

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Law

Berk Erdem

**SECURITY SITUATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION FROM  
A PERSPECTIVE OF NATO'S DETERRENCE EFFORTS**

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Supervisor: Holger Mölder, PhD

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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Berk Erdem .....

(signature, date)

Student code: 166388TASB

Student e-mail address: [eerdemberk@gmail.com](mailto:eerdemberk@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Holger Mölder, PhD:

The paper conforms to requirements in force

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(signature, date)

Chairman of the Defence Committee:

Permitted to the defence

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(name, signature, date)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Baltic Sea Region is an important region for whole Europe's security and for that reason it has been long contested. As one of the main historical actors, Russia is still provocative today in the region. To counter with Russia, NATO is active in the region and employs extensive deterrence measures. NATO's main activities are focused on four countries in the Baltic Region; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. This paper first asks the question on what kind of deterrence theory is applied by NATO in the region, and researches which one of the two main deterrence theories of classical deterrence and perfect deterrence fits into this case more. Later the paper analyses two of NATO's operations in the region, the Enhanced Forward Presence and Baltic Air Policing, while taking the variable of changing security conditions and aims to uncover which deterrence theory fits the case studies more. Finally, the paper gathers all findings in one chapter and presents a comprehensive analysis as well as the answers of the research questions.

Keywords: NATO, Deterrence, Baltic Sea Region, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Enhanced Forward Presence, Baltic Air Policing

## INTRODUCTION

As historically one of the most important regions of the North-Eastern European security theatre, the Baltic Sea region attracted many great powers' attention and today it is no less important to the security of whole Europe than it was before since it is still an area of power struggle between European powers and Russia. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is one of the main actors involved in the region's security. This paper aims to discuss the security situation from a NATO centric view and uncover how NATO's activities in the region provide deterrence.

The paper claims that; currently Russia is posing a threat to the Baltic States from different channels, and NATO is doing a lot to combat these threats already, and its actions are in line with deterrence theory. To research this claim, the paper takes two case studies on how NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and Baltic Air Policing operations contribute to the deterrence provided by NATO against the threat posed by Russia. The reason why these two operations are chosen is because they are the two most highlighted operations of NATO in the region and it would provide good discussion points for the deterrence theory.

The main target countries of the research consist of the Baltic Trio of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as Poland. Unless otherwise stated, the terms of "the Baltic States" or "the Baltic Sea region countries" will include Poland as well. Reasoning behind choosing these countries is that in a research focused on Baltic Sea security and discussing the threat created by Russia, it is imperative to include all three Baltic States which border Russia and feel threatened by Russia directly. Poland is included not only because it feels a Russian threat as a NATO member, but also because these four countries are in the position of being host countries regarding NATO's Baltic operations therefore they need to be analysed together. Another reason why Poland needs to be included in this research is that Poland along with Lithuania borders Kaliningrad, which is a heavily weaponised Russian exclave and strategically very important for the Baltic Sea Security theatre.

Research method will be process tracing. This method "moves us away from correlational arguments and as-if styles of reasoning toward theories that capture and explain the world as it

really works.” (Klotz, Prakash 2011, 121) Under the light of that, this method is chosen for the reason of focusing on the dynamics of the relations between actors and to bring a fair, well-balanced criticism to evaluated matters. In terms of literature chosen, extra attention has been paid to choosing works of authors with relevant expertise on the Baltic Sea Region as well as on deterrence and defence related matters. In addition to those, works of think-tanks who are working heavily on matters such as security studies, Baltic studies and NATO are chosen for supplementary sources.

There are multiple reasons for this topic being research worthy. First is to provide an insight into a topic that is very crucial to European defence yet is rather overshadowed by other security concerns, such as immigration. Baltic Sea Region is a gate to Europe, standing at the frontiers with Russia. It is the only place in Europe’s external borders where there is a large scale conventional military threat is present to Europe as a whole. This threat was reaffirmed after the Annexation of Crimea when the Baltic States felt they could share the same fate as Ukraine. This feeling translated into the actions we see today. Although it is important to mention that the Baltic Region did not attract NATO’s attention after the Annexation of Crimea for the first time, it was always a region where NATO and especially United States gave a lot of importance to. The case was such that after Crimea, the Baltic Region came into increased focus. However, despite the increasing importance of the region’s security, the public as well as the political focus in Europe seems to be not directed towards the Baltic Sea. Latest available results of Eurobarometer, a monthly questionnaire conducted on behalf of the European Commission revealed that, to the eyes of Europeans there are other concerns that come before a threat posed by Russia. Immigration is the number one concern with 40% of all Europeans agreeing on that (Standard 2019, 15). Even the respondents in the Baltic Trio placed immigration as their biggest concern. Therefore, the Russian threat is known in the Baltic countries, as well as elsewhere but is definitely overshadowed. It is not just the people; political circles of Europe can overlook the security situation in the Baltic Sea region as well. For example; when Portuguese defence minister José Alberto Azeredo Lopes was asked about the biggest threats facing Europe in a video interview, he first mentioned the threat from the South, namely Africa, and then mentioned the emerging threat from the East, which would be Russia (Lopes 2018). This suggests that European bureaucrats have their focus distracted and they are fighting in different fronts. Overall both the public and the policy makers can underestimate the situation in the Baltic Sea Region. Hence, this paper aims to direct the reader’s focus to the North-Eastern front of Europe and increase their understanding about the situation.

