

Latvia

From Total Defense to Comprehensive Defense

By Janis Bērziņš

Russia uses a variety of methods to achieve its strategic objectives, from elections meddling to cyber-attacks (as in Estonia) to violent military confrontation (as in Georgia and Ukraine). This often manifests as cognitive warfare in the form of influence operations in many countries, including Latvia where these operations aim to influence targeted social groups on certain issues. The ultimate objective is to create and strengthen discontent about Latvia's alignment with Western political, cultural, and economic models, increasing their rejection by some segments of society.¹

Several disinformation instruments are used in both Russian- and Latvian-language traditional and social media outlets. For example, trolls are used to spread fake news and advance accounts of discrimination in Latvia. Similarly, Western society is portrayed as rotten and morally decadent. The main narratives used by Russia are:²

- Russian-speaking minorities are marginalized and treated unfairly by the government.
- The Baltic states are corrupt, failed states.
- European Union (EU) membership has resulted in economic and social underdevelopment. Latvia should follow its own path without foreign interference.
- EU membership is equivalent to being in the USSR.
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership decreases the overall level of security because it will draw Russian countermeasures.
- Western values have been corrupted. Tolerance towards homosexuals and other minorities constitutes

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the moral degradation of traditional family values.

- There is no real democracy in the West. Politicians are puppets controlled by the financial system and work against the real interests of the population.
- Fascism is glorified in the Baltics.

The Latvian government closely follows these influence operations and counteracts them by presenting the population with facts and critical information. The government provides concrete information about such operations, when available, clearly stating who is responsible for the operation, the objective of the operation, what narrative is being promoted, and why it is not true.³ Before Russia escalated its war against Ukraine in February 2022, Latvia's strategy was to meet disinformation head-on rather than simply prohibiting the broadcast of Russian television and radio, unless there were hate speeches or incitement to violence. This changed in June 2022, when the National Electronic Mass Media Council blocked the transmissions of all Russian TV channels. The decision was based on a new amendment in the Electronic Mass Media Law, which forbade the transmission of content from countries threatening the territorial integrity and independence of another country.

In addition to information operations, another form of Russian action is what they call *near abroad*, which uses a variety of intimidation tactics and usually involves the military. Russia threatens military intervention to “protect” any ethnic Russian who was “left behind” after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As roughly 25 percent of the Latvian population are ethnic Russians, Latvia must take this threat into account.

Like the other Baltic states, Latvia has chosen an approach referred to as *comprehensive defense* or a whole-of-society approach to face hybrid threats.

From Total Defense to Comprehensive Defense

The National Defense Concept (NDC) is the main document that defines Latvia's defense strategy and provides guidelines to national security agencies. According to the National Security Law, the Cabinet of Ministers should propose a National Defense Concept for Latvian Parliamentary approval no later than October 1 of the second year of each parliamentary term.

Article 29 of the National Security Law requires the Ministry of Defense to prepare the National Defense Concept, a planning and policy document based on an analysis of the current military threats. It defines strategic objectives, basic principles, priorities, and measures for their three envisioned phases: peacetime, escalation, and war. The NDC is the basis for the national defense policy. It specifies the operational measures and allocates resources for the development of the National Defense Forces, as well as necessary preparedness measures for other governmental bodies, agencies, other public authorities, and private individuals during these three phases. Implementation has been largely decentralized, with the National Armed Forces executing this plan based on available resources and capabilities as defined by law while other national authorities implement in line with their competencies.

The first version of the NDC was approved in 1995, one year after Russian troops withdrew from Latvia. It was a superficial document defining Latvia's security as an integral part of the Baltic region and providing some basic guidelines for the development of the armed forces. It was much more a bureaucratic document than a security and defense assessment.

The second version was approved in 2001. It was a significant improvement from the 1995 version since it linked the country's strategic assessment with the possible threats and the development of the armed forces and other security structures, although



Caption: Soldiers from the Pennsylvania National Guard confer around a terrain map in preparation for a combined arms rehearsal prior to Saber Strike 2014. Image by: U.S. Army National Guard image by Capt. Gregory McElwain/Released. June 10, 2014

the threat assessment was limited to two paragraphs. It identified Latvia's main security concerns as geopolitical, economic development, historical foreign relations, education and culture, military and civilian defense capabilities, and the environment.

The 2001 NDC asserted that the end of the Cold War dramatically changed the global security environment. Although the threat of a global war was considerably reduced, the risk of regional and local crises had increased because of ethnic conflicts, massive migration, ecological catastrophes, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and organized crime.

