



## The Baltic States, enhanced Forward Presence and non-military factors

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There is a collective tendency to view the recent NATO assurance measures, including the enhanced Forward Presence, to support the Baltic States as a military solution to a military problem. Much was made of the RAND study that suggested that the correlation of forces between those of the Baltic States and those of the Russian Federation's Western Military District was in Moscow's favour and to confidently deter Moscow from ever attacking, an additional three Armoured Brigades were required.<sup>1</sup> This was, of course, a comment on deterrence as opposed to assurance. The latter consists of visible efforts by states to convince their allies that the states making the effort will not allow their security to be jeopardized.<sup>2</sup> While this may come across like an effort to deter an adversary, it can be argued that assurance is softer in that it is not intended to provoke the adversary, thereby avoiding the potential emergence of a 'security dilemma' which results in a downward spiral towards war.<sup>3</sup> What this means is that the correlation of forces is less important than it would be in an effort to deter.<sup>4</sup> This, however, does not mean that the correlation is not important. The literature on 'hybrid warfare' offers two important observations: (1) it is employed by the Russian

Federation in the 'near abroad'<sup>5</sup>; and (2) non-military issues can be exploited to tip the correlation of forces even further in Moscow's favour.<sup>6</sup> This policy brief will describe three non-military issues that have the potential to affect the correlation of forces, and offer recommendations for potential solutions.

All three Baltic States, by dint of their geography, trade with both the European Union and the Russian Federation. In recent years, all three have run negative trade balances with the states of the European Union and Russia. Economic growth has been limited at the same time, in part due to the imposition of sanctions on Russia and the cost this imposes on trade partners. Yet all three Baltic States are wealthier per capita than the Russian Federation when measured by Gross National Income. Figure 1 (below) demonstrates that the Russian Federation is getting poorer relative to the Baltic States. So what might this mean in terms of the Baltic States being vulnerable or sensitive to the Russian Federation? Given that the Russian Federation enjoys a trade surplus with all three states, there is little incentive for Moscow to disrupt this. This non-military factor is unlikely to affect the situation.

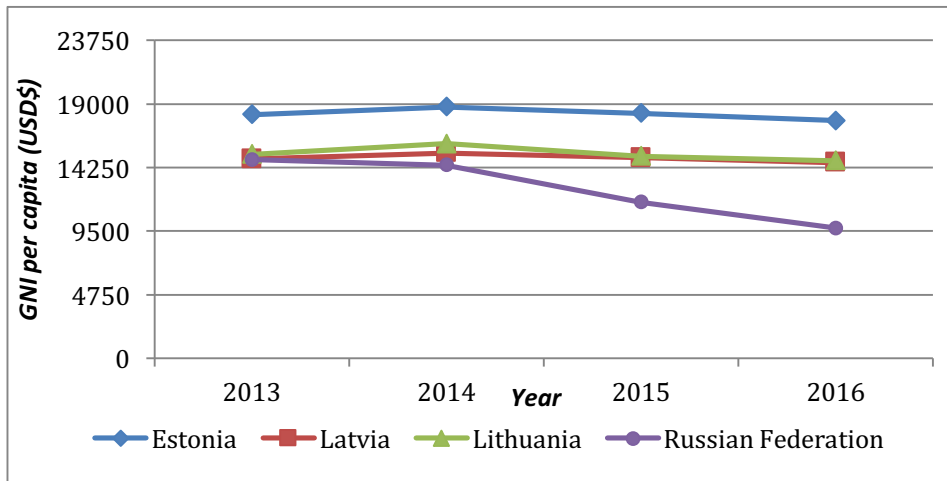


Figure 1 Gross National Income per Capita (\$USD)<sup>7</sup>

Energy security is a concern. The three Baltic States rely to varying degrees on Russian energy sources and remain linked to Russian-controlled energy infrastructure, namely oil & gas and electricity. In essence, the supplier (the Russian Federation) holds the potential to manipulate the supply and price of energy for its own gain. The threat is most acute in Lithuania due to a higher per capita rate of consumption. All three are working tirelessly to diversify their energy sources and address a potential vulnerability. What this suggests is that the salience of this non-military issue will reduce over time, but in the short term it could affect the correlation of forces if Moscow chose to wield it.

