Chapter 7

Deterrence by Punishment or Denial?

The eFP Case

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Abstract In 2017 NATO initiated Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltics to deter Russia. While most studies analyse eFP from the perspective of NATO or the troop contributing countries, this chapter addresses the question how the host nations, i.e. in this contribution Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, perceive the deterrence strategy underlying eFP as well as their own strategies. In doing this, the chapter emphasizes how strategic culture influences the Baltic countries' behaviour towards deterrence. We found that in Estonia perspectives on eFP were ambiguous. While official documents reflect the official NATO narrative based on deterrence by punishment other sources stress the illusion, expectation or aspiration of deterrence

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by denial. In Lithuania, documents, officials and experts emphasize deterrence by denial as opposed to deterrence by punishment. Latvia considers the strategy behind eFP as deterrence by punishment. The strategic cultures, the history and threat perceptions of the Baltic states explain these differences to a large extent. In particular the presence of Russophone minorities in Estonia and Latvia, lead to some reluctance in fully embracing NATO's strategy, while at the same time both countries prepare to counter Russia's threat with their allies.

Keywords Strategic Culture • eFP • NATO • Estonia • Latvia • Lithuania

7.1 Introduction

The security and defence policies of the Baltic states are strongly influenced by the Russian aggression of 2014.¹ This also holds true for NATO. The alliance has deployed around 4,500 troops to Poland and the Baltic States since 2017. There is a large consensus amongst academics and practitioners that this mission, labelled Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), should deter Russian aggression. However, the strategy to do so remains highly ambiguous and unclear (see also Rynning's chapter in this volume). While many official NATO documents as well as observers simply refer to the strategy as deterrence, others, either explicitly or implicitly, distinguish between *deterrence by denial*² or *deterrence by punishment*.³ The exact nature of the strategy can have far reaching consequences in terms of allocation of resources, strategic communication, (perceived) effectiveness as well as the very foundation of the alliance itself: the trust of every ally that it is protected by NATO in case of aggression.

Traditional deterrence theory presumes a rational actor perspective. Over time the role of psychology and actor specific perceptions has become more appreciated, in particular in the third wave in the deterrence literature. Most of these studies have focused on the history of the deterrent relationship and the nature of signaling behaviour.⁴ However, although strategic culture has been widely acknowledged as an important shaping factor of strategic behaviour,⁵ the role of strategic culture has been largely ignored in deterrence studies. This contribution aims to address this gap. Specifically, this chapter focuses on how strategic culture influences the Baltic countries' behaviour towards deterrence.

While most of the literature analyses eFP from the perspective of NATO or the troop contributing countries, this chapter addresses the question how the host

¹Rostoks and Vanaga 2016, p. 71.

²E.g. Daalder 2017.

³E.g. Zapfe 2017.

⁴Lebow 1991, p. viii; Jervis 1991.

⁵Booth 2005, p. 25.

nations, i.e. in this contribution Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, perceive the strategy underlying eFP and their own strategies. Given the fact that NATO's responses in the Baltics post-2014 were also intended to be 'assurance measures', such a perspective is important because similar or diverging perspectives can have far reaching consequences for NATO's strategy and its credibility. We found that in Latvia official documents reflect the official NATO narrative based on deterrence by punishment. In Estonia and Lithuania, documents, officials and experts emphasize deterrence by denial as opposed or sometimes even parallel to deterrence by punishment. To understand these tendencies, this contribution contends that the respective strategic cultures of the host nations influence their perspectives on the NATO's strategy. To that end, Sect. 7.2 briefly addresses the debate on deterrence and the different perspectives observers take on the eFP mission. Section 7.3 subsequently introduces strategic culture theory as a lens to explain the perspectives of the host nations. Section 7.4 outlines the methods we used. We discuss the results in Sect. 7.5 and provide a discussion and conclusions in Sect. 7.6.

7.2 The Academic Divide: eFP, Deterrence by Punishment or by Denial?

Like the other chapters in this volume, we share the definition that deterrence refers to the practice, the process or the situation in which one state relies on the prospect of harm to persuade an opponent not to engage in certain specified behaviour. Deterrence-by-denial relies on convincing the opponent that it is unlikely to attain its immediate objectives at a reasonable cost, whereas deterrence-by-punishment consists of the threat of great harm which will be imposed after the opponent has engaged in unwanted behaviour. The success of deterrence is highly dependent on the credibility of the threat, which is in turn strongly linked to the level of commitment to the deterrence strategy (preferences), the costs and risks associated with the fulfilment of the threat and the credibility of the promise for rewarding compliance.⁶

Turning to eFP, while not indicating the exact strategy explicitly, most NATO documents as well as its officials point towards a strategy deterrence by punishment.⁷ They strongly emphasize NATO's respect for international agreements, commitments and obligations and declare that the aim of eFP is to "unambiguously demonstrate Allied solidarity".⁸ Moreover, they signal to the world that any aggression towards the Baltic States and Poland will be met with a collective response, thereby leaving little doubt that deterrence by punishment is the main strategy behind eFP according to NATO. Meanwhile, indicators of deterrence by

⁶Schelling 1966, p. 6.