Second, NATO is one of the main actors concerned about the defence of the Baltics, therefore it is important to analyse in context of a research and understand how a Cold War-era institution reformed itself for 21st century threats and facing its old enemy in the territory that enemy used to control. In other words, how NATO works with the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries in their territory and provides support to them against Russia is a subject worthy of academic analysis. In regard to that, strategies employed in the region will be examined with the hope that this paper will give a fresh outlook to the Baltic security theatre in terms of how NATO's inter-alliance dynamics changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how that is creating a good base for deterrence efforts.

Third reason why this topic is important comes from the deterrence theory and its importance to the strategies employed by NATO in the region. Deterrence is a widely discussed scholarly topic and even though the paper's main focus is not deterrence theory as an international relations subject, it still relies heavily on it as its theoretical analysis base point. In the age when preventing conflicts is the main goal for many defence actors and when peacebuilding and peacekeeping are increasingly important concepts, deterrence gains more and more importance. It is also useful for determining the variables of this research. Deterrence theory affects the variables of this research in two ways: First is how NATO should plan its deterrence against Russian efforts of destabilising the region and NATO as a whole. Second way is, how NATO's operations with deterrent nature would affect the Russian foreign policy making. In both cases, deterrence is an important factor shaping the events and its crucial to understand it in the context of Baltic Sea Region security framework.

Overall structure of the paper will be as follows: It will first deal with the deterrence theory. This part will have mentions of scholarly literature on deterrence theories as well as dealing with issues such as how deterrence work in general. After that the paper will move on to Baltic Sea Region as an example of how deterrence is employed. In order to do that, first there will be a chapter about the security situation in the Baltic Sea. In that chapter actors and the threat in the region will be laid out as a starting point. Later on, the paper will take two case study examples of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and Baltic Air Policing. With regard to eFP, the paper will examine how eFP is a deterrence operation, and what aspect of it brings deterrence, in what ways. Later on, the same questions will be asked about the Baltic Air Policing, even though it's nature is totally different from eFP. It is important to include Baltic Air Policing as it gives examples of how NATO's operations evolved in the region over time and shows how it indirectly helped

NATO's deterrence efforts even though it is not a deterrence operation. Finally, it will go over the major findings and finish with an analysis chapter.



# 1. WHAT IS DETERRENCE THEORY?

United States Department of Defence defines deterrence as: “The prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits” (DOD 2018, 66). In other words; deterrence theory in international relations is a concept where conflict is avoided by one side presenting deterrent elements. Those deterring elements can be anything from military capabilities to political sanctions threat. Deterrence concept is not a new one for the world security theatre, especially for Europe. US historian John Maurer wrote that “European security in 1914 rested on deterrence and not on cooperation between alliance blocs” (Maurer 1995, 109) He later continues to argue that deterrence failed and that led to WW1. However, deterrence as a dominant concept appeared with the Cold War. At that period, classical deterrence was conceptualised by Realist theorists. End of the Cold War led to another major deterrence theory surface; the perfect deterrence theory. This paper will take these two major theories in its analysis due to their contrasting fundamental nature and they are from NATO’s two key phases; Cold War and post-Cold War. Including too many deterrence theories would have reduced the topicality of the paper so it is avoided.

Classical deterrence theory is one of the two main deterrence theories that will be discussed in the paper. It is a product of Cold War and relies heavily on the Realist thinking. Its key assumptions come from mainstream Realist ideas such as anarchy in the international system, balance of power as only source of peace and a constant power struggle. It relies on two major points; first is balance of power concept. It is a situation where in a two state model; potential attacker and defender, both sides have matching power so that they are in balance. However, researchers argue that it is not enough to have only balance of power for deterrence. Kenneth Waltz wrote on the matter that “if an equality of power among major powers’ minimizes the likelihood of war, World War 1 should have never been fought.” (Waltz 1993, 77) That is why classical deterrence also puts emphasis on the cost of war. What is meant by that is showing the attacker that the cost of war would be too high in order to deter them. In a situation where a potential attacker is significantly overpowered and the other state in question cannot provide defence elements to make the cost of war too high, there would be no deterrence in terms of the classical deterrence theory.

