Lithuania's Total Defense Review

By Dalia Bankauskaitė and Deividas Šlekys

Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014, and especially after February 2022, was a gamechanger that radically transformed the geopolitical and security environment in the Baltic Sea Region. Russia's aggressive and unpredictable behavior pushed Western capitals out of their comfort zone, while the Baltic states understood the new reality and reacted swiftly. Lithuania performed the most drastic overhaul of its security and defense policy since independence in 1990. Some say that the real formation and development of the modern Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) started then.

For several years following independence many did not focus on national defense issues. After joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004 Lithuanians relaxed, as did the many other NATO allies. At that time the thinking was that liberal democracy would prevail in the region. Also, NATO would help in times of crisis, therefore there was no need for increased spending on defense or LAF development.[1]

This article describes the development of Lithuania's total defense policy, which focuses on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.[2] It discusses the major changes in the Lithuanian security and defense policy during the last 8 years, concentrating on political-military and strategic issues. The article is organized in three parts. The first discusses major conceptual debates concerning the best options for the state defense. These discussions mainly circled around the ideas of hybrid warfare, total defense, and the Suwalki Corridor dilemma. The second part focuses on institutional and political changes in Lithuania's defense sector with an emphasis on such issues as Lithuania's international cooperation and conscription. The third part deals with the dilemma of society's engagement in defense issues and the challenges that presents.

Conceptual Debate on the Options of State Defense

Since 2014, Lithuania has gone through three different stages of conceptual development concerning the state of defense. From 2014 to late 2015, the dominant narrative was hybrid war. It was succeeded by discussions about the Suwalki Corridor. Since 2018, debates about total defense have gained momentum and greater importance. Events in Ukraine since February 2022 only confirmed that taking the course toward total

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Suwalki Gap Crossing. Image by: Spc. Kevin Wang/Released (U.S. Army). June 19, 2017

defense is the right one. Yet, it is also important to emphasize that these different discussions do not replace each other but coexist; each leaves its imprint on defense politics.

Buzzwords such as "hybrid war," the "Gerasimov doctrine," and "new generation warfare" were widely used to explain the Russian military approach in Ukraine. Lithuania was no exception. Political leaders, the national military command, members of the media and academia constantly talked about it.

These discussions led to institutional changes. The LAF in 2014 designated two battalions and some additional elements from other services as rapid reaction units to be ready to act in less than 24 hours. Parliament provided legal shortcuts to swiftly deal with emergencies like Crimea.[3] Lithuania also acknowledged the importance of non-kinetic elements of defense.

Therefore, when the border crisis with Belarus started in summer 2021, Lithuania institutionally and conceptually was more ready than in 2014 to tackle such a challenge.[4] Accordingly, Lithuanian politicians called this crisis a hybrid attack and gave a new lease of life to the salience of hybrid war.[5]

Suwalki Corridor Scenario

Toward the end of 2015, U.S. Army Europe commander Lieutenant General Frederick Benjamin "Ben" Hodges III recognized the vulnerability of the Suwalki Gap, which he later called a "corridor." This corridor is the only land connection between the Baltic states and the rest of Europe and is sandwiched between Russia's Kaliningrad District to the west and Belarus to the east. Keeping this corridor open became a major task for NATO.[6] The concept

was to defend the Baltic states and Poland by using Cold War military scenarios. Bearing in mind the intentional conceptual similarity between notions of the Fulda and Suwalki gaps, this approach also is more suited for a conventional army-centric vision of warfighting. The United States, by emphasizing this particular geographical area, shaped Lithuanian defense debate by nudging it into a more balanced conceptual approach, which previously had been overly fixated on the idea of hybrid war.

In Poland and Lithuania, this discussion helped to prioritize the development of host nation support (HNS) capabilities, making national politicians and the military aware that logistics were essential for any military activity in the corridor.

However, emphasizing this piece of land led to some perceptual extremes. For instance, in summer 2022, the American political news outlet Politico published an article about the Suwalki Corridor, calling it "The most dangerous place on Earth."[7] Ironically, the Suwalki Gap concept helped to avoid an over-fixation on hybrid war and yet, in time, the corridor itself became an object of over-dramatization and conceptual overstretch.

At the same time, this fixation on the Suwalki Corridor faced its own challenges in Lithuania, where the defense community sought to consider the wider involvement of society and to take the idea of total defense seriously.

Lithuania's Total Defense Posture as Focused on Deterrence and Defense

Discussions by Western and Baltic analysts on Lithuanian defense reveal a certain gap in understanding the current focus of Lithuania's total defense.[8] U.S. analysts prefer to focus on Lithuania's conventional kinetic capabilities, unconventional warfare, and violent resistance, while nonviolent civilian resistance is considered "passive resistance."[9] This approach focuses on an occupation scenario while Lithuanian experts focus on deterrence

and defense. This discrepancy occurred because American studies concluded that the Baltic states might be occupied within a certain number of hours; this view was compounded by a lack of regional expertise.[10] Outsiders tend to forget that Lithuania has extensive experience and behavioral memory of societal resistance against Soviet Russia's aggression in 1944–1953 and of regaining and defending its independence in January 1991. More recently however, Americans are paying more attention to ideas and proposals coming from the Baltic region and tailoring operational concepts for this region, such as the 2019 Resistance Operating Concept.[11]

The conceptual dynamic of defense priorities shows that during the last several years, Lithuania has been engaged in a fluid, diverse, and productive intellectual reflection, and the diversity of ideas and solutions demonstrates that Lithuania is taking its defense seriously.