⁷NATO 2016a, b, 2017, 2018a, b, c, d.

⁸Ibid.

denial, such as improved capabilities or logistics, were not emphasized as much. When discussing deterrence within NATO context, it is important to keep in mind that it is ultimately a form of extended deterrence based on the solidarity between member states, most crucially the US. Greater effort is therefore required to signal readiness and determination as there is always doubt whether a pledge to defend a third party will be upheld.⁹

Amongst experts and academia there is, however, no clear consensus on which deterrence strategy eFP is based. There is a large group of pundits that explicitly¹⁰ or implicitly¹¹ argue that the strategy behind eFP is, or should be, deterrence by denial. They emphasize a number of military factors such as the role of the Kaliningrad exclave. Kaliningrad is heavily defended with so-called anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) systems and precision strike capabilities, which can supposedly disrupt, neutralize or even destroy NATO forces in the Baltic region before reinforcements could arrive.¹² Moreover, these capabilities deny NATO air and maritime superiority in the Baltic area as well as large parts of Poland and Germany, which in turn, according to these authors, will deny access to reinforcements to the Baltics or at least make such a NATO effort very costly. This raises doubts about NATO's ability to deliver on its declared deterrence strategy presuming it is based on deterrence by denial. Their concern with the Kaliningrad exclave shows that those experts assume that eFP is meant to hold out against a large-scale Russian invasion. NATO's forward presences have supposedly never been mere 'tripwire forces'.¹³ With the aim of balancing against Russia, this group of observers generally also recommends sending additional reinforcements to the Baltic region¹⁴ next to investing in conventional capabilities and improving military logistics.¹⁵ All of these measures are meant to strengthen eFP to the point that it can withstand a Russian invasion, thereby revealing that the authors assume that the strategy behind eFP is deterrence by denial, or argue that NATO should aspire to evolve into such a strategy. Most of these denial measures were also strongly recommended to the Dutch government by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) as they believe the greatest risk facing NATO is a Russian invasion with the aim of a *fait accompli* due to strategic miscalculation by Moscow.¹⁶

A second group of academics and experts argues that eFP is based on the strategy of deterrence by punishment. In their views eFP should symbolise NATO

⁹Mazarr 2018, p. 3; Shiffrinson 2017, p. 111.

¹⁰Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 14.

¹¹Frühling and Lasconjarias 2016; Daalder 2017; Pothier 2017.

¹²Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁴Daalder 2017, p. 37; Frühling and Lasconjarias 2016, p. 108; Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 17; Pothier 2017, p. 77.

¹⁵Daalder 2017, p. 37; Frühling and Lasconjarias 2016, p. 110.

¹⁶Advisory Council on International Affairs 2017, p. 21.

unity and solidarity, but is no more than a so-called ‘tripwire force’.¹⁷ Fear of an arms race due to the Russian security dilemma makes these pundits skeptical of further reinforcing the Baltic region.¹⁸ It is this same logic that makes European member states reluctant to send follow-on forces to the Baltic region instead preferring deterrence by ambiguity, but this is in effect deterrence by punishment.¹⁹ Moreover, this group of experts argues that the divergent interests within NATO simply make deterrence by denial unrealistic.²⁰ In general, those who conceive NATO’s strategy pointing towards deterrence by punishment show a much greater appreciation for the nuances of deterrence theory as they actually make specific mention of deterrence by punishment,²¹ while deterrence by denial proponents write about eFP without distinguishing the exact form of deterrence, Lanoszka and Hunzeker (2016) being a notable exception. Moreover, they do not consider the possibility of deterrence of denial leading to an arms race with Russia or they claim an arms race is already ongoing without providing any clear evidence.

Ultimately, however, deterrence theory is a formal theory for determining rational moves. It cannot be used to explain why certain states are motivated towards certain goals or why a group of states might perceive an ambiguous deterrence strategy as either deterrence by denial or deterrence by punishment. Nor does it explain why states in a similar geopolitical position facing the same geopolitical threat hold different views on a commonly devised deterrence strategy. To gain insight into the perceptions and expectations of states, this chapter turns to strategic culture.

7.3 Strategic Culture

When reacting to Robert Kagan’s provocative view of Europe’s pacifistic strategic culture, Adrian Hyde-Price emphasized that “European attitudes to the use of force are characterized by considerable heterogeneity. These differences cannot simply be attributed to relative power differentials”, but have to be seen in the light of diverse historical and cultural experiences.²² Theories based on rationality, like realism and most deterrence approaches, fall short of explaining differences between supposedly functional similar countries with comparable capabilities, facing a supposed similar threat in their vicinity. And even with similar historical experiences, like the Baltic states have had over the last century, nature and value of a strategic choice, like NATO’s deterrence by punishment, face different interpretations and choices by

¹⁷Zapfe 2017, p. 152.

