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Ready or Not? Explaining Military Strategic Diversity Among NATO's New European Allies

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the defense transformation processes during the two initial decades of the twenty-first century among the 11 former communist states that currently are members of both the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The article introduces an analytical framework for systematic comparisons of states' priorities regarding military strategy. Moreover, the article evaluates the influence of two intervening variables: (i) differences in relative power between middle powers and small states and (ii) differences in geographical exposure. Our findings suggest that differences related to these intervening variables correlate with differences in prioritized strategic ends, means, and ways.

KEYWORDS

Defence transformation; Central and Eastern Europe; Military strategy; New EU/NATO members; Realism; Strategic studies

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This military aggression did not only constitute a major escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian War that began in 2014. It also signified the final blow to the idea of a peaceful and stable European security order that was created in the early 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the Warsaw Pact (WP), respectively.

Although the scale of the renewed military aggression surprised several observers, Russia's willingness to use military force to achieve its political objectives had already been vindicated in Georgia (2008) and Crimea and Donbas (2014). Nevertheless, many European states had been reluctant to respond to the gradually deteriorating regional security environment. Additionally, defense transformation processes initiated during the late 1990s had put the members of the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic

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Treaty Organization (NATO) in a difficult position to rapidly regain dismantled capacities for national defense.

In this article, we analyze to which extent the 11 former communist states[1] that became members of both the EU and NATO between 1999 and 2013 adjusted their military strategies due to systematic pressures emanating from their memberships and the changes in their external security environment during the first decades of the twenty-first century. Despite their common experiences of great power aggression and/or oppression during the Second World War and the Cold War era, the strategic adjustments among the eleven new allies are far from uniform. In addition to describing the differences in strategic priorities regarding military strategic ends, means, and ways, the article evaluates the influence from two intervening unit-level characteristics: differences in relative power and geographical position. To what extent do differences relating to these two covariates with differences in strategic priorities make these states more or less able to respond to armed aggression from a qualified state adversary and contribute to common efforts in this regard?

The defense strategies of the eleven new allies have not yet been comprehensively explored, nor systematically compared.[2] Consequently, we argue that our project offers a unique empirical contribution to previous research. Moreover, the new allies' responses are of particular interest against the

[1]The 11 new allies are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic (Czechia), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

[2]Aspects of the security and defense policy of the individual countries are most often to be found in academic journals with a specific focus on Central and Eastern Europe such as *East European Politics and Societies*, and *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*. Occasionally, articles exploring individual Central and East European countries can be found in "Western" journals such as *Armed Forces & Society*, and *Contemporary Security Policy*. From time to time, studies with a comparative approach are published. However, most often, these comparisons cover, as does M. Hadžić, Timotić, and P. Petrović (eds.), *Security Policies in the Western Balkans* (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy 2010), only a group of the Central and East European countries such as the Baltic States, the Visegrad Group, or the Balkans rather than all 11 new Allies explored in this article. Monographs going in-depth when analyzing the defense policy of individual Central and East European countries are rare. In addition, these projects, such as J. Zajac, *Poland's Security Policy – The West, Russia, and the Changing International Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2016), tend to focus on security policy rather than on strategy. So is also the case with most edited volumes. A. Péczeli (ed.), *The Relations of Central European Countries with the United States* (Budapest: Dialóg Campus 2019) focused, for example, on the relations of the Central European countries with the U.S. Moreover, in her volume, the countries are addressed individually. Other volumes covering several of the Central and East European countries also tend to approach them on an individual rather than on a collective level. Notably, some of these volumes contrast between the old and the new allies. The works of T. Lansford and B. Tashev (eds.), *Old Europe, New Europe and the US: Renegotiating Transatlantic Security in the Post 9/11 Era* (Abingdon: Routledge 2005) as well as R. Czulda and M. Madej *Newcomers no More? – Contemporary NATO and the Future of the Enlargement from the Perspective of 'Post-Cold War' Members* (Warsaw: International Relations Research Institute 2015) are such examples. Defense reform and military transformation covering some of the Central and East European countries are the most frequent approaches. A. Forster, T. Edmunds, and A. Cottey (eds.), *The Challenge of Military Reform in Post-communist Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002) focused, for example, specifically on Post-communist Europe. Other works have included Central and East European countries alongside states from other regions when focusing on the phenomenon of transformation rather than on strategy. T. Edmunds and M. Malesic (eds.), *Defence Transformation in Europe: evolving military roles* (Amsterdam: IOS Press 2005), as well as T. Bruneau and H. Trinkunas *Global Politics of Defense Reform* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2008) are both examples of this. Finally, N. Vanaga and T. Rostoks (eds.), *Deterring Russia in Europe: Defence Strategies for Neighbouring States* (Abingdon: Routledge 2019), focused on one of the aspects addressed in this article, deterring neighboring Russia. However, in their edited volume they include not only Central and East European countries but other states as well. Moreover, they address their cases individually and, in addition, not as part of studying the military strategies of former Eastern states becoming the new allies of both NATO and the EU.