Institutional and Political Changes in the Defense Sector

Lithuania's experience leaves practically no grounds to trust its neighbor Russia, which has deliberately challenged Lithuania both on the domestic and international levels since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Even so, it has taken time for Lithuania to move forward on these issues. Lithuania has been challenged by Russia on energy (in 2006), information operations (in 2006–2007), and cyber threats since 2007 (and it took until 2014 to pass a law on cyber security).[12] The main qualitative breakthrough came in 2018, when a major consolidation of all cybersecurity capabilities took place, the Ministry of National Defence took the lead at the strategic-political level, the National Cyber Security Center (NCSC) was established, and the National Cyber Security Strategy[13] was adopted.

Likewise, although Lithuania is expert on Russia's military threat, for many years since 1990

Rail Baltica Linking people, nations, and places. Image by: Rail Baltica (brochure). Accessed January 5, 2023

Lithuanian politicians kept on allocating less than 1 percent for national defense, like other states seeking to enjoy a "peace dividend."

This helps to understand the magnitude of changes in Lithuania's total defense posture after 2014. These changes may be grouped according to political-legal, politico-military, international lobbying (including defense against information operations), and political-bureaucratic (including cyber and energy) aspects.

Political-Legal Aspect

The first major decision made by Lithuania was to renew its political parties' agreement concerning defense policy (the Agreement) and to increase the defense budget. Since 2014, three such agreements were signed (in 2014, 2018, and 2022). In all three documents, the political leadership reconfirmed

its pledge to ensure the consistency of the commitment to strengthen national defense capabilities. One important issue covered by the Agreement was to ensure proper funding for defense by allocating at least 2.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and, depending on the state's economic health, try to reach 3 percent of GDP in the near term.[14] From a defense budget of 0.79 percent of GDP in 2014, the budget reached 2.52 percent by 2022,[15] demonstrating the maturing of national security attitudes and the determination of the Lithuanian political community and society at large to build up the country's national defense.

One new aspect covered by the Agreement is the commitment to increase public and national resistance, build resilience against hybrid threats among state institutions and the Lithuanian public at large, and further enhance the development of national cyber security capabilities.

The second important political-legal decision was to reintroduce conscription in 2015, an option discussed since conscription was abolished in 2008. The war in Ukraine forced Lithuania to reconsider this issue. The Chief of Defense publicly acknowledged that most battalions were seriously undermanned.[16] Considering Russia's habit of holding snap exercises and engaging in rapid deployment, the LAF needs enough troops on standby in the barracks ready to act when necessary. Because of this requirement, the Lithuanian Defense Council recommended a return to conscription in February 2015. Within 1 month, the Lithuanian Parliament overwhelmingly approved the recommendation,[17] with 3,500–4,500 conscripts per year serving 9 months. Citizens were encouraged to volunteer to the conscription service and missing numbers were to be covered by a lottery applied only to males aged 18 to 23, while females were encouraged to enter the service on a volunteer basis.[18]

In general, the reaction from the society was positive. In 2015 and 2016, volunteers surged to the LAF's recruitment posts. Over time, the numbers of volunteers declined, and the lottery became an important tool. Yet, public opinion approving conscription remains high and, after almost 8 years, it should be seen as a major success of the Lithuanian state and its society in terms of national security building.[19]

Alongside these two changes, several other smaller but nevertheless important legal changes were implemented, including clarifying presidential powers in the time of crisis[20] and revising wartime and mobilization laws.[21] It is clear that by making these decisions Lithuania started its serious overhaul preparation for total defense.

The Politico-Military Aspect

Despite all the talk about Russia's hybrid threats, Lithuania's first reaction to the threat was natural and classical: the Lithuanian government decided to strengthen warfighting capabilities by reforming the LAF. Conscription was only part of the approach. Lithuania decided to invest in "military hardware" and increase its warfighting capabilities. It initiated a broad range and large-scale procurement program, including mobile artillery systems (PzH 2000), armored fighting vehicles (Boxer), medium range air defense system (NASAMS), tactical combat vehicles (Oshkosh JLTV), helicopters (Blackhawk), and other tactical equipment.[22] Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 accelerated Lithuania's second modernization phase. Agreements were made with France to buy artillery systems, with Germany for additional infantry fighting vehicles, and with the United States for its High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), and surveillance and fighting drones.[23]

Host nation support and critical infrastructure are necessary for NATO success in Eastern Europe. At the Wales Summit NATO decided to establish NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) in the eastern flank countries. These units serve as command-and-control elements, coordinating and enhancing interoperability between national and allied forces. The Lithuanian NFIU is a great success story.