¹⁸Kroenig 2015, p. 65; Zapfe 2017, p. 158; Veebel 2018, p. 232.

¹⁹Ringmose and Rynning 2017, p. 134.

²⁰Ibid., p. 135; Veebel 2018, p. 239.

²¹Ringmose and Rynning 2017, p. 129; Veebel 2018, p. 230; Zapfe 2017, p. 157.

²²Hyde-Price 2004, p. 325.

those countries hosting NATO members' armed forces to deter Russia. This contribution uses the concept of strategic culture to show why Estonia and Latvia at first sight appear to be content with NATO's recent strategy, but "secretly" tending towards deterrence by denial and why Lithuania perceives NATO's and its own strategy much more as deterrence by denial.

There are broadly three traditions of strategic culture. The first sees strategic culture as the context "within which states form their security policies".²³ Associated with Snyder and Gray this includes also history and political culture.²⁴ The second tradition looks for the difference between state's official security and defence policy and what their actual motivations are.²⁵ The third considers strategic culture as an independent variable influencing the strategic choices of a state.²⁶ All three have methodological challenges. As far as the second tradition is concerned, it is difficult to find reliable evidence. Also, it is not the purpose of this contribution to find a hidden agenda of the countries under scrutiny. The third tradition is looking for a silver bullet, a single variable explaining a state's behaviour, which is "a rather ridged approach, implying the option to derive falsifiable hypotheses".²⁷

We situate our contribution within the first tradition of studies, seeing strategic culture as the context within which national security and defence policy takes place. It influences but does not determine behaviour of actors within a security community.²⁸ Following Biehl et al. (2013) we therefore define strategic culture as "a number of shared beliefs, norms and ideas within a given society that generate specific expectations about the respective community's preferences and actions in security and defence policy".²⁹ To understand the origins of a particular strategic culture, it is necessary to consider the geography of a country, its (political) culture and history.³⁰ Elites are seen as the carriers of strategic culture³¹ and many of the strategic documents express elite consensus on security strategy. These documents are subsequently used for planning and serve as "an instrument of public policy, communicating with and shaping domestic and external audiences".³² In addition to the elites there are many subgroups that may have different interpretations on the security strategy. These interpretations "compete with each other to offer the 'most

²³Biehl et al. 2013, p. 10.

²⁴Becker and Malesky 2017, p. 165.

²⁵Biehl et al. 2013, p. 10; Becker and Malesky 2017, p. 165.

²⁶Cf. Johnston 1998, p. 10.

²⁷Biehl et al. 2013, p. 10.

²⁸Ibid., p. 11.

²⁹Ibid., p. 12. See also Miklóssy and Smith 2019 for a debate about the (dis)advantages and methodological challenges of each tradition.

³⁰Hyde-Price 2004, p. 325.

³¹Biehl et al. 2013, p. 12.

³²Becker and Malesky 2017, p. 165.

accurate' interpretation of the state's international context".³³ Hence the importance of official documents, public statements and pundit contributions that fuel the public debate. They reflect the views of the elites, of different subgroups and with that the dominant and subordinate narratives about a state's strategic culture.

7.4 Method and Data

Given the explorative nature of this research, and the complexity and richness of the context, a case study approach is the most appropriate research strategy.³⁴ We are focusing on this strategy since it provides clarity and direction in method and operationalization. Following Yin's case study approach, the theoretical concepts of deterrence and strategic cultures outlined in the previous sections were applied to eFP.³⁵

Based on the recommendations by proponents of deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment, it is possible to identify specific indicators that primarily pertain to one of these two deterrence strategies in the context of NATO eFP. We will now provide an oversight of the main factors that are deemed important by both proponents of deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. These factors will be used as indicators for determining which specific form of deterrence is meant in the analysis of official texts and interviews.

Starting with deterrence by denial, proponents of this strategy place a very high value on the direct defence of the Baltic region. They therefore argue that eFP should be reinforced even before a conflict arises with the experts at RAND even going as far as to recommend that seven brigades be placed in the Baltic states and Poland.³⁶ Other proponents of the same strategy recommend improving the military capabilities of eFP and other NATO forces in the region.³⁷ Proponents of deterrence by denial are also strong advocates of improved logistics to ensure the timely arrival of follow-on forces in case of a conflict.³⁸ They often view the Russian A2/AD capabilities in Kaliningrad as a serious concern in this context as Russia could use its exclave to block follow-on forces from reaching the Baltic states.³⁹ This concern ties into another factor of importance to deterrence by denial proponents, which is the fear of a *fait accompli*. The fear is that Russia could use its time-distance

³³Miklóssy and Smith 2019, p. xiv.

³⁴George and Bennet 2005.

³⁵Yin 2009.

³⁶Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 13; Shlapak and Johnson 2016, p. 8; Boston et al. 2018, p. 11.