Classical deterrence was rather relevant in the Hobbesian nature of Cold War, however, in the post-Cold War reality it has many shortcomings. Indeed, it was a case where the United States and the Soviet Union had nuclear arms, which deterred them from getting into a war with each other's because the cost of war would be too high. Currently though, nuclear arms are less relevant in security situation, as the bipolar system has left its place to a multipolar system in which not all actors have nuclear weapons. Also a lot of emphasis has been put on nuclear disarmament. This does not mean that nuclear powers are forever eradicated, many of the historical nuclear powers still hold significant nuclear arsenals. Russia is one of such actors being researched in this paper. On other side of the story lies the Baltic States and NATO. The Baltic States do not have any nuclear weapons and although NATO has nuclear capabilities, it has no interest in deploying them to the region. Also linking it to the Realist assumption of balance of power being essential for peace, it is observed that in the Baltic Sea Region there is a clear unbalance between Russia and the NATO countries around her in terms of military capabilities, yet there is still a deterrence in existence. Therefore, Russia's nuclear arsenal and its importance for the classical deterrence theory falls short on explaining the contemporary deterrence situation created by NATO in the Baltic Sea Region. Another point is the new priorities in the deterrence changed towards finding long term solutions. Classical deterrence is a situation where one side is deterred by a matching force over the fear of war being too costly, and not deterred thanks to a stable international system. Stephen Quackenbush and Frank Zagare wrote on the matter that in classical deterrence theory while the cost of war in the nuclear age is prohibitive, it is not a stable and reliable one. (Quackenbush, Zagare 2016) What is observed in today's international relations is that importance of structuralism is increasing and in that environment there is no room for short term unreliable solutions. As a final reason of why classical deterrence is a theory that cannot be used to explain the current situation, NATO's changing nature can be put forward. During the Cold War NATO had a strategy of collective defence which after the Cold War turned into cooperative security. (Janeliunas, Zapolskis 2015, 77) The shift meant that smaller states that would join NATO in the future could bring security, in other words deterrence, according to their capabilities. NATO's past nature of a major power, the US, defending European allies with its large nuclear arsenal against another nuclear power was a concept from collective defence era and classical deterrence can be used to explain that, however in the current era we cannot use that theory. Therefore, it is evident that in order to explain the contemporary situation there is a need of a different theory, which is the perfect deterrence theory.

Perfect deterrence theory was developed by Frank C. Zagare and D. Marc Kilgour. Their main difference comes from the credibility of threats posed against the potential attacker by the defending side. In classical deterrence, conflict was the least wanted outcome both by the attacker and the defender and there was a credible deterrent. In the perfect deterrence theory, credibility is perceived by rationality of a player's threat to retaliate. (Quackenbush, Zagare 2016) In other words, the threats posed by the defending side are rational while in classical deterrence those threats were not always rational. This can be supported empirically by US and Soviet strategies during the Cold War, as neither government would have wanted to start a global nuclear war and therefore conflict was the least desired outcome for all. While in perfect deterrence theory more rational threats are posed, and all kinds of proliferation is strictly opposed. (Quackenbush, Zagare 2016)

Linking it to the upcoming case studies, NATO's current activities are more in line with perfect deterrence rather than classical deterrence. NATO have not deployed nuclear weapons but instead rather deployed small battlegroups and limited equipment. An impression is given so that the battlegroups and the equipment will be used almost for certain against an attacker since their usage does not have as serious consequences as using a nuclear weapon. Hence, the troops deployed in limited numbers are more credible and rational threat for the attacker. The perfect deterrence theory changes assumptions not only on the attacker but on the defender as well. In this theory, the defender sees conflict as a better choice than surrender because it has credible threat to use and its usage will not be as burdensome as using a weapon of mass destruction. Previously in the classical deterrence, the defender and the attacker both saw conflict as the least desired option. According to perfect deterrence theory, the defender can choose the mildly feasible conflict option instead of inaction and surrender. Knowing that the defender will act to utilize all its means will deter the potential attacker as well. Overall, perfect deterrence theory is more relevant to researching NATO's activities in the Baltic Sea Region, but before moving on to the case studies it is useful to give an outlook on the actors and understand the threat which requires deterrence to be employed.

## **2. WHAT IS THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION?**

### **2.1. Understanding the actors**

In order to understand any issue regarding international relations, the first step is to understand the actors involved. In the Baltic security theatre, actors could be classified into several groups. This classification is not in regard to their importance, since all are very important to the security equation, but for the sake of convenience and to shed a light onto the situation. Three of the four immediate actors for this research are the Baltic Trio of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. They have previously been under the Soviet Union directly. Since their restoration of independent statehood they followed a very fast path to getting closer with Western Europe, they developed their democracies rapidly and joined NATO and EU in 2004. Their enhanced integration into the Western Europe was not welcomed by Russia, while NATO coming to Russia's border plus Baltic countries refusing to be under their zone of influence as a former Soviet nation clearly caused resentment by Russia. Research shows that the Baltic Trio regard their membership to NATO as well as to the European Union as a safeguard to their security (Sakkov 2014). Their concerns have started to deepen with the Russia-Georgia conflict since they saw the measures Russia would take to maintain instability in their claimed zone of influence, in the former Soviet republics. This feeling was translated into feeling more of a direct threat from Russia after the Annexation of Crimea in 2014. Both Georgia and Ukraine were pursuing policies that may have brought them closer to EU and NATO, however Russian occupation of their territories clearly means that they cannot be members of either any time soon. Baltic nations were already members of both organisations as these happened and they understand the importance of remaining as an integral part of the West to not to endure the same fate as two other nations have. It is appropriate to mention Poland here as the fourth key actor, as it is a host nation to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and does have coast to the Baltic sea. Poland is a country that borders Russia over the Kaliningrad exclave. It shares more or less of a similar story as the Baltic Trio in regard to relations with Russia. In the past Poland was under heavy influence of the Soviet Union as a member of the Warsaw Pact Organization. Their NATO membership came in 1999, earlier than of those of Baltic states'. They are also a heavily focused NATO ally for American deployments, for instance under the Enhanced Forward Presence, as of January 2019 there are 889 US soldiers in Poland. (NATO's ... 2019)