Since the end of the Cold War, Latvia's security has been closely linked to the international security environment, in particular Estonia and Lithuania.

Integration into the European defense system and joining NATO are important pillars for Latvia's defense. Nevertheless, the NDC made clear that the

main partner for guaranteeing Latvia's security was the United States since it was also a major actor in shaping European security and securing Latvia's independence. The document did not mention Russia as a direct security threat for Latvia or the Baltic states. The main concern was internal and foreign instability. Interestingly, the 2001 NDC mentioned Russian progress in developing a market economy and a democratic society and dramatically reducing the Russian military presence in the Baltic region.

The 2001 NDC stipulated that Latvian defense was to be based on the concept of total defense by strengthening cooperation between the military forces and the civilian population. As a result, the entire society had to be ready to defend the country with all available resources. The military forces would consist of a small professional force augmented by conscripts who would later become part

of the active reserve. The 2001 NDC did not provide any concrete guidelines, but it did make clear that the Latvian Armed Forces should conform to all NATO standards and procedures in order to facilitate membership.

The third version of the NDC was approved by the Parliament in 2003. At that time, it was already clear that the county would join NATO in 2004. The threat assessment was slightly rephrased. It included an explicit reference about NATO being Latvian security's main guarantor, while Russia was not mentioned. Since Latvia was soon to become a NATO member, the Latvian concept of total defense embraced the notion of collective defense. Guidelines for the armed forces' integration into NATO structures were stipulated. Conscriptio was to be abolished by 2016, and efforts were redirected to developing a professional military. The National Guard and the Youth Guard were to be auxiliary forces which would help recruit professional military personnel.

The fourth version of the document was published in 2008. It reinforced the idea that Latvian security was largely determined by its membership in NATO. In other words, the Latvian National Armed Forces were to protect Latvia's territory and be ready for integrating NATO troops upon their arrival. At the same time, the Latvian military was to take part in NATO missions as part of the principle of collective defense and transatlantic solidarity. The NDC also presented a deeper analysis of the challenges in increasing the effectiveness and capabilities of the armed forces and provided some guidance for achieving these objectives. Nevertheless, the threat analysis was quite superficial. Russia and China were not explicitly mentioned, although "specific countries with unstable internal and foreign policies" were noted as well as "probable change in the equilibrium of international politics because of some specific countries' rapid economic development, increasing military

power, competition for natural resources, and influence in world politics" (a very clear reference to China).

In 2012, a new version of the NDC was approved by the Parliament. The biggest challenge was the result of the defense budget shrinking from €452 million in 2008 to €223 million in 2012 (in 2020 prices). The NDC assessment stressed Latvia's dependence on NATO and the EU, and the world's increasing inter-connectedness affecting Latvia's security. In this version, the idea of total defense and society's active participation gave room to the notion of collective defense based on NATO and the EU.

The new Parliament of 2016 approved a new version of the NDC. For the first time, Russia and what the West called hybrid warfare were clearly mentioned as the main threats to Latvia's security. This was a natural consequence of Russia's actions in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. It also mentioned terrorism and migration as significant security concerns.

Three defense principles were presented: the country's capacity and will to defend its sovereignty, a deterrence policy as an instrument to reduce external threats, and the operationalization of the national defense principles to overcome external threats within the collective defense framework based on NATO.

The role of society was considered important for mobilizing resistance, the National Guard, and the Youth Guard. Internal discussions about the necessity of developing a comprehensive defense system in Latvia as a complementary measure to the transatlantic collective defense arrangement were already underway in the Ministry of Defense and the National Armed Forces. Although the concept of comprehensive defense was not an explicit part of the 2016 NDC, it was the basis for the amendments of the National Security Law in 2018 and the 2020 NDC.

Parliament approved the current version of the NDC in 2020. It is a comprehensive document



Burachki checkpoint on Russia-Latvia border. Photo by: W0zny (Wikimedia Commons). August 16, 2013

providing solid guidance for the development of Latvia's defense system. The 2020 NDC draws attention to increased international competition, where some countries choose to openly ignore international laws and agreements as well as the sovereignty of other countries to achieve their own strategic ambitions. The fragmentation of the global system in combination with the development of new technologies, private military companies, climate change, and pandemics has increased uncertainty in international peace and security. As a result, economic and diplomatic instruments have lost their effectiveness in maintaining peace and stability, and thus there is a need to go beyond the model of collective defense based on the transatlantic alliance.

