

SMALL STATE'S USE OF THE MILITARY IN FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASE OF BALTIC STATES

Margarita Šešelgytė | Vilnius University | Margarita.Seselgyte@tspmi.vu.lt

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In the 90s Baltic states after 50 year period of occupation have regained their independence. A decade later they have successfully paved their way into Euro Atlantic community and became among most active members of it (Latvia was presiding over the EU Council in 2015, Lithuania was holding chairmanship of the OSCE in 2006, presiding over the EU Council in 2009, was elected non-permanent member of the UN SC, Estonia overtook the EU Presidency in July 2017). Active foreign policy is often a strategy that small states choose in order to increase their relative power in the international politics and by extension to increase their security. Interestingly Baltic states were not only aiming to increase their security by active foreign policy, but as well actively using their armed forces to promote their foreign policy goals. Active participation in international operations of the Baltic armed forces have helped those countries to integrate into Euro Atlantic institutions as well to keep an interest of the major powers, especially the US for the security issues of those states. I am not arguing that active use of AF was the only factor of success, but surely it was among the key ones.

Key findings

- Due to the geopolitical challenges Baltic states since the independence had to search for a creative foreign and security policy strategy to first of all appear on the map of Europe and second of all to make their voices heard;
- Aiming to be more visible all three of them chose activism on the international arena, with a particular emphasis on the use of their military instrument
- Participation in international military operations helped all three Baltic countries to become more visible and vocal, it also paved their way into NATO
- After becoming NATO members Baltic states retained high level of participation in military operations mainly aiming to ensure the US interest in the region.
- Changing security situation in the region along with the changing security threats are forcing small states in the Baltic Sea region to review their security strategies.

Creative foreign and security policy strategy to appear on the map of Europe

Security of the small states to a great extent depends on the external and systemic actors. Minor turbulence in the international system might pose a serious challenge for a small state. If the latter is



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situated in the vicinity of a large, revisionist, undemocratic power, security could only be obtained through creative strategies, most often ranging from bandwagoning to participation in the alliances. In the 90s Baltic states regained their independence from the Soviet Union. Apart from other challenges as the inexistence of democratic institutions, failed economy and unfavorable security situation, three Baltic states did not have clear foreign and security policy direction. It was obvious that they did not want to relate their destiny to the post-soviet space, however chances to get closer Euro-Atlantic community as another option were quite scarce. Western European countries did not know much about three Baltic states, they viewed them with a certain level of suspicion. Moreover any closer cooperation might have irritated Russia which was then quite chaotic, though on the path towards democratization. Baltic states had to devise a foreign policy strategy to get them into Euro Atlantic community, even though that meant that they had to get there through the back doors. The main element of this strategy became an active role in the international institutions.

Activism on the international arena, with a particular emphasis on the use of their military instrument

In the early nineties leaders of the Baltic states were discussing their options of how to become more relevant for the Euro Atlantic community. In 1992 on 1-2 of June first meeting of the Chiefs of Defence of three Baltic states took place where all three countries discussed their intentions to participate in international military operations. The main line of argumentation was that Baltic states cannot ensure their security on their own, they have to get integrated into the Euro Atlantic community and the first steps could be through active participation in international military operations (Paljak, 2008). Membership in the UN allowed them participate in the UN missions. There they received an opportunity to train and to increase interoperability also with NATO members. Step by step they also were gaining the confidence from NATO countries both on the military and political levels. Participation in international military operations became one of the options to increase country's visibility and make other countries see our security concerns.

Though Baltic states have started their involvement in the international military operations only with relatively small contributions in the framework of the UN missions in Balkans, it should be noted that this decision was a challenge for all three countries for a number of reasons. First of all, all of them were still undergoing severe processes of transformation (institutional, economic). Which did not allow to use much resources for the armed forces which in all three countries were created from the scratch. Moreover their security situation was very delicate, Russian AF left those countries only in 1993 - 1994. The path of Russian democratization was still very shaky. Society and the members of the governments in three Baltic states were quite sceptic about the use of scarce resources for the international missions especially considering unstable neighborhood. The main dilemma was should Baltic states protect themselves re-inforcing capabilities internally or "defending their countries" in international operations. However participation in international military operations does not bring direct military security, there is no guarantee of reciprocity if the security situation of the contributing country deteriorates. Participation in UN military operations did not provide NATO article 5 like security guarantees. Lithuania was the first one to make contribution in 1994 to the UNPROFOR (Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Latvia and Estonia have followed in 1995. During this period - the main aim of the participation in the international military operations was a need to get established on the Euro-Atlantic map. (Paljak, 2008) Despite internal and external challenges leaders of the Baltic states have decided that active participation in the international military operations was the best strategy to ensure their security.