³⁷Daalder 2017, p. 38; Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 16; Pothier 2017, p. 77; Mazarr et al. 2018, p. 83.

³⁸Daalder 2017, p. 37; Frühling and Lasconjarias 2016, p. 110; Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 14; Mazarr et al. 2018, p. 86.

³⁹Frühling and Lasconjarias 2016, p. 107; Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 12; Pothier 2017, p. 78; Mazarr et al. 2018, p. 71.

advantage and superior troop numbers to overwhelm the Baltic states (as predicted in the RAND wargames), thereby making deterrence by denial the only viable strategy for NATO to protect the Baltic region.⁴⁰ In summary, the most important factors to deterrence by denial proponents in the context of eFP are: (1) the immediate reinforcement of eFP, (2) enhancement of eFP capabilities, (3) improved logistics for the sake of eFP follow-on forces, and (4) the fear of a *fait accompli*.

As for deterrence by punishment, the proponents of this strategy mainly view eFP as a way to guarantee retaliation against Russia in the case of a conventional attack i.e. a tripwire.⁴¹ The primary strength of eFP is therefore symbolic as it is supposed to remind Russia that Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is alive and well and that there is unity and solidarity between the member states of NATO.⁴² With the aim of strengthening this message to Russia, proponents of deterrence by punishment often argue that NATO should improve its strategic preparedness.⁴³ However, the fear of (intensifying) an arms race is also one of the concerns held by proponents of deterrence by punishment, because an unnecessary conflict with Russia is to be avoided.⁴⁴ In short, the most important factors for proponents of the strategy of deterrence by punishment are: (1) the tripwire function of eFP, (2) the symbolism of NATO unity and solidarity, (3) signalling through strategic preparedness, and (4) the fear of (intensifying) an arms race. As mentioned earlier, these two groups of indicators are used to identify the specific deterrence strategy in our analysis of official texts and interviews.

Regarding strategic culture, and following Biehl et al. (2013) we consider four dimensions:⁴⁵

- (1) Level of Ambition, on a continuum between passive indifference and active international leadership. Data relating to that dimension are among others the country's main objectives in the security realm and the country's tendency to promote proactive intervention, including troops deployed.
- (2) Scope of Action for the Executive, which is expressed on a continuum between a low level and a high level of executive flexibility. Here, it is important to look for example at the key players in security and defence policy.
- (3) Foreign Policy Orientation, which is situated on a continuum between a European and a transatlantic focus as the country's preferred forum of security and defence cooperation.
- (4) Willingness to Use Military Force, in other words, it is placed on a continuum between reluctance and unconstrained acceptance to use military force as an instrument of security policy. Here, we are looking for the role of the armed forces and how the core tasks for the armed forces are defined. It is also

⁴⁰Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2016, p. 16; Shlapak and Johnson 2016, p. 4.

⁴¹Veebel 2018, p. 247; Zapfe 2017, p. 152.

⁴²Ringmose and Rynning 2017, p. 141; Zapfe 2017, p. 150.

⁴³Kroenig 2015, p. 61; Veebel 2018, p. 248; Zapfe 2017, p. 157.

⁴⁴Kroenig 2015, p. 65; Veebel 2018, p. 245.

⁴⁵Biehl et al. 2013, pp. 13–16.

important how different tasks are being prioritized (e.g. territorial defence is more important than international crisis management).

The advantage of using the framework by Biehl et al. (2013), is that it gives clear guidance for operationalising the concept of strategic culture. The different questions relating to the four dimensions offer a transparent operationalisation, justifying which variables and indicators have been selected to provide valid conclusions.⁴⁶ Additionally, the framework proved its merits when it was well applied to 28 European nations, including the three countries under scrutiny. To fully comprehend and grasp the strategic cultures, the framework is extended with historical experiences and an analysis of possible subcultures.

To that aim, the data collection involved several distinct sources. A thorough desk research was carried out. This included the national security concepts of the Baltic states and retrieving data on relevant indicators of deterrence and dimensions of strategic culture. Second, 20 semi-structured interviews were held with high level officials and experts in the different countries. Most of the stakeholders were active at ministerial level, the armed forces or think tanks.⁴⁷ The interviews were used mainly for triangulation purposes, since the number was too low to draw valid inferences solely on their own merits. As a third input the second author made two visits to the Baltic States and Poland in December 2018 and June 2019. These visits lasted 6 weeks in total. During these visits he was able to acquire many relevant documents and held numerous (informal) conversations.⁴⁸

7.5 Deterrence and Strategic Cultures of the Baltic eFP Hosting Countries

7.5.1 *Estonia*

Estonia sees NATO's strategy as deterrence by denial. Prior to the Russian aggression in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014, Estonia, as Salu and Männik convincingly show, was "a small state deeply worried about its (hard) security".⁴⁹ The country strived to prevent marginalization within the alliance, punching above its weight when participating in Alliance missions. However, since the incidents in 2014 much has changed. Estonia's renewed military strategy foresees a great increase in terms of operational capacity. The country is planning to have an

⁴⁶For the entire operationalization, see Biehl et al. 2013, pp. 13–16.