Latvian Comprehensive Security

The 2020 NDC established four pillars for Latvian defense: the National Armed Forces, a comprehensive defense system, NATO collective defense, and international cooperation.

The comprehensive defense system in Latvia has two objectives: societal resilience in peacetime and the protection of the state during a conflict. This system is based on the idea that society must support the National Armed Forces together with the national economic structure to guarantee the vital functions of the state (including material support for the armed forces). In the event of a major crisis or conflict, Latvian society is expected to:

- organize and implement passive/non-compliant civil and armed resistance against the aggressor.
- support the National Armed Forces and the allied forces with information, goods and services, and any other necessary resources.
- maintain societal services and functions in case of major disruptions or shocks (including a military conflict), by focusing on the following areas:
 - governance and state structures at all levels
 - continuity of vital societal functions (electricity, communications, financial services, food, critical infrastructure, and public health and safety) in any way and under any circumstances
 - vital resources, including raw material reserves
 - readiness to act in crisis and war situations across various societal levels, including individual civic preparedness.

According to the 2020 NDC, Latvian comprehensive defense is based on eight pillars: maintaining the vital functions of the state, society's resilience, protection of the information space, the sustainability of the national economy, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the church, civil resistance, cyber security, and youth education.

1. Maintaining the Vital Functions of the State

Latvia plans to implement pre-established mechanisms at all institutional levels to guarantee the basic functions of the state during crisis and war. Each structure must have well-defined strategies, objectives, and staff to ensure its operability. This includes maintaining backup copies of database systems abroad to ensure that they can restore important national data in case of disruption.

2. Societal Resilience

Comprehensive defense is only possible with the involvement of the entire society. Thus, the Latvian population must take responsibility for the country's security and defense. Individuals and society must be able to survive and sustain for at least 72 hours without any state assistance as well as support the national defense with information, knowledge, skills, material means, and psychological support. This requires a culture of readiness where every private and public organization is prepared to deal with potential crises. This shall be done by providing education, training, and information for all groups in the Latvian society.

3. Protection of the Information Space

Latvia's population must be aware of influence operations and information attacks, which are constant and permanent threats. Society needs to understand media literacy, critical thinking, and psychological resilience against influence operations by including these subjects in the school curricula and by providing educational opportunities for different groups in society. The defense sector should have a clear communications strategy to enhance the state's ability to respond to information and psychological operations.

4. Sustaining the National Economy

Companies that provide basic services with more than 250 employees must ensure continuity of the operations during crisis and war. Business plans must include provisions for guaranteeing supply chain security as well as limiting economic and technological dependence on non-NATO and non-EU countries. The state also needs to establish a reserve system and prepare for export restrictions on food, medicines, and essential raw materials. It is also necessary to assign mobilization tasks to companies during peacetime, including promoting the participation of current and former employees in the

National Guard and the National Armed Forces to guarantee the physical security of strategic facilities.

5. Nongovernmental Organizations and the Church

Nongovernmental organizations are also expected to take part in defense planning, organizing exercises and training, and informing society. The church has a significant role in strengthening the psychological resilience of its members, helping them to overcome difficulties, motivating them to support civil society, and providing reliable information.

6. Civil Resistance

In the event of an armed conflict, the civilian population must evacuate as far as possible within the territory controlled by the National Armed Forces and the Allied troops. At the same time, it must passively resist by not cooperating with the adversary's established administrative institutions and armed units. This is to be done by isolating oneself from the decisions and actions of the occupiers, such as not taking part in public events organized by occupying forces and structures, not providing them information, and not participating in elections or referendums organized by the occupiers. The success of the resistance movement depends on the covert support of the population (such as security, medical care, information, finance, communications, training, recruitment, and intelligence) to members of the civil resistance, the armed resistance, the National Armed Forces, and the Allied forces.

7. Cyber Security

In efforts to reduce the vulnerabilities of state institutions, society, and companies, it is necessary to guarantee the implementation of minimal cyber security standards and the reduction of technological dependence on countries that are not members of NATO or the EU. Cyber security issues must be

included in the curricula of educational institutions, and in the annual training of state and local institutions. In addition, the NDC calls for establishing subdivisions of the Cyber Youth Guard and the National Guard Cyber Defense Unit. It is essential to ensure the secure storage of important data in Latvia in efforts to guarantee the continuity of critical services.