These US soldiers are a part of a bigger picture which would be categorised as the main NATO partners. Along with USA, Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom make up the so called framework nations of the Enhanced Forward Presence. Moreover, they are the nations which are making the highest contributions to defence of Baltic nations over other operations, although, they are not the only NATO members contributing to the defence of the Baltic region. When the Baltic Air Policing is added up to the calculation, only two NATO members have never sent troops or equipment to Baltic region for neither of these operations; namely, Bulgaria and Greece. The reason why they have not participated is officially unclear, theoretically the closest reasons could be either economical or these countries are trying to maintain rather good relations with Russia. All other 27 nations, in their capabilities, have participated in NATO operations in the region. This wide participation sends a strong message of unity and sets an example of Allied defence for modern times. Other nations mentioned above, such as Germany and the UK, all have been very important contributors to NATO operations in the Baltic. What these states are doing by sending soldiers that would automatically make them join the conflict in case of a potential attack is called “irrevocable commitment” by researchers (Quackenbush, Zagare 2016) and examples of that could be found throughout history.

After the NATO member actors, it is good to mention the partner nations in the Baltic Sea region, the Nordic Duo of Sweden and Finland. Both of these countries are not members of NATO but are more or less on the same side of the equation with NATO states by active involvement in NATO’s partnership programs. They are important states of the Baltic Sea region. Sweden was once the dominant power of the Baltic Sea, which Russia contested. These two countries are feeling a security challenge from Russia. Sweden controls the island of Gotland in the Baltic sea and Finland controls Aland Islands. Both are strategically important locations and their defence is crucial for the defence of the wider Baltic Region. The reason for their importance comes from geographical locations. They are islands which if occupied by an attacker, could be used as a base for further advances as well as used as an outpost to deter any help from outside. NATO and Nordic Duo may be on the same side but they are not necessarily working in a flawless unity. It is important to understand their role, but the paper will not include them for the sake of topicality.

This concludes only one side of the equation, and on the other stands Russian Federation. Baltic States see Russia as a threat to their sovereignty and Russia employs strategies such as information campaigns and large scale military exercises to keep the tensions high. It is rather challenging to

talk about Russian motives since many factors come into place. This discussion opens up the next part of the paper, where the threat is discussed.

## **2.2. Understanding the threat**

To start off with, the question of what Russia wants from the Baltic Sea comes up. An obvious answer to that comes from the history. Early traces of activities regarding Russian Empire's expansion desires into Baltic Sea region can be found dating as back as to 16<sup>th</sup> century with Livonian Wars. The original rhetoric combined with Russia's historical willingness to gain access into warm seas results in historically obsessive Baltic Sea policies by Russia. In the modern context, the direct military threat and objectives are reduced and instead a more of a hybrid threat exists. This hybrid threat includes misinformation campaigns such as spreading fake news, influencing the local Russian minorities in these countries, exploiting the historical elements and such. Social media is a common tool doing this, religion or events targeted to the youth can be used as tools as well. Main idea is to create social unrest. Hybrid threats are usually not alone though. Many take hybrid operations as a part of a bigger strategy. For example, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism mentions that; "Orchestration [of hybrid threats] as part of a strategy/campaign" is one of the characteristics of hybrid conflicts (Putten, Meijnders 2018,1) . Therefore, threats arising from hybrid operations are nothing to be taken lightly, as it can be employed hand in hand with military instruments for serving larger goals. Such is the case observed in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, where Russia engaged in hybrid threats along with using pure military forces for occupation. To summarise, the hybrid threats include many aspects such as cyber threat, military threat, harassment of air border by Russian fighter jets, social manipulation over the internet and so forth.

What Russia gets out of these actions is the real question. Is there a serious hope of occupying Baltic states or its merely a case of power play and destabilising the neighbourhood? Chances of Russia actually wanting to get into a hard war are very low. This idea has been voiced by many Western security agencies, such as the Danish Defence Intelligence Service, which believes conventional military threat is low (Findsen 2017, 5). That comment is ought to be taken seriously coming from a security agency of a NATO country bordering the Baltic Sea. The threat exists from Russia to all Baltic Sea states, but not necessarily a conventional military one. However, not every country perceives the threat at the same level. Main policy differentiation among the allies in the

Baltic Sea is that some countries, such as the Baltic Trio see Russia as a more of a conventional threat combined with hybrid elements while as observed with the Danish case, some allies take the threat from one dimension. However, research suggests that a successful security institution should seek to decrease distrust and misperceptions of threats between member and non-member states while creating mechanisms that facilitate peaceful resolution of potential disputes and conflicts (Mölder 2011, 146).