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Participation in international military operations before 2004

In 1994 Baltic states have officially declared their aim to become NATO members by sending the letters of request to the NATO secretary general. All three received their first invitations to develop Membership Action Plans (MAPs) in 1999. However despite quite successful military adaption Baltic states were still not viewed as credible enough to become members of NATO. The main challenges have appeared to be the political ones: Baltic states were considered indefensible, which might cause a lot of problems to NATO from the perspective of defence as well their membership might irritate Russia. In order to prove their credibility Baltic states once again have chosen a strategy of military activism. The opportunity came up with the operations that followed September 11 attacks in the US. The first troops from Lithuania (special operation forces) and Estonia (Explosive ordnance Detection Canine team) arrived to Afghanistan in 2002. All three countries contributed to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq extensively (Paljak, 2008). In 2002 in Prague summit all three received invitations to become members of North Atlantic Alliance (they became members in 2004).

Participation in international military operations after 2004

Although one of the main foreign policy goals and the main security policy goal - to become members of NATO was attained, Baltic states continued to play an active role in international military operations. The main reasons behind military activism, was, first, to get established within NATO, to prove that Baltic states are not only the users of security guarantees but as well contribute their share into NATO security. Second, and probably more importantly, Baltic states were seeking to maintain the US interest in the region. After September 11th it became obvious that military attention of the US was shifting from Europe to other regions - Middle East and gradually as well to China. Moreover US was on the way towards closer cooperation with Russia in fighting new security challenges. Baltic states have chosen to increase their relative political power by again putting a strong emphasis on their military activism. In 2005 Latvia deployed military platoon (later increased to a company) in Norwegian brigade in ISAF (Afghanistan), Estonia contributed a company size unit at Helmand province, Lithuania took responsibility to lead its own Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Chagcharan in the province of Ghowr (Paljak, 2008). All three countries as well contributed to the operations in the Iraq. Troop number in the international military operations since 2005 - 2011 in all three countries has varied from several dozens up to 500 hundred. Most of them were deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Lithuania was a smallest country to have its own PRT, Estonia in Afghanistan provided biggest forces per capita. Although Economic crisis although severely hit Lithuania and Latvia it did not have an impact on the international military operations (number of troops deployed remained the same, Lithuania was still leading PRT.) Although on several occasions this choice was considered as a big sacrifice (AF were economizing on procurement, salaries were cut) participation in international operations was still considered as they way to ensure security guarantees. It was clear that it would be too costly to rely on own security capabilities to ensure security. Russian - Georgian war in 2008 had only proved the necessity to rely on international partners and in particular on the US. Therefore although Baltic states were ardent players in the international operations led by NATO, they were reluctant to participate in the operations conducted by the EU, their contributions in many cases were limited to a several staff officers.

Changing security environment after 2008

Russian Georgia in 2008 has worked as an alarm for Baltic states demonstrating that despite all the Western efforts to democratize Russia and integrate it into the global international institutions Russian



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leaders did not have the same intentions. Georgian - Russian conflict coincided with the reset in the US - Russian relations, US pivot to Asia, economic crisis and the start of a qualitatively new reform of Russian defence forces. Although growing Russian assertiveness in foreign policy put Baltic states on the alert, severe economic crisis has kept them busy with internal challenges. The main game changer became occupation of Crimea and crisis in Ukraine. All three Baltic states have significantly increased their defence spending throughout recent years. Lithuania has reintroduced conscription. During two decades of participation in international operations have gained crisis management skills necessary for out-of-area operations. Recently the capacity to defend own territory has been reinforced. Although NATO remains the main pillar of the defence of the Baltic states, their participation in international military operations has been reduced. Continuing insecurity in the region, Brexit, change in the US administration, strengthening role of France and Germany in European politics might furthermore have a significant impact on the strategies that Baltic states will be choosing to ensure their security and to promote their foreign policy goals.

What to do?

- Strategies of military activism are still important, it is still crucial to have strong link with the current US administration.
- At the same time Baltic states should consider more active role in CSDP and the EU led operations.
- Within NATO and in cooperation with the US, more active involvement in the antiterrorism operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria.
- Helping EaP countries - Georgia and Ukraine - on their way to NATO, active participation in the training missions and security sector reform.
- Search for the new formats of defence cooperation among the small countries: e.g. Nordic - Baltic cooperation.



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