The last non-military issue is without doubt the most complex and difficult to mitigate. During the Soviet occupation of the three Baltic States, Soviet authorities encouraged immigration from Russia into the Baltic States, and upon independence these ethnic Russians found themselves in the position of being

neither Soviet nor Russian. Thus all three Baltic States had to contend with minority Russophone populations, many of whom included stateless persons. Before proceeding, it is useful to clarify that there are citizens of the Baltic States who are Russophones and there are also Russophones resident in the Baltic States who are not citizens. The stateless citizens, who make up 18% of the total population of Latvia and 13% of the same for Estonia, could be a vector for Moscow to foment unrest if it so chose. Lithuania is an

outlier for two reasons: (1) there was less need during the Soviet era to increase the workforce there; (2) their approach to citizenship also differs. Lithuanian citizenship is based on being born within the country, as opposed to ancestry. In addition, the naturalization processes in Estonia and Latvia require the applicant(s) to develop fluency in the majority population language, a practice perceived by some as discriminatory. This is a potential source of a grievance from a population that consumes Russian media and / or a justification for action that Moscow might be willing to employ. Others argue that a fear of Russian soft power is not so well founded, and that there is little to fear from ethnic Russians, stateless or otherwise, because they are more affluent than those in Russia. Even so, the presence of large numbers of stateless citizens does create a potentially volatile situation: a politically disenfranchised population that consumes information largely through Moscow's prism. This was, after all, the pretext for the support of separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine.

So long as the Russian Federation presents a potential threat to the Baltic States, NATO's member states ought to maintain the enhanced Forward Presence as an assurance measure. While this may not deter an attack, neither will it provoke one. At the same time, the same member states should encourage and assist the Baltic States with the diversification of their energy sources to reduce their vulnerability. The last recommendation is also the most challenging. The presence of stateless peoples creates a potential non-military vulnerability. However, a recommendation that member-states ought to encourage those states to grant citizenship to stateless persons in their

borders might be considered an affront to their sovereignty. In lieu, it may be best if their governments are persuaded that fostering civic nationalism has merits worthy of consideration.

*The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Nina Rathbun and Frederic Labarre in shaping this policy brief.*

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## Endnotes

1. The study in question, based on a tabletop wargame conducted by a series of experts, was: David A. Shlapak, and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2016).
2. Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Varieties of Assurance", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2012: 376 and 381.
3. For a small yet important sample of the literature on the concept of the security dilemma, see: John Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, 1950: 157-180; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, 1978: 167-214; and Shiping Tang, "Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis", *Security Studies*, 2009: 587-623. For specifics on the downward spiral, see Knopf: 383 and Tang: 594-596.
4. Knopf: 376 and 379-381.
5. Mirosław Banasik, "Russia's Hybrid War in Theory and Practice", *Journal on Baltic Security*, 2016: 157-182; Jānis Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, Policy Paper (Riga: National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and

Strategic Research, 2014); Samuel Charap, "The Ghost of Hybrid War", *Survival*, 2016: 51-58; Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2016: 282-301; Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe", *International Affairs*, 2016: 175-195; Andras Racz, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Will to Resist* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015); Sibylle Scheipers, *Winning Wars without Battles: Hybrid Warfare and Other 'Indirect' Approaches in the History of Strategic Thought*, Aleksanteri Papers, (Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki, 2016); and Martin Zapfe, "'Hybrid' threats and NATO's Forward Presence", *Policy Perspectives*, 2016: 1-4.

6. Paul Bernstein, *Rethinking Assurance and Deterrence*, Conference Summary, (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015): 3; and Kalev Stoicescu, and Henrik Praks, *Strengthening the Strategic Balance in the Baltic Sea Area*, (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2016):14.

7. Gross National Income data for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation sourced from the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/>, accessed on 28 August 2017.