of NATO membership—indeed, citing shared values as a catalyst for the pursuit of EU membership would appear to be an obvious assertion given the frequent rhetoric of the EU as a project of European common values. There is therefore an overlap in the Baltic states between the perspectives

on EU membership and on participation in NATO; however, as demonstrated, the benefits of EU membership are not seen as interchangeable with or replaceable by the benefits of NATO membership, though the Baltic perspective on the EU's roles differ measurably from the perspectives of their European neighbors.

BALTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

As diverse as the history and domestic politics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are, the three Baltic republics are tied together by the nature of their security environment regarding Russia. In particular, the Baltic states' absorption into the Soviet Union after the Second World War unified the Baltic states in their attitudes on what threatens their nations. Currently, there is generally an agreement at the decision-making levels in the Baltic capitals that Russia has the capacity to threaten all the Baltic republics in isolation, and that Russia's views on the expansion of NATO and the EU foster a paranoid vision of what such an expansion might entail. Whether Russia will ever strike the Baltic states, either overtly or covertly, and what method will be used should it decide to do so, is very much in dispute.

BALTIC PERSPECTIVE ON CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

Positive characterizations of Russia's motives and mindset by the three Baltic states are sparse; the portrait they paint of their neighbor is one of a paranoid state, engaged in patterns of deceptive and destabilizing behavior. Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves stated that Russia's recent behavior in seeking to block nations—including through the use of force—from freely joining NATO and the EU threatened international principles granting nations a right to choose their alliances.¹⁸ Additionally, he characterized Russia's annexation of Crimea as an Anschluss, evoking the memory of Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria before the outbreak of World War II in Europe, claiming that it was "the proper term for what happened in Crimea."¹⁹ The Lithuanian government has printed and disseminated a preparedness guide, for civilians and military personnel alike, should open conflict arise.²⁰ In speaking about the guide, Lithuanian Defense Minister Juozas Olekas declared that its production was motivated by Russia's behavior, stating, "When Russia started its aggression in Ukraine, our citizens here in Lithuania understood that our neighbor is not friendly."²¹ Even if the Lithuanian government does not see the likelihood of war with Russia as high, the guide still characterizes Russia as a threat to Lithuania. While shying away from the Nazi imagery invoked by Ilves, Hurt argues that there was never a period of time during which the Baltic political leadership entertained the notion of cooperation with Russia, observing, "There was no thinking in the Baltic states that Russia [...] since 1991 is a friendly nation, comparable with Germany and Portugal and Norway and all those other democratic states. For us, what is happening right now is, for sure, not a surprise by any means."²² The consistent and strong distrust of Russia's motives and intentions, especially in the immediate post-Cold War environment, indicates a belief that Russia is intrinsically opposed to cooperation, and is thus unable to do so.

Policymakers in the Baltic tend to view Russia's mindset as paranoid in Moscow's assessment of NATO intentions. This view was explicitly clarified when Putin signed a document designating NATO and its expansion as a threat to Russian security, a designation condemned by the Baltic states and by NATO as a whole.²³ Russia has often characterized the alliance's expansion as a provocation towards Russia, and Putin has used rhetoric that very strongly insinuates that if Russia believes conflict to be inevitable, they will not wait for the beginning of hostilities, but rather will strike first.²⁴ This lack of trust on the part of Russia, combined with a haste to consider worst-case scenarios and a confrontational (if not outright aggressive) foreign policy in its neighborhood, is a trait that many in the Baltic states believe can lead to a dangerous confrontation. It should be noted that the Lithuanian National Security Strategy expresses the need to "seek to enhance mutual trust with the Russian Federation in the field of security,"²⁵ which would appear to undercut the notion of Baltic mistrust of Russia. However, the document was produced prior to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and may simply reference cooperation with Russia for diplomatic purposes.

Closely linked to this characterization of Russia as paranoid is the impression that Russia views itself as mistreated by the West. There is a prevailing belief in the Baltic states that Russia feels itself maligned by NATO and its standing in the world denigrated by western nations. Tüür argues, "Russia actually and really [believes] that they are mistreated, that the West humiliates them—humiliated, at least until now, but now they have real options to fight back, to stand up from their knees."²⁶ There is also a consistent Russian narrative that NATO has, through its policy of enlargement, broken promises made in the immediate post-Cold War aftermath. Mary Elise Sarotte writes, "Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressive actions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 were fueled in part by his ongoing resentment about what he sees as the West's broken pact over NATO expansion."²⁷ There is evidence, therefore, to support the Baltic states' impression of a Russia that considers itself to be betrayed or otherwise maligned by the West—a consideration that is detached from reality.

VARIED PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE OF THE THREAT POSED BY RUSSIA

The unified assessment of Russia's worldview contrasts with the varied opinions on the exact manner a threat against the Baltic states would arise. The distinctions here are not necessarily between the three Baltic republics, but rather within the policymaking ranks of all three states. There is disagreement over whether Russia is likely to come into conflict with any of the Baltic republics at all, and even more so with respect to the manner by which such a conflict might manifest itself. There is also disagreement over what the most likely target for Russia might be—be it Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, or somewhere outside of the Baltic region entirely. Such a varied range of opinions has not yielded a consensus on the likelihood of Russian action against the Baltic states, or what such action would consist of.