8. Youth Education

The Youth Guard and the introduction of national defense education in schools have a key role in strengthening societal resilience in Latvia. This is to be done by educating the youth about national defense, developing their sense of patriotism, civic consciousness, social cohesion, and leadership and physical abilities. The Ministry of Defense will be establishing a vocational secondary education institution, where general education will be combined with the acquisition of skills and values to develop the students' intellectual capacity, including developing a strong sense of responsibility and improving the necessary competencies to withstand increased physical and psychological challenges. The general secondary school curriculum will focus on mathematics, physics, chemistry, and technology to develop the students' competencies to use modern combat technologies. The subject of national defense will be introduced in the national curricula of secondary schools (10th and 11th grades) by 2024. The objective is to develop competencies associated with national defense, crisis management, critical thinking, and civic patriotism. In addition, the students will have the opportunity to take part in voluntary national defense summer camps, where the knowledge acquired during the school year will be applied and practiced. It is expected that around 30,000 students aged 15–17 will participate each year. The aim is to reach a third of Latvia's population within 10 years.

Implementation of Comprehensive Defense

Developing and implementing comprehensive defense is an ongoing process with many challenges. Following the 2016 version of the NDC, the National Security Law was amended to reflect the necessities of implementing the system of comprehensive defense and civil resistance. Although both ideas had broad support by many significant stakeholders in the armed forces and the Ministry of Defense, it was politically sensitive. With a different threat assessment, it became viable to include the amendments of the National Security Law. The next step was to prepare the strategy for implanting the system of comprehensive defense. It was defined in “On the Implementation of the Comprehensive Defense System in Latvia.” It defines seven key strategic objectives, the institutions responsible for implementation, and their main tasks (see table).

In 2019, Exercise Kristaps tested these functions, and the private sector had the opportunity to directly interact with the defense sector in a hypothetical crisis situation. The exercise provided many significant insights about critical services and suggestions for improvement which are being included in legislative reforms.

In 2020, the working group responsible for implementing these tasks produced a report evaluating its progress. It stressed informing society, amending legislation, strengthening the relationship between the public and the private sector, and increasing society’s participation in the country’s military defense system within the comprehensive defense framework.

The ministries also engaged in a tabletop exercise to help establish priorities and tasks for specific organizations, and to check the ministries’ individual plans in response to the exercise scenario. The exercise conclusions showed the importance of assessing the financial systems, energy reserves, and communication capabilities during a crisis as well as

the need to identify necessary resources and staff to guarantee the critical functions of the state.

Political Aspects of Comprehensive Defense

Russia’s attempts to influence Latvian politics can be divided into three categories: supporting pro-Russian political parties, organizations, NGOs, and individuals; maintaining or trying to increase its political influence over the local population; and influencing politicians and civil servants, mainly at the regional level.

The main pro-Russian political force is the political alliance “Harmony,” which started as the Harmony Center in 2005 as a merger of several pro-Russian parties and then consolidated in 2010 and 2011 into the Social Democratic Party Harmony. It signed cooperation agreements with Putin’s party in 2009, the Chinese Communist Party in 2011, and joined the European Socialist Party in 2015. In 2017, it broke the agreement with United Russia in a move to become more palatable for Latvian mainstream politics and to be included in the government’s coalition.

Although it is not possible to affirm that Russia controls any political party in Latvia, many politicians have maintained close contact with Russian political actors. The former Russian Ambassador to Latvia revealed in an interview with the Russian radio station Ekho Moskvi in 2015 that the Russian embassy had a plan for pro-Russian parties to win a majority of seats in the Parliament in the 2010 elections. In the same interview, he revealed that his successor had similar plans.⁴ Pro-Russian politicians denied involvement in any plan from the Russian embassy.⁵ Since 2017, Harmony has been publicly distancing itself from Russia and assuming a more social-democratic profile to compete with ethnic Latvian parties, which are mostly conservative. It has a stable electorate, with an average of 25 percent of the seats in the Parliament but has never been part