Lithuania focuses on military critical infrastructure and has modernized its training grounds, military bases, and other infrastructure with significant help from the United States and Germany,[24] as well as building three new military bases and a new, large training ground.[25]

During the NATO Madrid summit in 2022, the Baltic states and Poland managed to convince their allies to move the Alliance into a forward defense direction, which in practical terms means more forward deployment of allied soldiers on NATO's eastern flank.[26] In Lithuania's case, an agreement was reached between Vilnius and Berlin for Germany to dedicate an entire infantry brigade to this flank. Yet in the near future, only part of its

brigade will be deployed in Lithuania due to insufficient logistical infrastructure.[27]

Finally, working together with the other two Baltic states, Lithuania scored a diplomatic victory by gaining confirmation that the EU will fund Rail Baltica, to be finished by 2026, the high-speed railway link to the rest of Europe, tremendously increasing capacity for flow of goods, people, and, if necessary, military material.[28]

The LAF also returned to conscription and to increased retention for long-serving active personnel; the number of active personnel within the military rose from 13,000 in 2013 to around 21,000 in 2022,[29] allowing the creation of four new battalions in a second infantry brigade. The LAF also developed division-level headquarters capabilities to provide higher command and control. This increase in manpower was complemented by a substantial deployment of allied troops. Some are part of bilateral agreements, such as U.S. troops on rotation or NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) units. Within the last few years, the number of rotationally deployed allied troops in Lithuania has exceeded one thousand. The presence of well-equipped allies makes a major impact on Lithuania's defense and deterrence posture. [30]

At the same time, the LAF reconfirmed Lithuania's commitment to the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union by participating in international missions abroad in Mali, Iraq, Ukraine, the Mediterranean Sea region, and the Somali waters. Overall, Lithuania remains an active participant in international missions.[31]

An overview of the last 8 years of military changes in Lithuania clearly indicates that the LAF transformation was both impressive and remarkable in all spheres. Nevertheless, such changes required almost total attention from all stakeholders and kept the mainstream thinking and public debates focused more on defense and the country's warfighting capacities, at an increased risk of neglecting the focus on its civic society, especially how to comprehensively engage it with the country's defense.

International Diplomacy and Lobbying

Another achievement is that Lithuania has never lost sight of the vital importance of diplomacy. After its initial work at home, Lithuania moved quickly, together with the remaining two Baltic states, Poland, and other countries in the region, pushing hard to change NATO and EU policies toward Russia and the defense of NATO's eastern flank. In parallel, Lithuania focused on developing bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation to complement the security umbrella provided by NATO.

NATO made a series of decisions on reinforcing northeastern Europe during summits in Wales (2014), Warsaw (2016), Brussels (2018) and Madrid (2022): Since 2014, friendly foreign forces deployed in the framework of enhanced air policing (which started in 2004, and which should be transformed into the air defense), an eFP battalion led by Germany and including many other units designated for military exercises and training.[32] However, Lithuania understands the complex nature of NATO decisionmaking and its cumbersome military structure and made a strategic decision to diversify its efforts by actively participating in NATO reforms as well as pursuing military cooperation with a number of countries. As one senior official of the Ministry of National Defense (MOD) said, Lithuania looked for partners with "teeth and claws," that is, willing, capable, and experienced in warfighting. Lithuania opted to work with countries that could be first responders.

The underlying idea is that NATO will honor Article 5 (mutual defense) of the Washington Treaty (dubbed "the musketeer clause") and will come to help in time of need, but force deployment will take time. Therefore, in a time of crises the armed forces from partner countries would provide crucial help and support while NATO forces assemble. This

idea manifested itself in closer bilateral cooperation with Poland. Cooperation includes establishing the Lithuanian-Polish Council of Defense Ministers and coordinating affiliated military units, as well as other resources. Lithuania also seeks closer cooperation with the United States, including developing Lithuania's Land Forces divisional headquarters and special operations forces (SOF) cooperation and training. The battle-tested and combat-fit Lithuanian SOF are highly valued by the allies. Lithuania also engages in multilateral cooperation in the format of the Joint Expeditionary Force (a United Kingdom–led two-star command incorporating forces from 11 circum-Baltic states),[33] which provides actual defense planning and training not only with NATO states but serves also as a "bridge" for deeper cooperation with non-NATO Sweden and Finland.

These warfighting partnerships are complemented by EU security initiatives like the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) program aimed at deepening defense cooperation among the EU member states. From the Lithuanian perspective, NATO alone cannot deliver all the necessary tools for Baltic region defense. Some issues require specific legislation, and this is an EU, not NATO, function. In 2018, Lithuania initiated and now coordinates the Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRT) project in the framework of EU PESCO. The CRRT project is one of the most successful PESCO projects. The Lithuania-coordinated CRRT typically consists of 8 to 12 cybersecurity experts pooled from six participating EU member states—Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and Romania—that can provide assistance in the event of a cyber incident. CRRT has been operational since 2019 and reached full operational capability in May 2021.[34] On February 22, 2022, the Lithuanian-led EU CRRT was activated in response to Ukraine's request to help Ukrainian institutions "to cope with growing cyber threats."[35] However, Russia's invasion

of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, impeded the mission.