backdrop of the present Russian-Ukrainian War. Four of the new allies have a land border with Russia, but the full-scale invasion indicates that war has literary come closer to the borders of additional states included in this study. Furthermore, in December 2021, Russia officially announced its renewed ambition to re-establish the sphere of influence it had during the Cold War and reverse the outcome of NATO's enlargements since 1997.[3] All the eleven new allies have previous experiences of being victims of great power agreements. The Munich Agreement in 1938, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, and the Yalta Conference in 1945 constitute, according to Ainius Lašas, a "black trinity" that together affected all 11 of the new allies.[4]

However, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine from 2014 and onwards is not only a challenge to the post-Cold War European security order. President George H.W. Bush's ambitions that a reformed NATO would promote the project of building a "whole and free" democratic community in Europe was an integral part of a U.S.-led liberal international order based on institutions established during the Cold War era. According to political scientist Professor Mary Hampton, the Western institutional integration and the enlargement processes included accommodating Russia. Yet, there was never a strong push from either Russia or the Western political leadership to integrate Russia into NATO and/or the EU. Moreover, Russia's resistance to a U.S.-led liberal international order did not begin with Vladimir Putin's rise to power. Already in 1996, the Russian foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, argued that a unipolar world dominated by the US could not be tolerated and that Russia therefore should facilitate the emergence of a multipolar order in which it would play a key role.[5]

In the next section, we discuss the changes in the European security dynamics during the twenty-first century and the institutional pressures related to membership processes. The following two sections introduce the theoretical framework of this study. The first presents an operationalization of each of the three key elements of military strategy. This operationalization aims to enable more nuanced systematic comparisons of differences in strategic priorities. The second introduces the two intervening variables: relative power and geographical position. This theoretical framework offers

[3]Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 'Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees' Moscow: Kremlin, 17 December 2021. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 'Agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization' Moscow: Kremlin, 17 December 2021 https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en&clear_cache=Y.

[4]A. Lašas, *European Union and NATO Expansion: Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010) pp. 8-12.

[5]M. Hampton, 'The historical significance of NATO' in M. Slobodchikoff, D. Davis, and B. Stewart (eds.), *The challenge to NATO: Global security and the Atlantic alliance* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books 2021) pp. 59-60. This competition between Russia and the West also includes elements of contenting soft power strategies involving competing cultural values triggering nationalistic counter-reactions in some of the former communist states. For an in-depth study on this aspect of the conflict, see D. Davis and M. Slobodchikoff, *Cultural Imperialism and the Decline of the Liberal Order: Russian and Western Soft Power in Eastern Europe* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2019).

a comparative approach to analyzing strategy that challenges traditional great power-centric approaches to strategic research often assuming that one strategy should fit all states. In contrast, we argue that explanations of strategic priorities must consider national characteristics related to differences in relative power and geographical location, as well as to differences related to regional security systems.[6] In the remaining sections, this framework is used to compare and explain the new allies' strategic responses to a changing security environment.

The changing European security dynamics

During the first decade of the new millennium, several scholars and practitioners assumed that the Yugoslav Wars 1991-2001 were the end of the era of reoccurring European wars. In a study on "the new European security dynamics", Janne Haaland Matlary argued that the "nation-state model of defense" had been replaced with new "post-national" ideas regarding the use of armed force. In this new paradigm, previous conceptions of war as existential struggles between competing nation-states were replaced by a new kind of "optional wars" where states were contributing to international operations far beyond their own borders rather than defending their own territory and citizens. Consequently, the notion of national defense gradually became less relevant for the actual use of military force.[7] Even observers with a military background, such as the former Norwegian Chief of Defense, General Sverre Diesen, argued that the fall of the "totalitarian ideologies" and the political and economic integration in "our part of the world", meant that the European countries no longer had to calculate with the risk of new existential wars between themselves. According to Diesen, this development also meant that armed forces were primarily to be manned by professional soldiers and used in minor conflicts to achieve limited political aims.[8]

Timothy Edmunds claims that the early post-Cold War era was characterized by a "significant shift" toward a new kind of mission for the European armed forces. These new missions aimed to counter threats related to international terrorism, regional instability caused by intra-state conflicts, the supply of strategic resources, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. To contribute to these multilateral military operations, European states had to develop capabilities related to expeditionary warfare,

[6]For an extended argument on this issue, see H. Edström, D. Gyllensporre, and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States. Responding to the External Shocks of the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge 2019) and H. Edström and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Middle Powers: Competing for Security, Influence and Status in the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge 2020).

[7]J. H. Matlary, *European Union Security Dynamics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2009) pp. 3, 24-25.