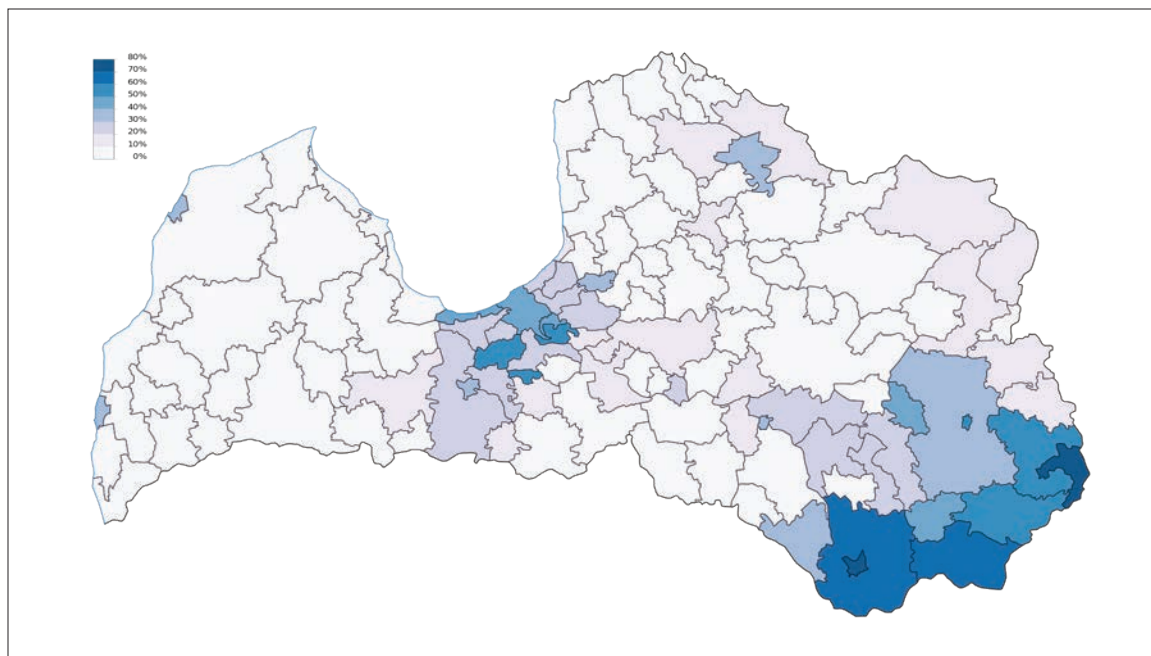
Table. Latvia's Comprehensive Defense Strategic Objectives, Stakeholders, and Tasks

Strategic Objective	Stakeholders	Tasks
Develop military capabilities and define defense strategies	Defense National Armed Forces	Develop military capabilities Develop defense strategy Increase individual willingness to engage in national defense and resist occupation
Establishing closer cooperation between private and public sectors	Entire government	Identify and reduce threat measures across government Cooperation with NGOs and their involvement in national defense Develop national and local volunteer networks Organize annual defense training for professionals and experts from various fields Develop the national defense industry and increase its role in national defense
National defense course in schools and increasing public awareness of defense issues	Education and Science Defense Other government bodies	Implement the national defense curriculum Introduce national defense subjects in higher education and applied sciences Strengthen relationship between state and society
Civil defense and disaster management	Internal Affairs State and local government bodies Juridical and Private Persons	Implement the seven NATO civil resilience baseline requirements Closer civil-military relations Population readiness to withstand initial stages of disaster or war
Psychological Defense	State Chancellery Defense Education and Science Culture Other government bodies	Increase societal resilience against influence, information, and psychological operations Increase social cohesion Increase social engagement in the domestic political and social processes Establish direct channels of communication with religious organizations
Strategic Communication	State Chancellery Other government bodies	Encourage the population to behave in line with the comprehensive defense model Manage the government's crisis communication Increase resilience against information operations targeting Latvia
Economic resilience	Finance Economics	Guarantee the provision of essential government services in crisis and war Establish reserves of essential commodities at the national level Sustain business continuity during crisis and war Guarantee personal economic security

of a government coalition.

Russia also finances and uses local pseudo-activists and NGOs. Over the last 10 years, Russia has instigated five campaigns with the sole objective of destabilizing Latvia: Russian-language education, Russian as the second official language in Latvia, automatic citizenship for all residents in Latvia, autonomy claims for the region of Latgale, and the family moral initiative. During Imperial Russian

and Soviet times, Russians sought to “Russify” local ethnicities using education, language, and religion. Latvians (and Estonians and Lithuanians) remember this quite clearly and seek to reverse this effort through these three areas that have historically been used against them. All three of these are intertwined. Education strongly influences what language is used, while the ability to speak Latvian is a strong determinant of citizenship. Most recently, Russian



Percentage of Russian speakers in different regions of Latvia, 2011 census. Image by: Xil, based on Latvia,_administrative_divisions_-_Nmbrs_-_colored.svg by TUBS. August 17, 2013

influencers have been focusing more on the immorality and decadence of the West since the mix of citizenship and minorities has been losing its appeal.