POTENTIAL FORMS OF AGGRESSION

Russia's annexation of Crimea made use of what has been referred to as hybrid warfare, characterized by the use of conventional military assets in unconventional manners. In defining the term, Pauli Järvenpää notes that hybrid warfare is not simply the application of military force, or the application of covert methods of coercive force, but rather the application of the two in concert.²⁸ It is understood that Russian soldiers did participate, in some capacity, in the initial actions that spurred the independence referendum. Armed gunmen established roadblocks and positioned themselves at or near critical government and civil infrastructure, significantly undercutting the control of local Ukrainian authorities; many considered these forces to be Russian soldiers without identifying insignia.²⁹ Noting that such a threat could pertain to the Baltic region, Järvenpää argues, "It is important to react quickly and decisively to hybrid threats. Therefore the [Nordic-Baltic-Poland Nine] countries, allied and non-allied alike, would benefit from jointly designing and executing complex 'comprehensive security' or 'total defense' plans that would bring together these countries' civilian and military authorities to work and integrate their separate efforts into a common response plan."³⁰

This is not the only mechanism by which Russia might attack the Baltic states that policymakers in the region fear. Analysts and military planners have openly expressed concerns that Russia may use military exercises as cover for the movement of large numbers of combat-ready forces who might be preparing for combat against the Baltic States. Drills such as these have been a major cause for concern in the Baltic states. Hurt argues that it is rational to predict that Russia would use snap drills as cover for a surprise attack, and does not view the use of hybrid warfare as an option mutually exclusive with the use of a snap drill as cover for a surprise assault, saying, "I wouldn't say that there is option one and option two [...] Both could be used together or independently."³¹ It is evident, therefore, that policymakers in the Baltic consider the aforementioned potential forms of aggression as dangerous in equal measure.

If past actions are any indication of Russian behavior, one must consider the realm of cyberspace—an area in which Russia has threatened many of its neighbors, the Baltic states included. In 2007, after the Estonian government relocated a Soviet-era monument against the wishes of its ethnic Russian population, Estonian websites experienced a crippling attack. The distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack, which flooded the target websites with overwhelming requests for information from many malicious servers, hit government, financial, and media websites.³² The crude nature of the attack led many analysts to determine that the Russian government was not at fault.³³ The Estonian government, however, found the Kremlin responsible, citing the fact that Estonian investigators traced the attacks back to locations in Russia with ties to the Putin administration, as well as obstinacy from the Russian Public Prosecutor's Office when Estonia requested legal cooperation on its behalf.³⁴ Even if Putin's administration was not directly responsible for the DDoS operation, the attack still underscored the vulnerability of the Baltic states to an attack if Russia

should decide to carry one out. A year later, the Russo-Georgian War underscored this vulnerability when a wave of cyberattacks directed against Georgia struck critical websites as hostilities were unfolding.³⁵ As in Estonia, Russia denied responsibility. By its nature, cyber warfare allows the Kremlin (or any other aggressor) to have near total deniability for an attack, making retaliation all but impossible.

Russia has also historically used the dependence of its neighbors on natural gas against them, a fact not lost on policymakers in the Baltics. Europe saw a particularly salient example of this in late 2005 and early 2006, when the Russian state-owned company Gazprom accused Ukraine of siphoning natural gas intended for Central and Western Europe and more than quadrupled the price of gas that they had charged Ukraine, from \$50 to \$230 per 1000 cubic meters.³⁶ When Ukraine denied the charges and refused to pay the inflated rates, Gazprom halted shipments of gas to Ukraine—a move that left Ukraine and the rest of Europe without Russian natural gas during a particularly frigid winter.³⁷ Ukraine ultimately had little choice but to accept Gazprom's terms to resume normal imports. It also admitted to siphoning gas shipments not intended for Ukrainian consumption.

Episodes such as the 2006 Ukraine gas crisis underscore the security and political dimensions of energy dependence. Rojas Masiulis, Lithuania's Minister of Energy, stated bluntly in remarks delivered in Washington, D.C., "Energy is being used as a political weapon."³⁸ The Baltic states are especially exposed to disruptions in supply. None of the three Baltic countries have natural gas deposits, and as of 2014, all three import natural gas from Gazprom exclusively.³⁹ An EU-led stress test gauged the ability of member-states to cope with a complete cessation of Russian transport of natural gas. In such an instance, all of the Baltic countries would only be able to cope with the disruption for one week before the crisis would necessitate what the EU report termed non-market measures, or government intervention to mitigate the damage.⁴⁰ Estonia would be among the countries hardest hit: assuming a lack of cooperation among EU member-states to address a shortfall, supplies of natural gas in Estonia would last only five days.⁴¹ The particular vulnerability of the Baltic countries and their complete dependence on Russia for access to natural gas makes the issue of energy security particularly salient, and underscores the dire consequences if Russia chooses to leverage this dependency against the three Baltic states.