In response to the increasing incidents of ransomware threats around the world, Lithuania is among the leading partners (together with India)[36] in one of the five Counter Ransomware Initiative (CRI) clusters.[37]

Furthermore, Lithuania was among the first to initiate and support the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, located in Finland, which focuses on the fact that the nature of contemporary conflicts is not only kinetic. This center helps to build up expertise and consensus on hybrid threats among EU and NATO member states. For Lithuania, it is a venue to present and explain its assessment of Russia's activities in a less formal environment.

In Lithuania's view, its engagement with the United States is of significant importance for the region. It should be retained and is fundamental for Baltic security and stability and deterrence of Russia. If the United States were to start considering a limited engagement in the region, Russia would regard it as a regional weakness, and this would lead to increased insecurity in the region. Eventually, it might weaken the transatlantic bond and harm the security of the entire transatlantic region.

Lithuania and other Baltic states jointly address capability gaps in maritime and air defense in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic states have clearly expressed the requirements needed to improve political and military decision-making processes, rules of engagement in peacetime conditions, and procedures and force generation requirements regarding effective and timely transition from NATO's air policing to its air defense posture. Therefore, rapid deployment of surface-based air defense forces and fourth or fifth generation fighters are of utmost importance for deterrence and defense of the Baltics. The timely deployment and employment of air defense assets should be regularly exercised and

4 Multinational Battlegroups

ESTONIA:
United Kingdom
France
Iceland

LITHUANIA:
Germany
Belgium
Czech Republic
Luxembourg
The Netherlands
Norway

LATVIA:
Canada
Albania
Czech Republic
Iceland
Italy
Montenegro
Poland
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain

POLAND:
United States
Croatia
Romania
United Kingdom

Framework Nation
Contributing Nation
Valid as of 10 February 2022

HQ Multinational Corps North-East
SZCZECIN

HQ Multinational Division North-East
ELBLAG

NATO Enhanced Forward Presence

Image by: North Atlantic Treaty Organization. February 10, 2022

where possible should be linked to EFP training requirements, as EFP currently lacks sufficient combat enablers from the air and sea domains.

It is worth mentioning that Lithuania is leading the Military Airspace Block Concept regional initiative. This aims to develop favorable exercise conditions nationally and regionally for air and missile defense exercises and other military activities for contingencies in the Baltics. The project focuses on designing military interconnected airspaces for rapid activation and utilization, which connects all the dots of air defense.

In the current security environment and the military force imbalance in the Baltic region, Lithuania's strong transatlantic bond becomes exceptionally significant. Due to the size of its population and the economy, the country relies on cooperation with allies to ensure the security and defense of its territory and of the entire region. The presence of allied forces in Lithuania and their ability to provide timely reinforcements are seen as key factors to change the Russian calculus and prevent Russia's perceived easy wins in the region.

Understanding that, Lithuania is increasing its host nation support capabilities, working to increase the military mobility to and through the region and providing excellent training opportunities to the allied forces.

As a result of these investments, Lithuania can host not only its armed forces, but also an EFP battalion, U.S. heavy battalion, and other smaller allied military units. It is notable that all the deployed forces were able to maintain their level of readiness while training in Lithuania. While NATO forces in Lithuania are there for the foreseeable future, Lithuania seeks to ensure a long-term U.S. forward presence.

The diplomatic activity discussed above and these tangible investments show that Lithuania's response to the resurgent threat from Russia is multidimensional and comprehensive.

Strategic Communications or Russian Information Confrontation

In the age of social media and fast-spreading information, society is on the front line of confrontation

and negative influences. Forming a strong, resilient, and critically thinking society that remains attentive to information and resistant to provocations is a key task in Lithuania, especially in the face of today's security issues.

Lithuania's efforts to build a defensive strategic communication capability is a regional success story. Due to Russia's history of aggressive behavior, Lithuania began building up its expertise in this field years ago. During Lithuania's preparatory steps for NATO and EU membership, these skills were extensively employed in order to gain public support and empower citizens to appreciate the opportunities of membership.

When Russia began serious information operations throughout Europe after its aggression in Ukraine in 2014, Vilnius was better prepared to withstand malign information attacks than other European countries. Lithuania's expertise and proficiency in protecting its information environment; identifying, tracking, and neutralizing malign topics and themes; and debunking fake news as well as counter-information and psychological operations grew rapidly and earned well-deserved respect among allies.[38]

Lithuania has accumulated extensive experience in monitoring and assessing the risks of hostile strategic communication, including but not limited to assessing physical and electronic environments and countering disinformation. Malignant Russian activities in the electronic environment include denial of service cyber-attacks, defacing web sites by unauthorized alteration of information, or using disinformation to trick users into opening files that allow an aggressor to penetrate the digital system; shaping opinion through articles and comments on media web sites; shaping opinion on TV and radio; and shaping opinion by using blogs, social media, and other means. Activities in the physical environment include but are not limited to creating hostile political narratives by foreign countries, shaping

opinion by visual measures (for example, graffiti), using deception (for example, fake calls, alerts), propagating symbols, and holding legal and illegal protests and demonstrations.[39]

Successful defense lies in the way information operations are organized based on the decentralized and often informal cooperation among the state and civic society; the core of such cooperation is mutual trust.[40] At the state level, government institutions assess the information environment according to their areas of responsibility and competence.