⁴⁷The interviews were conducted in confidentiality, however, a list of questions can be obtained by the authors.

⁴⁸The first author of this contribution travelled several times through the countries either in preparation of visits with different student groups or with those groups, and talked extensively to experts, diplomats and officials in all three countries. This also holds true for the third author.

⁴⁹Salu and Männik 2013, p. 109.

operational wartime structure of 60,000 personnel, approximately 4.5% of the entire population.⁵⁰

While the goals are broader, including interoperability with NATO and EU and participation in Alliance and international missions, like Mali, it is fair to say that the main aim of the Estonian Defence Forces is “the preservation of the independence and sovereignty of the state, the integrity of its land area, territorial waters and airspace and its constitutional order”.⁵¹ By 2026, the 1st Infantry Brigade will be fully mechanised and the 2nd will be equipped with two more battalions, one infantry and one artillery.⁵² In 2018 the defence budget of the country rose to 524 million euro, or 2.14% of the GDP. The strategy of the country has clearly changed from the post-Cold War internationalism towards the development of the “capabilities for ensuring the initial self-defence capability of Estonia”.⁵³ At the same time the country invests in improving the conditions for hosting NATO forces, including necessary infrastructure. In particular, the relation to the US and its “presence in Europe, including in the Baltic Sea region, serves Estonia’s interests”.⁵⁴ The tasks of air force and navy are rather limited. While the first focuses on air surveillance and the hosting of aircraft and personnel of allied forces, the latter concentrates on mine countermeasure capabilities.⁵⁵ In case of a direct attack against Estonia or an ally, the Estonian President has the authority to declare the state of war or order mobilization, without authorization from the parliament, Riigikogu. In all other cases the President and the government have to ask Riigikogu for authorizing the use of the armed forces. In other words, only in case of a direct attack, the government is flexible. Parliament must approve missions abroad.⁵⁶

The country clearly prioritizes collective defence, yet relies at the same time on its ability to defend itself: “Estonia’s consistent commitment to development of military defence and Allies’ readiness to spend noteworthy resources for strengthening NATO’s deterrence and defence posture in the region give assurance that in the changing world, Estonia’s military security rests strongly on two pillars: a well-designed independent defence capability and trustworthy collective defence.”⁵⁷ To that end the country adapted a comprehensive security approach based on resilience and deterrence, following with that the early examples of Norway, Sweden and Finland.⁵⁸ Yet, as Veebel and Ploom (2018) show, a civilian-military divide exists when it comes to resilience, in which the former

⁵⁰<https://mil.ee/en/defence-forces/> as of 16 March 2020.

⁵¹<https://mil.ee/en/defence-forces/> as of 16 March 2020.

⁵²Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016.

⁵³Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016.

⁵⁴Estonian Ministry of Defence 2011, p. 9.

⁵⁵Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016.

⁵⁶Salu and Männik 2013, p. 107.

⁵⁷Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016.

⁵⁸Veebel and Ploom 2018.

interprets the security approach more in societal and economical terms while the latter focuses on the military or hard aspects.⁵⁹ In other words, the civilian interpretation of resilience forms a subgroup with its own security strategy.

This also holds true for the Russian or Russophone minority. Estonia has a large Russophone minority of approximately 25%.⁶⁰ This subgroup can influence the strategic culture of a country. It can do so either by influencing elite discourse, or by influencing beliefs, norms and ideas. There is a Russian tendency to influence the ethnic and cultural minority in the country, but there is little evidence this is successful. Nielsen and Paabo (2015) found that “although Russia does indeed have a number of soft power resources, their potential for being translated into actual power and influence is too often exaggerated, not least because Europe provides a much more attractive focus point for the disgruntled”.⁶¹ Most Russophone citizens, which also include Belarussians and Ukrainians, are satisfied with the status quo as the European Union offers a more prosperous existence than Putin’s Russia.⁶² However, when it comes to NATO, the divide between the different ethnic groups becomes much more obvious. Only 33% of the Russophone minority supports membership in NATO, compared to 92% of ethnic Estonians.⁶³ There is, in other words, a divide between the perception of NATO and Russia along ethnic and lingual divides.

Estonian respondents generally agreed that eFP’s main goal is to demonstrate alliance solidarity and to signal a strong message to Russia, as is the official line. The respondents do not think that an increase in troop numbers or a more permanent presence is necessary as long as the threat level remains stable. Yet, at the same time, the respondents emphasize an interest in improved military capabilities. This is also in line with the official policy to invest heavily in the armed forces by 2026. In case of a large-scale scenario, according to the Estonian constitution, the country “will continue to resist any foreign invader no matter how large” for as long as possible and wait for NATO reinforcements to arrive. Additionally, while the respondents agree that eFP is militarily more than a tripwire, which points towards a denial strategy, one of the Estonian respondents stresses that “[i]n a political sense, eFP might be considered a tripwire.”

