

Graduation Speech on 16 December 2011 for the 8th Baltic Defence College Higher Command Studies Course

Vice Minister, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank You, BGen Kiili, for the opportunity to congratulate the graduates of this very important course. As result of our conversation last night, I have decided to drop the prepared speech and outline the background of your course. To save time, I shall do it without diplomatic embellishment.

First the roots of the College: It was created in 1997-99 as the result of Western donor countries' frustration with the ineffective staffing and implementation in the defence support programmes in the three states, not because of lack of will, but because of different aspects of the Soviet legacy.

We were wasting our taxpayers' money. An example: I managed up to 15 million dollars annually for defence support to the three states during my years as Danish Defence Attaché to the Baltic States from 1994 to 1997. With the exception of the closely monitored common Baltic projects that started with BALTBAT, the support was wasted to a large extent. Everybody in the weekly structured and unfocused bureaucracies loved to plan, but there was an "Oblomov" attitude to implementation, which was a far more risky activity for those involved ... but the only one giving valid experience in the profession.

The new common Baltic Defence College was created to make what might be compared to a bypass operation, cutting a direct path around the otherwise likely slow, gradual and zigzag development. The college should quickly produce a critical mass of independent analytically minded staff officers in the best-practice (classical German) tradition. However, it would differ from that tradition by understanding and accepting the subordination to the democratically elected political leaders and the requirement for a close politically-professional dialogue in strategy and structure development. In order to facilitate that interaction, the College worked successfully to create the unique, parallel course for civil servants.

It all happened more or less as hoped and planned by those directly involved from the Baltic and sponsoring states. However, in 2003-2004 I realized that several new factors interacted to create the need for a new activity that would complement what had already been achieved during the first five years.

One important element in the crisis was the Anglo-Saxon generated NATO accession pressure to leave conscription and the territorial defence ambition and concentrate on small, regular expeditionary elements as a precondition for joining the Alliance. The Baltic States could and should ignore neighbouring Russia. This led to a direct disagreement between the professional military leaders and the politicians in Lithuania and especially in the Finnish inspired Estonia – with Baltic Defence College teaching operations and tactics in the middle. Even if I found that the demand to ignore Russia was arrogant, ahistorical and naïve as well as contrary to common Nordic States advice, and even if the College was now directly under the three Chiefs of Defence, the College had no option but to accept the subordination to the ministers' decision and views. We quickly adjusted the teaching in strategy and operations accordingly, not something that enhanced the popularity of the College in all quarters.

However, one aspect of the pressure was particularly offensive, narrow-military and stupid. Some Anglo-Saxon officers argued that the focus of the BALTDEFCOL teaching was far too high. Junior Staff training

where young officers were indoctrinated in tactical and basic staff procedures was more than enough for the military cadres of small states like the Baltic, as they would and should never work above a company and battalion staff frameworks. They were just to be trained to become uncritical and unthinking cannon fodder for the great powers: theirs and their politicians were not to reason why. It was in the very months when the US forces had been driven by Rumsfeldt's and his Pentagon's shallow techno-freaks into a strategy-free intervention into the Iraqi swamp in a way that conflicted with both relevant professional and regional expertise – with everyone else following that Pied Piper of Hamelin. The risk linked to an unthinking acceptance of the strategies of the larger alliance partners was all too clear in early 2004.

We needed to do the opposite of lowering our ambitions, making quite certain that even our small states had well educated high level military and civilian advisors who could enter into a strategic dialogue with their political masters to prepare them for the issues and problems of any new mission. This could ensure that the combined national political-diplomatic-military leadership of even a small state would become fully aware of what should be done and thus aware of the risks of joining, no matter what type of mission or place in the world.

In theory this would require the establishment of a traditional 10 months War College Course, something clearly beyond the resources of Baltic Defence College. However the very close cooperation we had with the United Kingdom and Canada made us aware that both countries successfully accomplished nearly the same in a shorter course. After all we did not have to teach our students how to operate the vast and complicated American strategy environment. So we borrowed the acronym of the British course, adjusted the focus *from* command at the operational level of war *to* strategy and structure reform advice, but kept the military and strategic history foundation that is common to all the best Anglo-Saxon war college education.

The professional history focus was also a clear reaction to what had happened in Denmark where the focus of a new course for those considered for high rank was a general – and thus a professional - preparation for employment of the current management ideology for the of organisational change. Instead of inspiring the future leaders to intensify their professional studies these bright officers met the business management fads that has led to the de-professionalization of all Western public sector elements creating growing administrations communication in Newspeak and as useful as the late Soviet Nomenklatura. This choice was critical due to an already very weak understanding in Denmark of the essential place critical handling of professional experience (=historical studies) must have in all advanced military education – necessary both for understanding how to integrate new technology with minimum risks and to outline the more likely results of political decisions.

So graduates. Congratulations. This was the course background. You had the privilege of some months away from the daily administrative grind. Now it is up to you to maintain your professionalism and further develop your usefulness as strategy advisors through continuous studies. Otherwise you will soon lose what you have achieved here in Tartu. Do not disappoint the College. Your countries need you.