The situation refers to theoretical point of view as well. Realism can be used to explain some of Russia's actions. Therefore, from a Realist point of view, Russia has unresolved issues in the region and those could be solved only through war and aggression. On the other side of the equation, the Allies are showing a Neoliberal stance with the security community. In a way this is a historical struggle turned into a debate between Neoliberalism and Realism. Russia sees former Soviet States as their natural sphere of influence. Seeing them a part of NATO and overall under the Western influence may also cause them to be more proactive in the Baltic theatre. Another realist explanation to Russia's actions is simply security dilemma, that NATO coming close to their borders creates a threat to them. Although on paper it would make a somewhat sensible argument, the real balance of military forces in the Baltic region favours Russia in the short term, if one does not include backup forces that the Allies can deploy. Also the Allied forces who are currently present are deployed as a deterrent force rather than an offensive force. Therefore, a significant threat does not exist to the Russian sovereignty. Overall, the threat is far from a military conflict but nevertheless involves military forces. This is almost a Cold War relic tactic where both sides do not intend to get into an armed conflict, mixed with 21st century methods of hybrid warfare. The latter methods pose a higher challenge to tackle with; in other words, combatting disinformation is not as easy as combatting direct military threats.

### **3. THE ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON DETERRENCE**

When it comes to dealing with the conventional threats, it is already mentioned that there are land based troops in the Baltic states as a deterrent, and this deployment is called Enhanced Forward Presence (shortly eFP). They are stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The main intention of eFP is clearly stated in the NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué of 2016, point 11, as a deterrent force. (Warsaw 2016) The actions of Enhanced Forward Presence operation has been in line with the purposes outlined in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, as NATO follows a strict transparency policy and tries to follow its own guidelines to the fullest. They make up a part of the wider defence strategy for the Baltics. Therefore, it is very important to understand it and analyse how it affects the security theatre, as well as the bilateral relations which in the long run reflect back on the security situation.

Enhanced Forward Presence is a NATO deployment to the Allies in the East - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, which has been decided in Warsaw Summit in 2016. These four Baltic Allies felt increasing threat from Russia in the aftermath of Annexation of Crimea and eFP aims to address their concerns. Some researchers argue that before the events in Ukraine, the eFP would have been unthinkable (Zapfe 2017, 148). Instead there was NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, shortly VJTF, which was set up in Wales Summit 2014. However, they are quite different in nature and since the paper focuses on only two case studies, VJTF will not be analysed further. Going back to the eFP, is important to mention the military capabilities in the Baltic Trio and how it led to creation of eFP. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all have very limited military capabilities, while Poland is comparatively better. With the eFP, NATO followed its dedication to capacity building in its allies. This deployment shows NATO's military capabilities in terms of defending their Allies and working together as a larger entity. With a total of 20 allies working in different languages and having organisational and cultural differences between them, it is an unprecedented example of collective defence and international team work for 21st century. In total there are 4657 troops are deployed under this operation to four countries, as of 28 January 2019 (NATO's ... 2019). Under the light of these facts, the main strength of Enhanced Forward Presence comes forward. It is not the 4657 soldiers that provides a sense of security to Baltic States as they are not comparable to Russian troop count. The advantage of eFP is the 20 different countries coming together, the sense of solidarity that arises from it. Russia will not be attacking Baltic States only if they decide to do so. The other 20 countries will be involved in the fight immediately,



not including the other Allies providing military and political support in the later stage. This is a very effective way of dealing with this kind of threat. The Ambassador of Canada to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania Kevin Rex stated that the proof of NATO's effectiveness in the region is shown over the fact that no heated armed conflict has arisen in the Baltic region. (Rex 2019) This shows where the thinking lays in regard to policy making behind the eFP, which is deterrence focused.

Not only the contributing allies prefers the deterrence method but also in a strategical dimension the Baltic States' defence strategy relies on the principle of defence through deterrence. That has been confirmed by several policy makers involved in the eFP and was unanimously interviewed by the Tallinn based think-tank International Centre For Defence And Security-ICDS. (Stoicescu, Järvenpää 2019) Enhanced Forward Presence is therefore very fitting for these states. Indeed, they are integrated to the defence systems of host states. The facts such as their arrival being over the invitation from Baltic nations, their working being hand in hand with the national armed forces, and their purpose serving the host nations' defence strategies makes them a welcome element to defences of these countries. Additionally, the general public also holds a rather favourable opinion on eFP and on NATO in general. According to a Gallup poll from 2016, the Baltic States' population supports NATO in a rate that is higher than most Southern and Eastern European states. (Gallup 2017) This draws a picture where eFP is very beneficial to host nations, but whilst the hosts' gains are visible, what are the contributors' gains?