Language and Education

The Kremlin is pushing to make Russian Latvia's second official language in order to reverse de-russification and to pursue a broader strategy aimed at establishing Russian as an official EU language.⁶

After its independence from the USSR, Latvia maintained a dual language education system with both Latvian and Russian language schools. In some cases, this resulted in a deep divergence of learning outcomes, particularly in the subject of history. In 2002, the Latvian government initiated a program to protect the cultural heritage of minorities living in Latvia by opening publicly financed schools in seven different languages.⁷ This is changing, however. Before 2019, 60 percent of the studies were to be in Latvian and 40 percent in the minority language. As of 2022, all subjects except language and literature

are taught in Latvian.

Another initiative to influence Latvian politics has been to include family values in the school curriculum; for example, to legally define a Latvian “family” as a heterosexual couple with children. These attempts are aimed at undermining “Western” values.

Citizenship

With Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, all those who had moved to Latvia from the Soviet Union between 1940 and 1991 (currently 25 percent of the population) had to apply for Latvian citizenship.⁸ Russia's narrative aims to delegitimize Latvia's political and economic model by convincing these people that they are being discriminated against. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that the Russian-speaking population in Latvia are able and willing to support Russian destabilization operations as the Russian-speaking population is very diverse and many are not necessarily pro-Russian.

Another failed pro-Russian initiative advocated that all non-citizens should be eligible for Latvian citizenship and that the Latgale region, where a large number of ethnic Russians live, should be autonomous.⁹

Other efforts have included issuing Russian citizenship for ethnic Russians living outside of Russia, for example in the Baltic states. Since 2002, Russia has encouraged issuing Russian passports (called passportization)¹⁰ targeting two groups: Latvian residents (particularly ethnic Russians) who are not eligible for Latvian citizenship and those who want to receive a Russian pension. This was designed to exploit their discontent and feeling of being insulted. Between 2007 and 2017 approximately 28,000 people in Latvia became Russian citizens,¹¹ many of whom did so for economic reasons and not for any particularly strong allegiance or loyalty to Russia. However, large numbers of Russian citizens in Latvia increase the risk that Russia will intervene on behalf of “these oppressed” Russian minorities to “defend them.”

In 2019, the Parliament approved a law granting automatic citizenship to all non-citizens’ children born after January 1, 2020, provided that the children’s parents agreed to not seek citizenship of another country for their children and that the children did not already hold citizenship of another state.

The Economic and Social Aspects of Comprehensive Defense

According to the economic platforms of the parties represented in the Latvian Parliament, the key economic sectors are transportation, real estate, and finance.¹² All three are highly dependent on money from Russia and countries making up the Commonwealth of Independent States, and thus such business interests are a significant conduit for Russian influence. This has resulted in allegations of money laundering and corruption that create a reputation problem for Latvia.

Although Latvia’s transition to a market economy might be considered a success, one of the economic policy’s pillars has been low wages as a means for establishing competitiveness. This has resulted in developing a low-complexity economy with low productivity producing low added-value goods. Therefore, economic growth has not resulted in improving relative living standards. On the contrary, it has deepened economic inequality and consequently increased the sentiment of relative deprivation among the population.¹³ This was aggravated by the financial crisis of 2008. Absolute living standards declined and because of government austerity policies a significant part of the population emigrated or developed resentment against the state and the political system. Thus, since Latvia’s economic leverage is quite small, Russia has focused on discrediting the Western neoliberal financial and Latvia’s economic models. However, Latvia has been implementing policies to resolve these issues. Wages are increasing and sectors with high complexity such as information technology are developing.

Nevertheless, Russia’s opportunities for influencing Latvia by economic means is very limited. The majority of Latvia’s external trade is with EU and NATO member states. In 2019, 72 percent of Latvia’s exports were to EU states, and 11 percent to non-EU NATO member states. Exports to Russia accounted for only 9 percent. At the same time, Latvia’s imports from EU member states accounted for 75 percent of the total, while 8 percent were from non-EU NATO member states and 7 percent from Russia. The transportation sector, which is heavily dependent upon Russia, represents just 8 percent of Latvia’s gross domestic product (GDP).

