

Baltic national security and Denmark since 1994:

20 years after Russian troop withdrawal and the creation of BALTBAT, after 15 years with Baltic Defence College and with 10 years of NATO membership.

Estonia and the two other Baltic States had – and still have – four basic problems when trying to ensure full future sovereignty. The developing insights into these problems guided the authors' role in Denmark's advice and support during his ten years' service in the region.

The first and foremost problem was and is the deep Russian resistance to accepting the loss of areas that the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union controlled. Few state this as openly as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy did when I visited his party congress in Moscow in spring 1994, but it was the underlying substance in all contacts with Russian military and diplomats during the years that followed. During Vladimir Putin's ever more autocratic rule his country has regressed to Geo-Strategic world views of the years before the First World War and the Bolshevik coup and revolution. Small states such as the Baltic should subordinate themselves to their great neighbour simply because they are small. They should show respect in the way that a business owner in Sicily should show respect to the local Mafia Don. The risks of not doing so is underlined by the pattern of military exercises, but normally the aim of achieving subordination is furthered by a combination of economic pressure and attempts to corrupt Baltic leaders to act in personal interest rather than to consolidate the sovereignty of their country. All this is constantly openly illustrated in Russia's dealings with the Ukraine and Georgia.

The second and related problem is the naïvety of the West-European great powers. They cannot, they will not accept that history has not ended, that Russia does not subscribe to their liberal views of the mutual benefits of interstate relationship built on equal rights. This is simply because the consequences of accepting reality would undermine the idea of constant progress towards a peaceful, richer, more democratic world. It would mean that we might have to accept a relapse to time and situation before 1989, before 1939, before 1914, where military forces had other roles than stabilizing bad situations in far-way places. It is an undisputed dogma that a new cold war should be averted, no matter at what cost. It is therefore a Pavlovian reaction of the West Europeans to convince by appeasement rather than deterrence. In Germany the inability to face reality is reinforced by its rather superficial reading of its past history with Russia. In Britain and France it is nourished by sympathy with the familiar reactions of another unjustly deprived great empire. These basic views of the West European powers made them incapable of taking the initiative in 1994-1999 to give support to the Baltic States aspirations, and the same views would effectively undermine any timely purely European reactions to a threat to the Baltic States.

The third problem was and is the ideologically based resistance of the Anglo-Saxon armies and political scientist to territorial defence and deterrence structures that are also based on conscription. Ignoring what Britain did when she was faced with a direct threat to its territory 75 years ago, no analysis of the actual geographical requirement and problems of the region were conducted. Arguments that modernity requires contract regulars with high-tech equipment combined with the implicit assumption that history had ended. Nobody considered why Finland

maintained a territorial deterrent defence structure and how it was and is made affordable. As the Anglo-Saxon militaries drove NATO with shallow buzz-words and assumptions, and as the West-Europeans saw no military challenge to their territories, nobody confronted them with analysis and logic.

The fourth problem was internal to the Baltic States. There was no confidence in the political elite that their nations would be able to contribute anything significant to their self-defence and deterrence of Russian actions. Even the part of that elite that controlled the volunteer nationalist militias, in Estonia the “Kaitseliit”, in Latvia the “Zemessardze” and in Lithuania the “SKAT” and the even more nationalist sister organisation of the Kaitseliit, the “Šauliai” only considered symbolic resistance followed by guerrilla possible. With own direct resistance to coup or invasion seen as basically futile all saw their countries as fully dependent on outside military deterrence of Russia. Even if Estonians admired the Finns for what they had achieved there was not even here a willingness to shoulder the burden of the personal and popular commitment to national service and territorial defence that had characterized all Nordic States during the Cold War. Their model of “Total Defence” looked too much like the Soviet era total war mobilisation preparations to be politically viable. If the Anglo-Saxon-dominated NATO told the member-hopefuls that they had to create small professional specialist contributions rather than consider territorial deterrent structures, Latvia followed immediately and fully, Lithuania more hesitantly and Estonia as far as acceptable to the respected Finnish inspired architect of the country’s defence forces, Ants Laaneots.

The implicit understanding of these basic problems soon formed the framework for my country’s defence assistance as it quickly developed from 1994 onwards. It was guided by Hans Hækkerup and his close assistants Per Carlsen and Peter Michael Nielsen from the Ministry of Defence. The implementation was in the hands of the Danish Chiefs of Defence: General Jørgen Lyng followed by Admiral Hans Garde, who had served as Lyng’s Chief of Defence Staff.

The support combined the understanding that the Nordic States had to have a key role with the realisation that the U.S. was the only country that could deliver the catalytic effect that might drive the West Europeans to move in spite of their reservations. From the start the “Partnership for Peace”-programme formed the framework for the effort. The agreed legitimate and safe vehicle for progress became the BALTBAT combined peace-keeping battalion project and the parallel Danish inclusion of Baltic infantry platoons in the Danish contingents in first UN and later NATO led operations in Former Yugoslavia. Energetic and charismatic officers led by Colonel Jens Christian Lund drove and supported this project to success. As requirements grew with the development of the battalion headquarters company, so did the willingness of the participating states to assist development of the real combat capabilities of the unit. The successful model for the management of the BALTBAT project was thereafter used to inspire the creation of the BALTRON mine vessel squadron that soon became essential for the developments of the Baltic navies, for the BALTNET air surveillance network and for the Baltic Defence College. The key officers originally selected for the BALTBAT project later played a very important role in the integration of the Baltic armies into the Alliance structures.

By May 1995 the Danish Government had reached internal agreement that the country would support the Baltic NATO aspirations, and during the next two years we developed a concept for an affordable territorial defence structures for the Baltic States that would also be capable of forming

and sustaining expeditionary elements for international operations. This defence structure was directly inspired by the low troop density model used by Sweden during the Cold War to defend the northern part of the country. As all roads in the former Soviet Union were constructed on causeways over the often swampy terrain, a high number of cuts made by demolitions could easily remove the option of fast road movement, and light forces with anti-tank weapons – volunteers and/or locally mobilised conscript reservists – could complicate road reconstruction. The only serious remaining problem was to protect the capitals and other key cities against sea- or airborne coup.

That model also motivated the tactical teaching during the three first Baltic Defence College staff courses. During the course I moved to the borders of the three states to study and discuss the problems, force requirements and required tactics in north-eastern Estonian, eastern Latvia and south-eastern Lithuania. In order to make sure that the possibilities of the cheap territorial defence model were highlighted, the combat engineer specialist in the directing staff was from the Swedish Army.

However, thereafter the pressure from the Anglo-Saxon dictated NATO accession plans forced a clear shift of focus to expeditionary operations. Tongue-in-cheek I used the argument to convince hesitant commanders that if all West European NATO members created and maintained deployable forces in high readiness, they would be able to counter a build-up in time and thereby underline the risks to the Russians.

In reality I just had to subordinate College policy to the three Defence Ministers' wish even if I doubted that the West-Europeans would ever show timely determination, something all too clearly illustrated later in Georgia. This was before the effects of first the economic crisis and later the reaction to the Afghanistan experience. The two combine to force a deep reduction to both European and American deployable land forces.

In Denmark the regional and European focus of the 1990s has now been replaced with the widespread Western view that European history has ended so we can ignore the NATO Article V obligations and chase the maybe opportunities of the melting arctic ice.