Contributing to a military operation is a big decision and states needs to first and foremost protect their interests while making decisions like this. Therefore, there has to be benefits to the contributing nations. In eFP there are many that can be mentioned. First is increasing the sense of unity with the traditional so called Western World and the former Eastern Bloc states. Admitting those Baltic States into the two key institutions of the Western world, namely NATO and EU, does not automatically make those former Eastern bloc countries integrated into the traditional Western world. Years under the Communist regimes made those countries lack behind in terms of infrastructure, development and so on. Enhanced Forward Presence therefore acts as an integrating force. This integration benefits the contributor nations by winning more friends which strengthens their hand against Russia. In other words, more integrated alliance increases the credibility of NATO's deterrence efforts, and directly denies Russia freedom to act however they desire to. Right now it is good to mention Russia's claims that the US and NATO is getting closer to Russian borders and that is a danger to Russian sovereignty. The Baltic States makes up a very small portion of Russia's borders and possibly the only noticeable encirclement of Russian territory by

NATO is the exception of small Kaliningrad enclave located north east of Poland and also bordering Lithuania which is a vital piece of land for Russia in the Baltic sea. Furthermore, a deterrent force cannot be a threat to national security, as it is a tripwire not an aggressor force.

Another opportunity it gives to the contributing nations is the chance to experience an area so close to the Russian border and benefiting from the expertise of the people who lived directly under Soviet Rule or in a communist regime in case of Poland. The joint exercises they can conduct and the overall living experience will increase the combat readiness of all Allied soldiers. For armies that are globally active, such as the British Army which is deployed all around the world from Brunei to Belize, this is a very good opportunity to gain the necessary expertise. They get to learn the threat from first hand, they survey the land, they learn working together with the Baltic Allies and so forth, which is a major gain. It is good to note that Baltic states have sent military personnel to US-led as well as NATO-led operations before, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, while others have learned from the Baltics, they were also eager to learn about environments foreign to their armed forces.

One fact that cannot be overlooked when it comes to overseas deployments is the political influence side of it. In this case, it appears in two levels; NATO level and bilateral level. On the NATO level it creates more political integration of the Baltic states. It gives them a chance to influence the Alliance's policy making and in return their defence policies get influenced by the other Allies involved. The whole existence of Enhanced Forward Presence can be seen as an example of how Baltic states were given a platform in NATO to raise their concerns and find support after the Annexation of Crimea. It also sets a good example of the internal practice of NATO as it shows that small or big, Allies are willing to work together, and they are committed to collective defence. This would surely have an impact on other small former Eastern Bloc states, mainly in the Balkans to have a more favourable view of NATO membership. Those countries, especially their public can see that small countries can still influence the agenda and they will not be purely exploited. Another type of influence arising from eFP is the bilateral influence. That happens parallel to multilateral/NATO sphere of influence. What is meant by that is larger states contributing to eFP have a chance to influence the domestic and foreign affairs of the much smaller host nations. Military deployments, trainings, development aid and so on is a good chance of influence by the giver country. Today the contributors are increasing their bilateral relations and practically their concerns will be taken more seriously by the authorities in the host countries. This could end up in situations like such where contributing nations can ask the host nations to vote in

their interests in platforms such as United Nations or European Union institutions, therefore contributing nations can use their military participations as bilateral negotiation tool. One solid example would be Estonian soldiers joining French counter-terrorism *Operation Barkhane* in Mali. Estonian parliament approved this deployment while the French announced their troops will return to Estonia. There is a case of out of NATO engagement involved and this is made possible by the deepening relations, which is mainly due to this military engagement. It gave countries who were diplomatically underrepresented in the region a significant influence. As Canadian Ambassador Rex explained Canada's presence in the region comprising Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was limited to only two officials while later due to soldiers and support personnel joining Enhanced Forward Presence it has increased to 900, which makes up the Canada's second largest military presence. (Rex 2019) Clearly Canada can influence the domestic politics of Latvia right now, where most of these soldiers are stationed, using their military contribution as a negotiation tool which is something they did not had before. In regard to how this effects the deterrence situation; more political integration between allies translates into more credible deterrence.

There is a lesser mentioned, but very important factor which is the shift in public opinion that could be a great gain against the hybrid threats by Russia. The public in the Baltic states getting acquainted with the Allied troops is a good way to influence the public to a stance that is closer to the NATO's instead of being exposed to Russian propaganda. As a part of its hybrid strategies Russia spreads fake news regarding Allied troops but giving public a chance to read the troops' activities from their local newspapers and have a chance to see them in parades or in other events would combat those allegations and lift the alienation of the local population to the soldiers and vice versa. Allied troops make frequent public appearances in the host countries. These appearances and overall being transparent as much as possible is very helpful against misinformation. In regard to transparency the Allied troops do not only follow that strategy for civilians but Russian officials are also kept informed and regular invited to exercises as observers. This is a good case of showing the superiority of transparency, rule of law and unity over brute, destabilising and shady efforts. In terms of how this is linked to deterrence, a reference needs to be made to the first chapter where deterrence theory was discussed. It was mentioned that in perfect deterrence theory the defender has a favourable view of using the deterrent forces. The public also supporting the presence and a potential use of the eFP forces would strengthen the hand of the defender side's governments.