For many years, Latvia has been accused of laundering money from Russia and the former Soviet Union, and since 2017 the United States has been putting pressure on Latvia to toughen its anti-laundering laws. The ABLV Bank (one of the largest private banks in the Baltic states) was

accused of “institutionalized money laundering” and the Bank of Latvia’s governor was investigated for suspected bribery.¹⁴ In mid-2019, the Latvian Parliament passed an anti-money laundering law to avoid being placed on a gray list by Moneyval, a Council of Europe monitoring body.¹⁵

Energy

There are important questions regarding Latvia’s energy security. This is of special relevance because of historical ties with Russia which deepened during the Soviet period. The first issue is Latvia’s dependence on gas from Russia. The second is the Baltic states’ connection to Russia’s power grid. The third is the import of electricity from Russia. These factors result in Latvia’s strategic fragility since Russia could potentially turn off the electricity system in the Baltics or cut gas flows during the winter. As always, reality is more complex. Latvia has an underground gas storage facility in Inčukalns with the capacity for 4.47 billion cubic meters. From that, 2.3 billion cubic meters are of active utilization, or the equivalent to roughly 2 years of Latvia’s consumption of natural gas. It is possible to increase the active reserves to 3.2 billion cubic meters.

Still, 30 years after leaving the Soviet Union, the Baltic states are synchronized to Russia’s power grid to maintain stable power supplies and prevent blackouts. Some analysts believe that, in case of conflict, Russia could turn off the electricity in the Baltic states. Although technically possible, it would result in turning off the energy in Kaliningrad, in Russia’s western region, including Saint Petersburg, and in a considerable part of Belarus. The Baltic states have plans to completely disconnect from the Russian power grid and connect to the European power grid by 2025. Russia answered by launching a power plant in Kaliningrad to guarantee the region’s self-supply and allegedly has plans already to disconnect the Baltic states from the Russian power grid in 2024. Regarding Latvia’s dependence on

imports of electricity, in 2019 the country produced 6,178 million kilowatt/hours while consumption was 7,296 million kilowatt/hours. In 2018, the production of energy was 6.5 million kilowatt/hours. In other words, Latvia is nearly self-sufficient in electricity production.

Diplomacy and Comprehensive Defense

Russia’s diplomatic and information actions in Latvia have the objective of debasing Latvia’s credibility, especially with NATO, the EU, and the United States. Russia promotes numerous false narratives about Latvia. First, Russia maintains the narrative that the Baltics were liberated from fascism by the Red Army and voluntarily joined the USSR, instead of being forcibly occupied and annexed. The most recent example is a series of tweets from the Russian embassy in Latvia. Starting in early July 2020, it has promoted the Russian interpretation of Latvia’s integration into the Soviet Union as opposed to the actual forcible occupation and annexation. This is part of the larger Russian effort to establish a narrative of the Soviet Union as the victim.

Another strategy is renovating Soviet military memorials, a task being carried out by Russian diplomats who actively establish contacts with local Latvian authorities. Similarly, the Russian embassy has been actively recruiting individuals and organizations (such as Russian historical and cultural clubs and military archeological associations) to do research and conservation work.

Since independence from the Soviet Union, the main objective of Latvia’s foreign policy has been to integrate with the West, especially by joining the EU, NATO, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. This is the result of Latvia sharing with the West the same main security and strategic interests, culture, and system of values. Since these objectives have been achieved, Latvia’s foreign policy priorities are:

- to strengthen Latvia's interests in the EU, at the same time supporting a united and strong Europe
- to develop Latvia's economy and the welfare of its inhabitants
- to strengthen national security in close cooperation with the other member states of the EU and NATO
- to strengthen the cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Rim to reinforce democracy and economic stability
- to promote a closer relationship between Latvia and the diaspora.

The Invasion of Ukraine

In March 2022, the Latvian government agreed to increase the defense budget to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2025. The additional resources will be used to benefit the development of defense capabilities (especially in logistics and procurement, drones, smart ammunition, air defense systems, and indirect fire support systems such as self-propelled artillery and mortar weapon systems), increasing the mechanization of the land forces, and strengthening the capabilities of cyber defense. Defense spending in Latvia has been strategically used to promote re-industrialization by stimulating the defense industrial sector. At the same time, Latvia together with its neighbors has been pushing for ampler NATO presence in the Baltic region and is analyzing the best way to reinstate conscription by the middle of 2023.

The feeling of an increasing Russian threat has galvanized public opinion to vigorously support the EU's sanctions against Russia. Survey data shows that 66 percent of Latvia's population supports the economic sanctions, with 52 percent irrespectively of the possible negative consequences for them on the personal level. There are discussions and plans to terminate all energy ties with Russia.

These include constructing a terminal for importing liquified gas from other sources in Skulte and increasing gas reserves in Inčukalns. In the information domain, Latvia has forbidden all Russian TV channels, expelled 13 Russian diplomats, and closed the Russian consulates in Daugavpils and Liepāja. In addition, the city of Riga decided to demolish the Victory Monument, which has been used to promote Russia's imperialistic ideology under the mantle of commemorating the victory over fascism, whereas Latvians often refer to it as the monument of occupation.