In 2013 Biehl et al. concluded that Estonia’s strategic culture reflected a security policy as international bargaining, due to a low to medium international level of ambition, strong legislative rights in sending armed forces abroad, functional view of NATO for collective defence and a high willingness to use military force for

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁰328,299 on a total population of 1,324,820 (as of 1 January 2019), see https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/rahvastik__rahvastikunaitajad-ja-koosseis__rahvaarv-ja-rahvastiku-koosseis/RV0222, retrieved 16 March 2020.

⁶¹Nielsen and Paabo 2015, p. 125.

⁶²Noll et al. 2017.

⁶³Atmante et al. 2019, p. 64. See also Veebel and Ploom 2016, pp. 46, 48.

defence purpose and less for crisis management.⁶⁴ This has changed. In particular the defence of the own country became much more important. With that the flexibility of the executive changed, since Estonia's parliament has less authority in response to an attack as compared to deciding on sending troops abroad. Hence, it is fair to say that the country's strategic culture is more focused on protecting and projecting state power than 10 years ago, perceiving threat for the vulnerable national territory and thereby striving for deterrence by denial. The influence of the Russophone minority and the military-civilian divide on resilience and with that the whole of government approach to defence might be countervailing forces for a new strategy.

7.5.2 *Latvia*

Like Estonia, Latvia underscores NATO's strategy. At the same time, the country is looking for deterrence by denial, not so much by the alliance but with its own capabilities. The reasons for that can be found in its history, its comprehensive defence and the Russophone minority. In 2013 Rikveilis wrote "that a parallel strategic culture might be emerging in Latvia" favouring closer ties with Russia both economically and politically.⁶⁵ He continues that "it is possible that in the near future the current strategic elite will be forced to justify its principles of unequivocal orientation towards the West in more sophisticated ways than simply alluding to Latvia's natural place in the 'European family'". This elite is confronted with a dilemma, the more it strongly favours US involvement in European security affairs. The developments since 2014 again show the ethnic divide.

Yet, like in Estonia, several studies show that the Russophone minority has a different view of Russia and NATO than ethnic Latvians do. Being an important minority of 26%, Russophones tend more towards Eastern and post-Soviet countries than to Western countries. In 2015, 64% of the ethnic Latvians considered Russia a threat, compared to 23% of the Russophones.⁶⁶ When it comes to NATO 65% of the ethnic Latvians are confident while 27% are not. Meanwhile, 69% of the Russophones distrust NATO and 21% does not. Even more important is their view about stationing allied troops in the country: the majority (58%) of the ethnic Latvians has a positive attitude, while the majority (54%) of the Russophones has a negative attitude.⁶⁷ The size of the Russophones and their views are a non-neglectable factor for Latvians strategic culture and with that strategic choices. When talking to officials and experts, some emphasized the sensitivity of having a

⁶⁴Biehl et al. 2013, p. 394.

⁶⁵Rikveilis 2013, p. 215.

⁶⁶Rostoks and Vanaga 2016, pp. 90–91 (Latvia's Security and Defence Post-2014).

⁶⁷Rostoks and Vanaga 2016, p. 99.

greater US presence in Latvia, due to public opinion, while others could imagine more US engagement.

Central to Latvian security and defence policy is the concept of Comprehensive Defence, announced in August 2018: “The aim is to strengthen the cooperation among state institutions, provide effective mechanisms for public—private partnership, increase the skills and capabilities of the society to protect themselves, their families and Latvia in case of crisis”.⁶⁸ It comprises seven pillars, ranging from military capabilities to psychological resilience.⁶⁹ In its nature and scope, this concept is comparable to Finnish Comprehensive Security.⁷⁰ The minority issue influences also Latvia’s resilience, closely associated with the country’s comprehensive defence. Like in Estonia the chance that Russia might use the minorities as a pretext to seize the country are rather slim. Yet the linguistic divide and the domination of Russian information channels undermine the government’s striving for an effective comprehensive approach.

While in 2016 Reire contended that resilience is about coping with threats “that are not related to defensive security and the concept of deterrence”,⁷¹ the government interprets “comprehensive defence means that people are organized to defend the country against all forms of attack, both military and non-military”.⁷² It shows that the country focuses on territorial defence with almost all means available. This is also reflected in the main aim of the armed forces, defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Like in many other NATO and EU member states, international missions and (civil) emergency rank second and third as main task. Over the years, the country participated in a broad variety of international (military) operations led by NATO and EU, including ISAF and follow-up missions.⁷³

With a relatively small-sized country and a population of less than 2 million people, the armed forces consist of 6000 military personnel and 8300 national guards. Atmante et al. (2019) point to the importance of these national guards, the more they mitigate the debate about reinstating conscription.⁷⁴ Compared to 2018, the 2019 defence budget rose with almost 8% to 636 million Euro, 2% of its GDP.⁷⁵ The president of Latvia is formally the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, yet

⁶⁸<https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/nozares-politika/comprehensive-defence> as of 18 March 2020. Compare also to <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Comprehensive%20National%20Defence%20in%20Latvia.docx>.