The LAF were among the first to develop capabilities to monitor, assess, and analyze the information environment in real time. MOD communications promote public awareness about security and military processes in Lithuania. Other security institutions such as the State Security Department and Second Investigation Department under the MOD carry out internationally acknowledged public communication and education campaigns on potential risks to Lithuanian citizens, and their annual national threat assessment reports became branded analysis regarding geopolitical trends.[41]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has taken the lead in strategic communication to partner with state institutions to represent Lithuania's position abroad and to push the issue of information security up to the EU agenda.[42] Additionally, the Threat Prevention and Crisis Management Bureau (Group) in the Office of the Lithuanian Government steers and coordinates strategic communication activities between different state institutions, consolidating the comprehensive threat monitoring and crisis management mechanism. In 2020, the government approved coordination procedures for national security strategic communications.

Civic society is directly engaged in the national information environment monitoring and fact-checking, strengthening society's media and information literacy. Examples include civic activists

volunteering to work in the information technology, media, academic, education, and business sectors, such as the Lithuanian "elves;" or a mainstream media initiative; a fact-checking platform such as Debunkeu; and many others.[43] The National NGO Coalition, uniting nongovernmental organizations umbrella associations working in different areas of public policy, contributes significantly to society's resilience-building and is active in positive narrative communication. Although the state provides financial assistance to the civic society, the major financial support for the civic society comes from international donors. Cooperation between state institutions and society sets a framework for the whole-of-society approach to become tangible and long lasting.

Strategic communications are not sufficient for developing long-term social resilience. Lithuanian experts assisted by Swedish colleagues adapted the concept of psychological defense by basing their approach on the country's realities and a long-term strategy to build up resilient, well-informed decision-makers, institutions, and society, empowering them by providing practical knowledge and tools to ensure their readiness and willingness to act during a crisis.[44]

Overall, since 2014 Lithuanian institutional response to national security threats has gained momentum. Considering the nature of the threats and the speed and scope of hostile activities carried out by Russia, at the beginning a lot of response activities among state-institutions and civic society were carried out informally, based merely on coordinated efforts of interested groups and individuals. Today, the response process has become much more institutionalized.

The Political-Bureaucratic Aspect

Since regaining independence the government delegated much greater decision-making autonomy to the MOD than to other ministries. This created two problems. First, MOD officials were not inclined

to share the power of a national defense monopoly. On the other hand, politicians and officials in other ministries and institutions were not very eager to claim and take over more responsibilities and tasks that would increase their workload. However, it appears that Lithuania's MOD, due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Belarusian border crisis, is on track to share custody of national security with other institutions.

Since 2014, most strategic decisions concerning the establishment and strengthening of political and military institutions have been aimed at preparing Lithuania to face hybrid threats. The first and crucial lesson learned from the experience of Russia's war against Ukraine was that national security and defense cannot be the business of the MOD and LAF alone. Diverse threats and risks require a whole-of-government approach and coordinated action among all state institutions and agencies. This can only take place if there is a functioning coordination unit in the government. Yet, theory and practice are two separate realms. It took several years for the government to finalize the National Model for Integrated Crisis Prevention and Hybrid Threats Management[45] (the Model), a legal and procedural framework for implementing Lithuania's National Security Strategy[46] that structures national efforts to monitor and assess national threats, design prevention and crisis solving plans, and conduct risk management. The new edition of the Law on Civil Protection (June 2022) and related bills defined the creation of an integrated crisis management and civil protection system for crises and emergencies, including nuclear or other potential disasters. In addition, the Threat Management and Crisis Prevention Bureau (Group) functions as a secretariat of the National Security Commission,[47] which monitors the implementation of tasks on a daily basis to secure the smooth functioning of the Model. With the start of the new year (January 2023), the Bureau/Group will be transformed into the National

Crisis Management Center.[48] The Center is tasked to continuously monitor situations, assess and forecast threats to national security, and contribute to the implementation of national security objectives set by the government. The Center is also responsible for the coordinated assessment of key state institutions' functional resilience; namely, it supervises the NATO seven baseline requirements[49] of civil preparedness. While it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this effort, Lithuania must take steps to ensure that bureaucratic inertia does not hinder necessary cooperation.[50]

The COVID-19 pandemic public health crisis was a stress test for the Lithuanian total defense system and revealed deficiencies in the crisis management system, indicating that an overhaul is in order. The outgoing political leadership passed important new versions of Mobilization and Wartime acts. A new ruling majority came to power in late 2020 and immediately went into action, initiating a revision of the National Security Strategy, while the newly appointed Minister of Defense announced a government-wide effort to create a state defense plan designed to create the first functioning total defense system.[51]

On Cyber Security

In the wake of the 2007 Russian cyber attacks on Estonia, Lithuania elevated cybersecurity high on the political agenda and decided to build advanced cyber capabilities, which are today producing results. Lithuania has applied a systematic approach to ensure the security of state information resources and its information technologies by adopting the Cyber Security Law in 2014, launching the National Cyber Security Centre (NKSC) under the MOD in 2015, adopting a Cyber Security Strategy in 2018, and establishing the position of Vice-Minister for Cyber Security.