To summarise what Enhanced Forward Presence delivers; it is a tripwire deterrent which in case of an event would be used and it would result in the participating countries of eFP to be directly involved with the war. Researcher Ulrich Kühn wrote:

“The logic behind this strategy is that involving NATO forces ... against Russia—and hence giving them a direct stake in the outcome—would help minimize pressure within the alliance to simply cede to Russia any territory it may take, thus strengthening deterrence and preventing deliberate Russian escalation (Kühn 2018, 27). ”

It is a major step for security situation in north-east Europe, but it is not enough. Martin Zapfe argues on the situation that eFP is a symbol of strength and an important step with significant historical weight. However, he continues to argue that “The tripwire does not deter; the Alliance does.” (Zapfe 2017, 157) Nevertheless eFP is working well on denying Russia the freedom to intervene in the Baltic countries militarily. On the matter regarding Russia’s strategies, Director General of Estonian Internal Security Agency Arnold Sinisalu wrote: “Russia does with its neighbours whatever it can get away with” (Sinisalu 2019, 3). Thanks to the eFP, Kremlin cannot get away with military action in the Baltic region. Aside from its deterrence goal, it is a great example of Allied cooperation, in other words; collective defence. It is one of the operations in the modern military history where the security community theory shows itself come alive successfully. The actors involved also widen their relations and integrate deeper into the NATO structure, which once more increases the credibility of deterrence.

## 4. BALTIC AIR POLICING MISSION AND ITS EFFECTS ON DETERRENCE

Air Policing mission in the Baltics is a continuing project and as old as the NATO membership of three Baltic States, since 30 March 2004, starting a day after the accession of those states into NATO. It is not an air defence mission, according to a comprehensive research commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, but a peacetime mission with assisting the member states whose air capabilities are not sufficient. Although the operation's capabilities have been doubled since the Crimean annexation. (Harper, Lawrence, Sakkov 2018, 13). This gives an idea of its *de facto* nature of intercepting illegally entering Russian aircraft into the air space of the Baltic States. Also there is a clear goal of capacity building laying underneath Baltic Air Policing, since NATO's Air Policing missions have taken place elsewhere before too, for example Iceland, and the goal was to assist allies who did not had enough capabilities to protect their own airspace. There are other components to air defence capabilities by NATO however covering them would disorient the paper. The main presence of NATO in terms of air force capabilities is the Baltic Air Policing mission. A typical Air Policing mission is conducted with four-month rotations, usually with four fighter jets positioned in two air bases. Those bases are in *Šiauliai*, Lithuania and *Ämari*, Estonia. (Norway 2015) Their main *de facto* functionality is intercepting Russian aircraft which illegally enters the airspaces of those countries, which is a serious problem that the Baltic States are facing. The reason why Russian military aircraft doing this can be explained in two main ways; one is the idea proposed by Sinisalu that was mentioned beforehand, that Russia will do whatever it can get away with (Sinisalu 2019, 3), and it can simply get away with harassing the air spaces of Baltic States. Another idea is a rather optimistic look; inspired by a disclosed diplomats' ideas, that many Russian aircraft equipment and crew who are trained under Soviet Union are not fully in command of the air borders of Baltic states as it was all Soviet Union before. This case can be seen in flights to Kaliningrad from mainland Russia which is the main route where these violations into the Baltic Trio's air space occurs. Therefore, air border crossings can be either accidental or incidental. Although realistically it is good to remember that if the accidental violations are real as such, it could and should be fixed.

In a very straightforward context; Baltic Air Policing has not deterred Russian military aircraft from harassing Baltic States. The reason is simple; because it never intended to do so. However, it is still a part of overall deterrence posed. In that regard Baltic Air Policing is quite research worthy. It is also good to mention Baltic Air Policing because it gives a chance to compare how

NATO's strategy has evolved from its first operation in the region to the latest, the eFP. The main criticism that could be brought to Baltic Air Policing is that it is waiting to intercept an incoming threat while offering little to no actual protection. Realistically speaking 8 fighter jets cannot match Russian air capabilities, and Air Policing is not as multicultural as eFP because it is usually one country taking the four months' rotation, unlike the Enhanced Forward Presence where it is multiple countries working together at once. Therefore, it lacks the unity the eFP has at a single place and time. Although some of the positive things said about the eFP can be said about Air Policing too; as it does increase cooperation between member states and gives military experience to participating forces. Naturally these positive aspects bring an elements of deterrence. Overall, Air Policing and other initiatives by the Allies in regard to air defence falls short, while not everything about it is necessarily bad. It addresses a very particular problem and it will only be effective given there is a threat existing. Also, fighter jets make no use in the fight against the hybrid methods. As a final note, it is good to remember that this was the first official NATO mission conducted with the then-new Allies.