⁶⁹Military capabilities, Public-private cooperation, Education of society, Civil defence, Strategic communication, Economic resilience, Psychological resilience.

⁷⁰Cf. Seppo and Forsberg 2013; https://www.defmin.fi/files/3827/Valtonen_2017_06_14_FL_Concept_for_Comprehensive_Security_Valtonen.pdf as of 18 March 2020.

⁷¹Reire 2016, p. 179.

⁷²<https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/nozares-politika/comprehensive-defence> as of 16 April 2020.

⁷³Anāžans and Veebel 2017, pp. 37–38.

⁷⁴Atmante et al. 2019, p. 65.

⁷⁵<https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/NBS%20faktu%20lapa%20-%20ENG.pdf> as of 18 March 2020.

the prime minister is politically responsible.⁷⁶ Their authority with regard to territorial defence is, however, heavily influenced due to a special provision in Latvia's security law from 2015. This law, of which the roots can be traced back to Soviet aggression in 1940, states that it is "a duty of every member of the LNAF to respond to military aggression—even in the absence of any direct orders to that effect (in case command and control ceases to function)".⁷⁷

At first sight it seems that Latvian respondents and official documents mostly emphasize the strategy of deterrence by punishment. On closer look, the perception of eFP and the future planning is slightly mixed. Respondents perceive eFP as deterrence by punishment, yet at the same time most respondents support improved military capabilities. The National Security Concept 2016 points to the strengthening of self-defence capabilities of the country and the need for a long-term presence of allied forces.⁷⁸ This, however, is typical for deterrence by denial. This part shows that the strategic culture of Latvia changed towards more protecting and projecting power, indeed with its rather limited capabilities, compared to the eFP partners in the region. The new provision of the security law in 2015 states that the country always has to be defended, the switch towards comprehensive defence and the rise of the defence budget establish a straightforward line towards deterrence by denial. This is also supported by the need for a long-term presence of the allied armed forces. At this moment, however, the country's interpretation of eFP and its own initiatives with regard to its defence are also dependent on Latvia's ability to incorporate its minorities in the efforts. Additionally, the acceptance rate of NATO, its troops stationed in Latvia and the own government has to be higher across the population to have a strategy of deterrence by denial.

7.5.3 *Lithuania*

"Total and unconditional defence is the main principle of Lithuanian defence meaning that all national resources will be used to defend the State and that every citizen and the entire nation will resist in every way defined as legitimate by international law. Defence of Lithuania is not a subject to any conditions, and no one can inhibit the right of the nation and every citizen to resist an aggressor. Lithuania will defend its sovereignty and resist all aggression independently and without waiting until Allied support is provided".⁷⁹ This clearly reflects a strategy of deterrence by denial and, at first sight independence, from eFP and any NATO strategy.

⁷⁶<https://likumi.lv/ta/en/id/57980-the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-latvia> as of 18 March 2020.

⁷⁷Atmante et al. 2019, p. 65.

⁷⁸Latvian Ministry of Defence 2016.

⁷⁹Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2017, p. 11.

When looking at Lithuania's strategic culture, Šešelgytė concluded in 2013 forcefully "that it is a country shaped by transatlantic and even militaristic tendencies, albeit with limited resources and opportunities".⁸⁰ According to her, the military activism is a strategic choice "to ensure national security via collective defence and a strong bond with the USA". Militaristic here means the prioritization of the military tool in security and defence and a main focal point within the whole of government approach.

It does not take much imagination to see that this has not changed since 2014. On the contrary, the country invested even more in its military capacity and its relation to the U.S. Most Lithuanian respondents would welcome a more permanent US presence, which has been a longstanding policy goal of the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence. This is confirmed in the 2017 National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, which mentions the military presence of the US as an important source of strength for the national security of the country.⁸¹

In 2019, the country had a defence budget of 948 million euro, or 1.99% of its GDP. The breakdown of the expenditures is 42% Personnel, 29% Equipment and 21% Operations and Maintenance. The number of military personnel grew substantially over the past years to more than 20,000 in 2019, including conscripts. Conscription was reintroduced in Lithuania in 2015. While the country participates in several international missions, the defence of the country is top priority. To that end, the country established among others a national rapid reaction force, consisting of up to two battalion-sized battlegroups that can be used against hybrid threats.⁸² The greatest security challenge that Lithuania faces is Russia⁸³ and "its ambition to regain its status as a major power".⁸⁴ To counter that threat, Lithuania also has—besides the traditional branches—a state-supported paramilitary organization, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (LRU) with approximately 10,000 members. More than 6,000 youngsters (11–18 years) joined the young riflemen, whether or not during summer camps.⁸⁵ The country is very clear about the allocation of funds and efforts: "Land Force development is a priority for Lithuania".⁸⁶ Even in recent publications, the country focuses on the army, enhancing society resilience and cyber.⁸⁷

It is not surprising that, given the priority for the military in the whole of government approach and the strong will to defend the country, Lithuanian respondents as well as official documents place great emphasis on deterrence by

⁸⁰Šešelgytė 2013, p. 226.