The branches of the NKSC, equally important for national cyber security, are the National Cyber Incident Management Centre CERT-LT and sectoral Mil-CERT (launched in 2021), responsible for managing cyber incidents in the military defense system. Since the summer of 2021, the NKSC also runs the Regional Cyber Defence Center (RCDC) as the main platform for practical cooperation in the field of cyber with the United States. The RCDC members are Ukraine, Georgia, Poland, and Lithuania.[52]

The MOD is responsible for the development and implementation of national cyber security and its integration into national defense. The LAF has cyber security troops and annually runs cyber security and defense drills, such as "Amber Mist."[53] Cyber security scenarios have become an integral part of military as well as mobilization exercises.

Within a few years, Lithuania has become one of the leading states in cyber security expertise and is among the leaders in the buildup of cyber capabilities of the EU. Lithuania is ranked fourth globally and second in the EU in the ITU (International Telecommunication Union) Global Cybersecurity Index, with the highest scores in the legal, technical, organizational, and cooperation domains.[54] Following this assessment of its capacities, Lithuania simultaneously follows two parallel directions: building up national cyber security capacities and strengthening mutual interstate assistance capacities. Lithuania initiated and now leads both the PESCO CRRT and the Mutual Assistance in Cyber Security project,[55] and is also among the leaders of one of five Counter Ransomware Initiative groups. The MOD secures the core network to ensure the continued functioning of the institutions engaged in national mobilization. The current trajectory is designed to make Lithuanian capabilities in cyber security even greater and stronger.

Energy Security

In addition to cyber security, Lithuania is well known in transatlantic circles for its advocacy of energy security. The Law on the Protection

LNG carrier Energy Liberty is moored at Klaipėda LNG terminal for LNG reloading operation. Image by: Andrius Pelakauskas/ Klaipėda Nafta. March 23, 2020

of Objects of Importance to Ensuring National Security includes energy and contains criteria for assessing the compliance of investors with the interests of national security while setting a framework for economic ties with Russia and China. It has been applied numerous times and has stopped questionable investments.[56]

Lithuania has already refuted the Russian-created narrative that its energy system cannot function without Russian energy resources. Since May 2022, Lithuania has not paid a single penny to Russia for energy resources, refusing to import gas, electricity, or oil from Russia.[57] In the early 2000s, energy security was a rare topic on NATO or EU security agendas. Lithuania, facing constant pressure

from Russia, complained that Moscow was setting the price of natural gas on political, not economic, criteria. Because of that, Lithuania ended up paying one of the highest per capita costs of energy in Europe. The situation became even more dire in 2010 when Vilnius closed the Ignalina nuclear plant as required by EU membership obligations; Lithuania changed overnight from being an electricity exporter to importing 65 percent of its electricity.[58] It is not surprising that Lithuania sought similarly minded states to lobby the EU and NATO to address the issue of energy as a security challenge. Eventually, these attempts proved successful. Establishing NATO's Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Vilnius serves as recognition of Lithuania's role on this

issue.[59] In 2014, Lithuania opened a floating Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Klaipėda, completed the EU's Third Energy Package, and increased the capacity of Lithuania's pipeline system. This enabled Lithuania to acquire natural gas in international markets and eliminated Russia's monopoly in the natural gas sector in Lithuania and the Baltic region. These changes have transformed Lithuania from paying one of the highest prices for natural gas to having the lowest prices for natural gas in the EU.[60] Currently, Lithuania imports no gas from Russia, and U.S. gas through the Klaipėda LNG terminal already accounts for almost 80 percent of Lithuania's gas imports. The 508-kilometer-long bi-directional Lithuanian-Polish gas pipeline GIPL (Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania), completed at the beginning of 2022 and open since May 1, 2022, has significantly increased the energy security of the whole region by expanding supply options. GIPL has connected the gas markets of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland to the European Union,[61] and it gives Poland access to the Klaipėda LNG terminal.[62]

Although Lithuania remains the largest electricity importer in the EU, Vilnius has multiplied its international electricity connections, which supports its energy security. Lithuania is connected to the Nordic electricity market by the NordBalt link (a Lithuanian-Swedish submarine power cable) and the EstLink 1 and 2 (an Estonia-Finland interconnection). Lithuania is also connected with the Western electricity markets by LitPol Link 1.