POTENTIAL VULNERABILITIES

Where there is agreement on how Russia might attack the Baltic states should they choose to do so, the question of if and where they might do so is less clear, even among Baltic policymakers and analysts. A number of analysts consider the greatest vulnerability to lie just south of Lithuania, as the narrowest point between Kaliningrad and Belarus, Russia's ally, crosses roughly 65 kilometers (41 miles) of Polish territory, which would completely separate the Baltic states from their NATO allies.⁴² Both Stoicescu and Ilves, in describing the situation, argues that the stretch of territory connecting Lithuania and Poland "is the new Fulda Gap," referencing the city

of Fulda, West Germany through which a Soviet attack would be most likely during the Cold War.⁴³ Not all share this view, however: Radosław Sikorsky, the former Foreign Minister for Poland, argued that “politics will trump geography” in the case of Kaliningrad due to, among other things, the generally weaker and smaller nature of Lithuania vis-à-vis Poland.⁴⁴ Former Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius agrees, saying, “We are afraid of any kind of possible provocations on transit routes, both railways, or gas pipeline, or electricity transit routes, which can be organized in order to have some type of pretext from Moscow’s side [...] to begin some aggressive actions.”⁴⁵

Others, in examining the threat to the Baltic states, look at the heavy presence of Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia. While a quick assessment of the ethnic composition of the three countries might lead one to conclude that both Latvia and Estonia are more likely to suffer from the sort of hybrid takeover experienced in Crimea, a more cautious assessment of the situation in Latvia and Estonia would yield evidence suggesting that there are differences in opinion among ethnic Russians in both countries. Those in Latvia, for example, are more inclined to be disillusioned with the government in Riga and express greater enthusiasm for Moscow, whereas residents of the Estonian border city of Narva, while they may not consider themselves to be truly Estonian, have developed a unique regional identity and are less sympathetic to the Russian government.⁴⁶ One must note, however, that though Russia may still use the (albeit greatly inflated) grievances of ethnic Russians as a justification for action absent any organic support.

When one does not consider the Baltic states in isolation, there are those who argue that the threat to any of the three republics is very small when compared against threats to Russia’s other neighbors. Tüür argues that there are “easier targets and [...] higher priorities” where Russia would be more likely to focus any application of military force.⁴⁷ Indeed, any threat assessment cannot look at one region in isolation, and must instead consist of a holistic view of the security position both of one’s own country and of one’s potential adversaries. The three Baltic republics engage in such an assessment. While references to potential Russian targets aside from the Baltic states are absent from the stated security and defense policies of the three nations, all state that the likelihood of war is low, but present.⁴⁸ However, as the nature of what threats are most likely to arise, and where, are still debated, at this point, the agreement ends.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Regarding European security architecture and the role of the three Baltic republics in it, they are largely unified. All share the belief that both NATO and the EU serve critical security functions for their respective countries; that NATO, while first and foremost an instrument of collective defense, is an alliance of shared European values and an embodiment of a Euro-Atlantic identity; that NATO has primacy over the EU insofar as which serves as the principal guarantor of their security; and that the EU’s internal security functions fill gaps in the European security architecture left

open by NATO, especially with regards to hybrid warfare tactics. The Baltic states also share an assessment of Russia's worldview, which they characterize as a paranoid, zero-sum vision of the international political environment. Furthermore, they assess this view to be dangerous for their region and for the European security community in general, raising the possibility of conflict, though there are varied assessments of the likelihood of a concrete threat from Russia materializing and, if so, the form such a threat will take.

The cohesion between the three Baltic republics regarding their role in NATO and the EU continues to serve as a solid foundation upon which their relations with both institutions—and with the member-states of which they comprise—can grow. The concurrence of their visions for both organizations strengthens prospects for consensus-building and the political will to be active contributors, rather than passive participants. Similarly, the relative unity in their assessment of Russia's intentions and general security posture guides Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian defense and security planning, fostering cohesion not only among themselves, but also among their NATO allies. There is also generally agreement over the likelihood of a specific Russian threat against the Baltic states: low, yet not absent. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have planned accordingly on the basis of this assessment, ensuring preparedness without needlessly expending resources on their defense where they may be better spent.

Speculation on the specifics of what may comprise a specific threat by Russia against the Baltic states is far more varied. This is not cause for concern on its own, as it fosters a more holistic consideration of what scenarios the three Baltic republics may face. However, if the divergence in opinions leads to a divergence in defense planning—whether the Baltic states' defensive plans differ from each other, or from NATO's as a whole—this will gravely undermine the defensibility of the Baltic region. Further research is required to determine whether the trend in the Baltic states is towards a divergence or a convergence of defense planning. Currently, however, all indications are that the cohesiveness of the three Baltic republics significantly outweighs areas in which they deviate from each other. This, in addition to their healthy and enthusiastic working relationship with both NATO and the EU, offers a positive prognosis for the defense posture of the Baltic states.

NOTES

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