



# Executive Summary



Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALTIC ARMED FORCES IN LIGHT OF MULTINATIONAL DEPLOYMENTS

James S. Corum

This report provides an analysis of the experience gained by the armed forces of the three Baltic States in their participation in multinational operations since the 1990s. This experience has been an important part of the maturation process of the three Baltic States. Since North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) multinational operations will be part of the security landscape for decades to come, understanding the Baltic experience will help the United States and larger NATO nations to work with small nation contingents in the future.

Upon regaining their national independence in 1991, the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had no interest in existing in a neutral status or remaining in any form of union with Russia, the inheritor state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) that had long occupied and oppressed these nations. Culturally and historically, the Baltic States are Western lands and are inspired by the Western European, not Russian, concepts of political and economic rights and freedoms.

Thus, as soon as the last Russian military forces left their bases in the Baltic States in 1994, all three states announced their long-range intention to be fully linked to the West, to NATO and to the European Union (EU). To this end, the Baltic States began to orient their brand new and rapidly developing armed forces to meet the Western standards as rapidly as possible. Participation in multinational peacekeeping and

intervention operations with NATO nations and with the United States became an important means to speed the development of the Baltic armed forces. Such operations provided officers and key cadre personnel with the chance to operate with Western forces. Such engagement also provided some valuable experience for the new defense ministries of the Baltic States.

The Baltic States began their program of engagement in Western multinational operations by sending small detachments to support the United Nations (UN) and NATO peace operations in the Balkans in the 1990s. At this time, the small Baltic teams or detachments operated under the command and control of one of the larger Western nations. From 2003 to 2008, the Baltic States committed units of up to company size, as well as specialist staff officers and training personnel, to the U.S.-led coalition operations in Iraq. The experience of deploying forces in multinational operations played a key role in maturing the Baltic armed forces and enabling those three nations to become full members of NATO in 2004.

The multinational operations in Afghanistan have been the focus of the defense operations of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania since 2005. Latvia and Estonia both deployed forces of up to company strength to serve alongside the U.S. and British forces in some of the toughest areas of Afghanistan (the Estonians served in Helmand Province with the United Kingdom [UK] forces). Lithuania has led a provincial reconstruction

team since 2006. In addition, the Baltic States have contributed specialist units such as the Lithuanian Special Forces detachment and the Estonian ordnance disposal detachments.

This report looks at some of the main experiences and lessons learned by the three Baltic States in the multinational deployments of almost 20 years. The deployment of Baltic forces in multinational operations has provided many examples of how training, equipment, and force structure of small armed forces can be effectively adapted to the conditions of multinational operations in regions far from their national borders. At the same time, the deployments have also exposed some problems in pre-deployment training, allied planning, logistics, and communications.

The Baltic States, as NATO members, are firmly committed to supporting NATO and supporting the military operations of Western nations. Even today, Baltic forces are supporting multinational military operations in places as remote as the coast of Somalia. Indeed, such operations on the periphery of NATO are likely to become common in the next decades.

This analysis is based on a series of critical reports and papers produced by Baltic nation officers on their experiences of multinational

deployments. The issues analyzed range from the tactical to the strategic level and offer insights as to how the Baltic States' forces can better prepare their forces in future deployments. The issues covered here are also useful for U.S. and larger NATO powers in developing better planning and coordinating better support for the small national contingents that will be part of future NATO operations.

\*\*\*\*\*

More information about the programs of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press may be found on SSI's homepage at [www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil](http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil).

\*\*\*\*\*

Organizations interested in reprinting this or other SSI and USAWC Press executive summaries should contact the Editor for Production via e-mail at [SSI\\_Publishing@conus.army.mil](mailto:SSI_Publishing@conus.army.mil). All organizations granted this right must include the following statement: "Reprinted with permission of the Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College."



**This Publication**



**SSI Website**



**USAWC Website**