Although Lithuania maintains power connections with Belarus and Kaliningrad, the country has already taken control of much of its electric power system, and it has implemented key synchronization projects that ensure the security of the national electric power system. This means that Lithuania's main generating capacity is ready to operate on the continental European system, and in case of an emergency (accident, disconnection), Lithuania can ensure the uninterrupted operation of the country's electric power system with the help of Polish partners.[63] Therefore, Lithuania plans to end the synchronization with the European electric power systems in 2024 (a year earlier than planned initially). Until then, a Lithuanian isolated operation test is planned, followed by a joint isolated operation test of the Baltic power systems.[64]

The 200-megawatt battery is another project of great importance for electric power system security and stability, which will be finally commissioned in December 2022 or January 2023.[65]

To further reduce dependency on electricity imports Lithuania has set a strategic goal of generating 103 percent of its own electricity needs by 2030, 93 percent of which will be renewable, or green, power.[66] Today 37.8 percent of needed electricity is self-generated, of which 62 percent is green electricity.[67] Also, the national focus is on household energy self-sufficiency, and one in three households will generate its own energy by 2030.[68]

In the context of hybrid threats, the importance of the electric power supply has been seen as a possible area where hybrid war (or conflict) might be launched. Such a scenario has been played out by numerous tabletop exercises.

Another energy-related risk is the Ostrovets nuclear power plant, located in Belarus some 30 kilometers from the Lithuanian border. It is a Russian-Belarus project, and it poses a nuclear and environmental threat to Lithuania and Europe. The plant runs counter to both the Espoo and Aarhus Conventions, and it has not implemented EU stress test recommendations.[69] Because national law bans the purchase of electric power from unsafe sources, Lithuania has suspended power trading with Belarus, and in September 2021, Lithuania restricted the access of electricity from the Ostrovets nuclear power plant to the Baltic market.[70] Even so, the current national energy security situation and Lithuania's efforts to reach this level of security qualify as major successes.

Society Engagement in Defense Matters: Bringing Society Back In

Lithuania continues to debate and discuss society's engagement in national defense. The underlying idea is that capable armed forces and the international allies' support are necessary but not sufficient to contain and defeat the aggressor. It is therefore crucial to involve and empower everyone, making the country's defense their matter of concern as well—constituting a whole-of-society approach.

The important role of society in defense matters seemed to be obvious, bearing in mind that Lithuania restored its independence with the help of civic, nonviolent reform movements. Lithuania remembers that independence was established because of this nonviolent nature and legacy, and its lessons were used and incorporated into the national defense and security strategies and laws.[71] Yet, for many years, civic engagement was not taken into serious consideration, and it was assumed that societal resistance and the ability to mobilize were part and parcel of the Lithuanian mindset. This held especially true during the 2000s, when preparation for, and later, membership in NATO and EU narrowed Lithuania's defense and military policy to expeditionary warfighting and stability operations.[72] Russian aggression in Ukraine led to the national total defense posture and the need to define what the total defense concept meant to Lithuania and, importantly, how to implement it. The key issue is how to involve civilians in national defense. The national defense strategy of Lithuania relies on this concept of civic-based defense.[73]

The semantics of "defense" and "resistance" and how they are perceived in Lithuania are formed by the Lithuanian post–World War II Forest Brothers (a military resistance), where "resistance" is understood to mean "insurgency" and "military fight." Therefore, when people hear the word "resistance," most of them associate it with a kinetic fight, rather than its nonviolent version.

This semantic confusion is a good illustration of Lithuanian's perception of war and defense. Despite the diversity of its historical experiences, Lithuanians with some difficulty accept the idea that defense is not only a violent phenomenon, but that it has its nonviolent side as well. Nevertheless, defense is still often considered to be a mission for the armed forces.

To strengthen citizens involvement in preparations for the state's defense, Lithuanian government and parliament initiated the revision of the state-controlled paramilitary organization's (Lithuanian Riflemen's Union) strategy. In November 2022, a new law concerning this organization was passed. Starting from 2023, its main function will be civic defense. Its annual budget will increase from €2 million to €17 million in the next 2 years. The ambition is to increase its membership from 10,000 to 50,000 in the next 10 years.[74] In other words, alongside its armed forces, Lithuania is building a civilian component, which in time of crisis and war will serve as a supporting institution for the military.

When it comes to civilian-based defense of Lithuania, education plays an extremely important role. Better education is a key to a strong and resilient society. Critical and informed citizens with a strong sense of duty are groomed starting in primary school.

The Lithuanian National Education Strategy[75] clearly defines the role of education as part of national security. Education about national security is multi-dimensional and includes such topics as civic education, education on national security, and media and information literacy, and is not limited only to these topics due to the changing security environment. There is more than one state institution engaged in national security education; for example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as the institutions and agencies

of defense have roles to play. Using education to strengthen national security is not questioned; active citizenship education has been discussed at Lithuania's political level for almost 20 years, and leaders have focused on national security and media literacy education since 2014.

Education faces several challenges. First, civic education and education on national security are not included in the compulsory school curriculum, so it depends on the willingness of teachers and their skills and attitude toward the subject. There is also a lack of coordination of teaching initiatives and programs and assessments of their effectiveness.

A major reason for such inconsistency is that after joining the EU and NATO, Lithuania did not see a reason to teach national security classes in schools. Children had compulsory civic education classes, which were mainly about democracy, civil society, and civic and political rights. Starting in 2014, the Ministries of National Defense and Education cooperated and created a national security education program, publishing textbooks and proposing optional national security and defense modules for seniors in schools.