Latvia has supported Ukraine by donating more than €200 million in military equipment, including weapons and ammunition, drones, helicopters, food, and anti-air systems (for example, Stinger missiles). The private sector and individuals have donated money, vehicles, food, clothes, and even the transportation of people from the border between Ukraine and Poland to Latvia. As of May 2022, the official number of refugees was around 30,000, but the actual number was possibly higher. Except for a minority of the Russian-speaking population, the local population has overwhelmingly supported the refugees and has provided significant donations to them.

Conclusion

Latvia sees national security through the lens of the threat from political warfare as practiced by the Russian Federation. During the post-Cold War era, Latvian views were more conventional. As Russia conducted operations against Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine, Latvia developed a new perspective. Because Russia's "new generation warfare" focuses on all potentially vulnerable sectors of society, Latvia has developed a whole-of-society approach towards national security. Although cleavages still exist that revolve around ethnicity, language, education, and citizenship, Latvia actively seeks to address those issues while also pursuing economic



Latvia's Parliament has declared Russia a "state sponsor of terrorism" for attacks on civilians during the war in Ukraine. Image by: The Parliament, Saeima, of the Republic of Latvia. August 11, 2022

development. At the same time, Latvia teams with the other two Baltic states to connect with the EU, NATO, and the United States to ensure that they will receive assistance in maintaining their sovereignty and independence. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ See Jānis Bērziņš, "Integrating Resilience in Defense Planning Against Information Warfare in the Post-Truth World," in *Drums: Distortions, Rumors, Untruths, Misinformation, and Smears*, ed. Norman Vasu, Benjamin Ang, and Shashi Jayakumar (Singapore: World Scientific, 2018), 117–131.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Eks-posol Rossii v Latvii: kak my «stavili» Ushakova i stroili nashi plany (Ex-Russian Ambassador to Latvia: how we "set" Ushakov and made our plans), available at <<https://rus.tvnet.lv/5249897/eks-posol-rossii-v-latvii-kak-my-stavili-ushakova-i-stroili-nashi-planu>>, in Russian.

⁵ See "Urbanovičs un Ušakovs noliedz Krievijas 'programmas' īstenošanu Latvijā" [Urbanovičs and Ušakovs deny the implementation of the Russian "program" in Latvia], TV3 Ziņas, March 10, 2015, available at <<https://skaties.lv/zinas/latvija/politika/urbanovics-un-usakovs-noliedz-krievijas-programmas-istenosanu-latvija/>>, in Latvian.

⁶ A language may attain official status in the European Union if one of its member states recognizes it as one of its official languages.

⁷ The languages are Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukraine, Estonian, Lithuanian, and Belorussian.

⁸ Citizenship requires Latvian language skills and an oath of loyalty to the Latvian state. The status of “noncitizen” entitles the same rights of a citizen with the exception of voting rights and working in the public sector.

⁹ See Paul Goble, “Putin and Latvia’s Latgale: Ethnicity as Explanation Vs. Ethnicity as Excuse,” *The Eurasia Monitor*, May 26, 2015, The Jamestown Foundation available at < <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-and-latvias-latgale-ethnicity-as-explanation-vs-ethnicity-as-excuse/#.VWwi1s-qpBc> >.

¹⁰ In 2002, the acquisition of Russian citizenship was simplified for any former citizen of the Soviet Union, irrespective of their current country of residence.

¹¹ See “10 gadu laikā Krievijas pilsoņu skaits Latvijā pieaudzis par vairāk nekā 28 000” [In 10 years, the number of Russian citizens in Latvia has increased by more than 28,000], LSM.lv, July 22, 2017, available at <<https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/10-gadu-laika-krievijas-pilsonu-skaits-latvija-pieaudzis-par-vairak-neka-28-000.a244201>>.

¹² Jānis Bērziņš, “Macroeconomic Policy, Business Cycles, and Neoliberalism in Latvia” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Latvia, 2015).

¹³ The term *relative deprivation* is the subjective judgment that one is worse off or deprived of some state or thing in comparison to some standard. See Robin M. Williams, Jr., “Relative Deprivation,” in *The Idea of Social Structure: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Merton*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (New York: Routledge, 2017), 355–378.

¹⁴ See “Latvia Passes Anti-Money Laundering Reform,” *Financial Times*, June 12, 2019.

¹⁵ See “At a Glance,” Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, available at <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/moneyval>>.