⁸¹Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2017, p. 3.

⁸²Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2018.

⁸³Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2017, p. 2.

⁸⁴Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2017, White Paper, p. 7. The Lithuanian White Paper dedicates two pages to Russia and less than one page to the other two perceived threats.

⁸⁵Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2017, White Paper, pp. 52–53.

⁸⁶Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2018, p. 5.

⁸⁷Lithuanian Ministry of Defence 2018.

denial. Although they consider eFP as a form of political deterrence, the Lithuanian respondents are quick to point out that eFP is supposed to be underpinned by a viable reinforcement strategy. An increase in eFP troop numbers is not seen as necessary for now, but Lithuanian respondents place a heavy emphasis on improving NATO logistics for the sake of enabling reinforcement, another important denial factor. In a similar way, these respondents were also keen on more advanced and more diverse military capabilities for eFP as this would greatly enhance Lithuania's ability to resist a limited incursion. In practice, however, all Lithuanian respondents perceive eFP as a NATO tripwire, albeit with certain added military functions.

7.6 Conclusion

We concur with Veebel and Ploom's view that "some signs of "self-deterrence" are also visible, referring to unsubstantiated, if not somewhat naïve, views of the political and military elite of the Baltic countries, as well as relying on so-called deterrence by imagination".⁸⁸ Yet, contrary to these authors, we were able to link the respective strategic culture of the Baltic states to their perception of eFP and their own strategies. Table 7.1 summarizes our findings.

Estonia is, within its limits, prepared to fight an enemy, relying on a comprehensive or whole of government and society approach. This points towards deterrence by denial. This is supported by the government's will to improve the infrastructure for eFP forces in the country. The country considers eFP to be a force multiplier. Based on the documents and the views held by the respondents we believe the most likely explanation for this perception is that Estonia, having the smallest potential manpower, benefits most from eFP compared to the other host nations and is therefore more convinced of its military value. At the same time, the country has to take into account its Russophone minority in leaning towards NATO.

With eFP, a rising defence budget and a new concept for defending Latvia—whole of society approach—the fear of an ethnic divide within the country seemingly disappeared. Yet non-native Latvian speakers still consider NATO more aggressive than the Latvian-speaking majority. Latvia values the added military strength that eFP offers, but Latvian respondents were slightly skeptical about the timely reinforcement and combat effectiveness of eFP.⁸⁹ This resulted in a perceived strategy that is based on deterrence by punishment while striving for more deterrence by denial on its own. The newly introduced concept of comprehensive defence might also foster a strategy that is oriented at deterrence by denial. The important caveat for success of this strategy is the effectiveness of an important

⁸⁸Veebel and Plooms 2018, p. 195.

⁸⁹Veebel and Plooms 2016, pp. 46, 48.

Table 7.1 Overview of deterrence strategy and strategic culture (*Source* The authors)

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
View on NATO's deterrence strategy	Denial	Punishment	Denial and punishment
View on own strategy	Tendency towards denial	Tendency towards denial	Denial
Key characteristics of strategic culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole of government approach towards security; • Conscription; • Change from security policy as international bargain towards protecting and projecting state power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive defence; • Change from security policy as international bargain towards protecting and projecting state power; • Provision to defend the country at almost any price by law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole of government, yet with a central role of military; • Conscription; • Change from security policy as international bargaining towards projecting and protecting power; • Focus on US, afraid that eFP is not enough
Countervailing forces to strategic culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russophone minority • Military-civilian divide on resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russophone minority possible threat to resilience 	

concept like resilience within heterogenic societies. While Latvia, like Estonia, slightly softened its harsh tune against minorities since the early independent phase, the divide between the ethnic groups is probably still too big to develop effective whole of society strategies against Russian threat.

Although having larger armed forces than the other host nations, Lithuania also appreciates the additional military strength provided by the eFP battlegroups. However, the country puts greater emphasis on striving for deterrence by denial as it expects higher engagement and readiness from NATO in the Baltic region.

What does all this mean for deterrence theory and NATO's deterrence strategy? While most theoretical chapters focus on the effect of deterrence on the adversary, we show that for an effective strategy within an alliance the perceptions of the host nations must be taken into account. NATO deterrence is primarily based on extended deterrence, which means for NATO that it needs to define its strategy more clearly. Different perceptions, not only in the host countries, point to a divide within NATO. It jeopardizes the alliance's solidarity and commitment. Without a common definition and perception any deterrence strategy is prone to the adversaries' moves, even below an Article 5 threshold. Our contribution shows how serious the threat is in the eyes of the Baltic States, the most vulnerable allies when it comes to Russian aggression.

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