What makes Baltic Air Policing an unintentional deterrent element? As mentioned before, it is not a deterrence operation, but linking it to the perfect deterrence theory could make Air Policing look like a small deterrent element. Baltic Air Policing was the first step where NATO would commit to the Baltic allies in terms of military equipment. When the operation commenced in 2004 it gave Russia a sign that NATO will be in the region. Simply, the starting of commitment meant for Russia that Baltic states are protected collectively, and there is a credible threat against an attacker. NATO showed that it would use Air Policing capabilities since it was a rational threat, therefore affirmed Russia that NATO will not choose inaction and will engage with them. Air Policing also gave eFP an inheritance, that it is another operation that NATO takes seriously and as shown before, NATO will use its means when necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The paper so far mentioned the deterrence theory, and then gave a background by mentioning the actors involved in the Baltic Sea Region security theatre as well as the threat posed by Russia due to their strategic goal of destabilising NATO and the West overall. Afterwards, the paper moved on to two case studies which are same in nature but different in execution. With all the groundwork laid out, an analysis could be conducted. Firstly, it has become evident that among two mainstream deterrence theories, the one that applies for NATO's operations in the Baltic Sea is perfect deterrence theory. Classical deterrence theory has assumptions that cannot be valid for the region, such as the balance of power. In terms of conventional military power there is a clear imbalance of power even with the NATO forces deployed to the region. Yet there is still a situation of deterrence. That is why the perfect deterrence theory is applied. It emphasizes on giving credible threats which the defender side will not hesitate to use and its usage will bring more benefits than its costs.

Under the light of that the Enhanced Forward Presence looks like a very important deterrence step. Its main strength comes from its multinational structure, the so-called irrevocable commitment. That makes up for the small troop size as well. The irrevocable commitment translates into a situation where a potentially aggressive Russia will see troops from around 20 different countries directly involved in a conflict against her. Therefore, this multinationalism is certainly a very big step and it shows NATO's evolvement from a collective defence organisation to cooperative security organisation. Also, in line with perfect deterrence theory, the allies give the message that eFP will be used when needed. In other words, inaction is not an option and Russia knowing that increases the effectiveness of Enhanced Forward Presence's deterrence.

The eFP works for what it is intended to be, as a deterrent force. The Baltic Trio and Poland have not faced a direct aggression from Russia yet and chances are low according to the opinion of many actors. Russia is deterred and choosing actions that will not lead to conflict while not completely abolishing their destabilising efforts. It is clear at this stage that without NATO, Russia would not be facing credible opposition to its efforts and peace might not have been sustained in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that eFP is a tripwire deterrent and as mentioned before, the real deterrent element is NATO itself. For example, there is a high chance that even if the Baltic States had managed to create a force that matches eFP in numbers and capabilities, they still might have not used it in case of an attack. Reason would be the cost of war

concept from the classical deterrence theory; Baltic States would try to minimize casualties and surrender. However, thanks to NATO's involvement there is a credible threat. This highlights a key finding; that without NATO, the region would be working under classical deterrence theory but due to NATO's presence it is working in line with perfect deterrence theory. One major question about existence of eFP is why NATO felt the need to create such a multinational force while anyway Article 5 should have been enough. One option is that NATO directly wanted to tie down allies into the region and in case of a possible conflict because their soldiers will be involved, they cannot refuse to help the Baltics. While some countries who do not have their forces in the region might choose to not to act on it in case of a Russian attack to preserve their national interests. Nevertheless, eFP is an important and successful step but should not be seen bigger than it actually is. There is still a need for more steps in order to achieve a more comprehensive solution.

Regarding the Baltic Air Policing, it is a good case example to compare two operations commenced in different times by the same organisation in the same region. Compared to eFP, Baltic Air Policing is a weak deterrence effort. Reason behind it is simple; because it does not intend to be a deterrent but more of a capacity building operation. Nevertheless, Baltic Air Policing indirectly contributes to the deterrence in the area, as any military presence of NATO is a show of solidarity and therefore deters Russia. Baltic Air Policing is usually done with four or eight fighter jets situated in Estonia and Lithuania and their number is very disadvantaged, yet again it is observed that NATO's operations in the region prioritise showing unity rather than creating a massive military build-up. This numerical imbalance once more shows the perfect deterrence theory is employed in the region.

To sum it all up, the Baltic Region is a vital area to the security of whole Europe, and for that reason it has been long contested. Russia has been one of those contestants and it is still going on with its efforts to destabilise the region. NATO is a key actor in this contest due to the Baltic Sea States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all being members of NATO. As a key actor NATO is employing series of deterrent measures which are in line with the perfect deterrence theory. Enhanced Forward Presence is a key example of deterrence employed by NATO as well as a crucial step for increasing security of the whole region. It is a relatively small force that gets its strength from its multinationalism, in other words, from the commitment different states made for the protection of the Baltic countries. It is a credible and rational deterrent and gives strong message to the potential attacker that it would be used in case of a conflict. Due to that, it has managed to deter Russia. However, eFP is not the only operation of NATO in the region. Baltic



Air Policing is a remarkable one, as well as NATO's first official operation commenced in 2004 with the newly joined Baltic Trio. It is not a deterrent operation, yet it exhibits characters of perfect deterrence theory, such as it has been used against the threat. In that case, threat was Russian military aircraft illegally entering the airspace of the Baltic Trio. Therefore, Baltic Air Policing can be taken as an unintended deterrence operation, as well as a good example to compare how NATO's actions evolved from its first operation in the region to its latest. Overall, research showed that NATO has been involved in the region and its actions are logically laid out, as well as evolving according to the developments around it. No operation is perfect, but with deterrence as main strategy, NATO appears to provide security guarantee for present as well as the foreseeable future.

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