Education on national security and information literacy is a crucial competency, but the Lithuanian government also needs to persuade the public of the need to improve their knowledge of national security, active citizenship, and media skills.

In May 2022, nearly 3 months into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Lithuania's Parliament adopted the Strategy for Preparing Citizens for Civil Resistance,[76] which focused on preparing an implementation plan for military and nonmilitary resistance that is much broader than strictly resistance against occupation. Resilience is a society's strength in peacetime that becomes resistance in wartime against an aggressor and is the key strategic focus when building up a resilient society. Preparing for resistance includes developing the will to defend the country, improving citizens' military and nonmilitary knowledge and skills, and more, as part of a national defense.[77]

A public opinion survey from 2017 shows that Lithuanian society has considerable civic potential to defend their country in the face of foreign aggression.[78] Eighty-eight percent of respondents think that defending the country is the duty of every citizen. Neither the Lithuanian elite nor the society is willing to repeat the mistake of the 1940s when the Lithuanian government surrendered to Russia's Red Army without a fight. (Male respondents and young people are more willing to participate in the defense of the country than women and senior citizens because these two groups think they cannot contribute personally to Lithuania's defense. Moreover, they do not know in what way and what form their contributions to Lithuania's defense could be relevant.)

The Invasion of Ukraine: Evolution, Not Revolution

Russia's invasion redeemed Lithuania's long-standing threat assessment of Russian expansionism while signaling that the country's security policy direction—to deploy total defense initiatives, modernize armed forces, and deepen NATO interconnectivity—was right all along. Considering this, the war only accelerated Vilnius's decisionmaking on defense and sped up the implementation of key policy priorities. One key example of this acceleration includes the March 2022 increase in defense spending to 2.52 percent of GDP (a staggering 47 percent increase year-on-year, fast-tracked ahead of the initial 2030 deadline). Another example was the decision to be the first European country to stop importing Russian gas; consequently, Russian oil is no longer supplied to Mažeikiai refinery, the only refinery in the Baltics. This in part was made possible by Lithuania's procurement of the floating LNG storage facility and a re-gasification terminal, as well as by the Poland-Lithuania GIPL.

Militarily, the country already completed its first military modernization program, scheduled

Border guard Arvydas Vilkaitis protects Lithuania's national border on the easternmost point of Lithuania in the Ignalina district. Photo by: Justinas Stacevicius, June 10, 2021

for 2022, and has expedited the start of the second phase. While data about specific acquisitions is scarce, Lithuania will procure new artillery systems, fighting drones, infantry fighting vehicles, and air defense systems, committing itself to €1 billion.

Politically, the government, in preparation for the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, is also advocating to shift NATO's strategy from deterrence to forward defense, stressing Germany's role in beefing up the region's security, and to expand the NATO presence in the region, with the permanent deployment of American troops in the country. The United States has initiated communications about the creation of permanent bases, but not yet permanent stationing. The Lithuanian government has also activated a defense-oriented venture capital fund, with further plans to join NATO's accelerator and venture capital initiatives as well.

With Lithuania being one of the first countries jumping to support Ukraine on the military, political, societal, and humanitarian levels, the importance of a whole-of-society approach was highlighted again in general and includes the training of territorial defense units.

All these initiatives are subject to a new agreement currently being discussed by the Lithuanian political parties, but in general there is strong support for these initiatives.

Conclusion

Major changes have taken place in Lithuanian security and defense policy since 2014; these changes discussed above prove that Lithuania's defense posture deserves high praise. It is natural that the country's focus first rested on, and major efforts

were allocated to, the warfighting capacity buildup of the LAF. Today, there is a clear understanding that the country's total defense posture is larger than just preparedness for conventional warfighting. The best defense is achieved when a smart balance is established between the country's military capacities, strong alliances, and the society gathered behind the military to support defense.

State inter-institutional interoperability should be sped up while Lithuania's politicians, the military community, and Lithuania's wider society must acknowledge the importance of non-kinetic elements of defense. Lithuanian society's engagement in the country's defense process has significant potential. Yet these major improvements in defense do not mean that the mission is accomplished. On the conceptual side, Lithuanians should initiate and seriously engage in debate about the importance and place of civil, nonviolent resistance in state defense. Institutionally, the government should acknowledge and prioritize the whole-of-society approach. State defense should not be perceived only as a matter of the MOD and Armed Forces. Defense should be co-owned by a variety of players. The government should facilitate this co-ownership by initiating new laws and revising old laws, procedures, and other legal documents. The government should engage and involve local authorities in all these activities. Finally, Lithuania should invest more in the general education of the population and include a wide array of themes concerning security and defense. Knowledgeable, critically aware, and creative people are the best line of defense.

Total defense is most effective when it is compatible with Lithuanian allies' defense concepts and practice: NATO allies, the EU member states, and neighbors of the Baltic Sea region. Shared total defense concepts are essential to make the collaborative response to any incursion real and effective. Moreover, it prevents misinterpretation of events and management of actions. Total defense is only as strong as its weakest element. How quickly state and regional institutions and agencies meet the requirements for total defense will depend on political consistency and leadership. Nonetheless, Lithuania is committed to total defense. PRISM

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