

**DOMESTIC RESILIENCY IS A KEY SOURCE OF BALTIC SECURITY****By Matthew Crandall**

*Matthew Crandall is a Lecturer of International Relations at Tallinn University in Estonia.*

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine has changed the security environment for all of Eastern and Northern Europe. For the United States, this has meant moderate financial and limited defense assistance to Ukraine, coupled with policies aimed at reassuring Eastern European allies and deterring Russia from future aggression. NATO has revamped its rapid reaction forces and implemented persistent troop rotations as well as military training exercises on a scale not seen since the Cold War. In addition to NATO policies, the US has also undertaken bilateral steps to meet these same goals. This has been especially evident in Estonia where President Obama visited in 2014 before his trip to the Wales NATO summit. The United States has also given Estonia tens of millions of dollars to invest in military bases. As the US devotes new resources to the Baltics, defense analysts are asking whether America's small eastern European allies are a liability or an asset.

Answering this question depends on one's assumptions. Those who believe small Eastern European allies are a liability point to the high cost of deterring Russia, of reassuring allies, and of the nightmare situation where the US would be obligated to enter a military conflict with Russia on behalf of a country most Americans could not locate on a map.<sup>1</sup> Those who argue that small Eastern European allies are an asset highlight their role in burden-sharing, adding political legitimacy to US policies, and their impact in solidifying the liberal world order by way of membership in NATO. Yet this debate often misses one important fact: small European states have never been in better positions to defend themselves and to deter military aggression.

Russia's military escapades in the post-Soviet space have caused Russia's neighbors and their allies to ask whether the Baltic states could be the next target and, if so, how such an attack could be prevented. Discussion has centered on NATO's Article 5, which states that an attack on one is an attack on all. President Obama mentioned this principle in his speech in Tallinn, Estonia last year. It is the reason why the Baltic states want permanent NATO bases in their countries, which would literally cement NATO's commitment. While permanent bases have not been built or announced, there is little doubt about NATO's resolve or its willingness to defend its member states from a military attack.

Yet NATO's Article 3, which states that all member states should possess the means to resist an armed attack, is also relevant. Russia's new generation warfare merges soft and hard security threats. Propaganda and destabilizing policies create the environment that makes military incursions viable. Russia's last two invasions in Georgia and Ukraine confirm these tendencies. Classic military invasion and occupation of a resisting population is a costly move, even in states like Georgia and Ukraine that lacked NATO's collective defense promises. Instead of a direct invasion, Russia pursued policies to create an environment where breakaway regions and local populations would support Russian military invasions. Without this fig-leaf

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/estonia-worth-war>

of legitimacy and without having destabilized the environment in advance, Russia would not have invaded. In short, soft security threats enable and lead to hard security problems.

For small states, and for allies committed to protecting them, this is a significant lesson. The ability to resist soft security aggression is much easier than resisting classic military aggression. The nature of soft security threats empowers small states. The size and power of an aggressor is not the key attribute in gauging the chance for a successful defense. Instead, the resiliency of domestic systems is key. The process of maintaining and defending domestic systems depends on domestic dynamics, not on the size of the threatening state. When looking in Russia's tool kit of soft security aggressive measures, the Russian-speaking diaspora is not the only one. Energy and cyber security are two soft security threats that Russia has used to pressure and punish governments. Estonia again is worth noting.

The crisis in 2007, when Estonia's relocation of a Soviet war memorial sparked riots and cyber-attacks, highlight the importance of social, energy, and cyber factors and demonstrate Russia's ability to exert pressure using each tactic. In response to Estonia's relocation of the memorial, Russia halted oil shipments through Estonian ports. Estonia was also hit by cyber-attacks believed to come from Russia. This was ground zero for Russia's new-generation warfare. NATO's Article 5 was certainly one factor that prevented Russia from more extensive meddling but it was not the only one. Estonia was a well-functioning state without many of the problems that were found in Georgia and Ukraine. Despite the riots, the ethnic Russian speakers were not motivated to the point where they would back military intervention as was the case in the breakaway regions in Georgia and in Ukraine.

Since 2007 Estonia has made significant improvements that limit Russia's threat in these areas. Estonia has diversified its economy away from energy transit. Domestic energy production provides most of energy consumption. Electric grids have been connected to Scandinavia via the Estlink 1 and Estlink 2 electrical cables. Natural gas will soon follow when a new LNG gas terminal is finished in a few years. Lithuania launched its first LNG terminal last year.

No less important is the transformation in cyber security. Estonia has led the way in cyber security, both in pushing the agenda in NATO and in bolstering its own cyber security defenses. This is evident in Estonia's military, which has created a cyber defense league. It is also visible across society with cyber security being taught at many educational levels.

On top of these steps to shore up Estonia's energy, cyber, and economic resilience, Russia's ability to use the Russian-speaking minority as a threat has also been reduced significantly. This year, an Estonian-funded Russian-language TV channel was finally launched. The channel will provide a balance to Russian-funded TV channels. Estonian wages, pensions, and employment levels have been rising, and they are noticeably better than in Russia. Lastly, representation of Russian speakers in Estonia has increased significantly. Noteworthy examples include a Russian-speaking representative in the European parliament, as the head of one of the major political parties, and as Estonia's 2014 representative to the Eurovision song contest. This highlights that ethnic Russian speakers see Estonia as their homeland and consider the Estonian government legitimate.

International institutions such as the EU and NATO have played a key role in enhancing the security measures noted above. The EU has funded several high-profile energy infrastructure projects. It also passed the third energy package legislation, which will open up energy infrastructure to multiple energy sources, helping small countries diversify away from dependence on Russia. NATO has established the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn and has placed cyber security at the top of the agenda. Perhaps the most noteworthy development is not material but in the sphere of ideas. The "Tallinn manual" has clarified norms and rules of engagement regarding cyber warfare. While not an official NATO publication, the manual was produced with backing and support of the CCDCOE.

The clash with Russia in 2007, and the measures Estonia has taken since, highlight the limitations of Russia's new generation 'hybrid' warfare. In countries such as Georgia, with its breakaway regions, or Ukraine, after the Maiden protest, hybrid tactics can snowball into military conflict and territorial annexation. In the case of Estonia and other stable states the utility of such tactics is limited. Small Eastern European states are more secure now than ever. Despite Russia's aggression, domestic resilience means that the cost of providing collective defense to small European Allies is just as small as ever.