[8]S. Diesen, 'Mot et alliansintegrert forsvar', in Ø. Østerud and J. H. Matlary (eds.), *Mot et avnasjonalisert forsvar?* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag 2005) pp. 167-170. The British general Rubert Smith presented an argument along similar lines in his study *The Utility of Force: The Art of Warfare in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred a Knopf 2007).

including flexible and technologically advanced force structures with professional soldiers able to interact with the armed forces of other participating states. Institutionally, pressures to develop these capabilities were channelized programs such as NATO's Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan. Within the EU, the 1999 Helsinki Head Line Goals provided additional impetus to these defense transformation processes.[9] The defense planning of the WP had left many of the new allies with decaying Soviet technology and an oversized force structure that was incompatible with NATO's new operational needs.[10]

However, the expectations regarding the establishment of a stable and peaceful European security order have proven to be premature. Russia's willingness to use military force for political purposes was visible well before 2022 and several observers had previously warned that Russia's key objective was to reassert a leading role for itself on the world scene and hence to disrupt the post-Cold War European security architecture.[11] However, following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO re-activated its defense planning, increased the number and scope of military exercises, and enhanced its forward presence in Eastern Europe.[12]

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 created an increased sense of urgency among European states to rapidly enhance the cost of further Russian military aggression and to provide support for Ukraine. Clearly, each state's ability to respond to these challenges is dependent on the strategic priorities made during the previous decades.

An analytical framework for comparative strategy

Military strategy concerns the creation, direction, and use of national military capacities. According to Richard Betts, strategy is the link between military means and political ends and a "scheme for how to make one produce the other".[13] Colin Gray claimed that strategy concerns "the direction and use made of means by chosen ways to achieve desired ends".[14] Similar to Betts and Gray, we approach the concept of military strategy as a matching set of ends, ways, and means.[15]

[9]T. Edmunds, 'A New European Security Environment? The Evolution of Military Roles in Post-Cold War Europe', in T. Edmunds and M. Malesic (eds.), *Defence Transformation in Europe: Evolving Military Roles* (Amsterdam: IOS Press 2005) pp. 10-11 and 14.

[10]J. Simon, 'NATO's Membership Action Plan and Defense Planning', *Problems of Post-Communism*, May/June 2001 pp 29-31.

[11]J. Karlsbergs, 'It is better to be prepared for a war that never comes than to rely on a peace that did not last' in M. Slobodchikoff, D. Davis, and B. Stewart (eds.), *The Challenge to NATO: Global Security and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books 2021) p. 192.

[12]M. Hampton, 'The historical significance of NATO' p. 61.

[13]R. Betts, 'Is strategy an illusion?', *International Security* 25(2) (2000) p. 5.

[14]C. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010) p. 18.

[15]See also A. Lykke, 'Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy', in Arthur Lykke (ed.), *Military Strategy: Theory and Application* (Carlisle: US Army War College 1989) and A. Herberg-Rothe, 'Clausewitz's Concept of Strategy–Balancing Purpose, Aims and Means', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37(6-7) (2014)

Regarding **ends**, we analyze the military strategies by focusing on three basic interests: survival, influence, and status. The former two correspond to the competing views in the debate between defensive and offensive realism, respectively. According to Kenneth Waltz, each state must have the survival of its own state as its most fundamental end, since this is a "prerequisite to achieving any goal that states may have". To protect their survival, states are recommended to use a combination of internal and external efforts, such as practicing unilateral or collective counter-balancing strategies against expansive powers.[16] In our operationalization, *survival* is seen as including both measures to ensure the continued existence of states and general considerations related to the protection of states' security and territorial integrity. In contrast to defensive realists, offensive realists argue that states should pursue power-maximizing strategies to improve their relative position and increase their ability to enforce their will on other states.[17] According to John Mearsheimer, great powers are "rarely content with the current distribution of power" and "almost always have revisionist intentions".[18] We view increased relative power and *influence* as a second alternative basic end. However, since our selection of cases only includes middle powers and small states, our operationalization of influence includes a broader range of goals related to increasing influence, rather than efforts to promote a change in the distribution of power in the global or regional state system.[19]

Additionally, states may have interests in gaining recognition for having a certain *status*. During the Cold War, some researchers emphasized this aspect of power competition.[20] In the twenty-first century, the interest in status competition has resurged. Deborah Welch Larson and her colleagues define status as "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes". Status, they argue, manifests itself in two distinct ways: as membership in a defined club of actors and as a relative standing within a particular club.[21] Obviously, the level of ambition regarding status is different when comparing great powers with states of lower ranks. However, small states and

[16]K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press) pp. 126-127.
[17]H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: McGraw-Hill 2006) pp. 29-30.
[18]J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (London: WW Norton 2001) pp. 2-3.
[19]P. Jakobsen, 'Small states, big influence: The overlooked Nordic influence on the civilian ESDP', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47(1) (2009).
[20]See, for example, C. Holbraad, *Middle Powers in International Politics* (London: Macmillan 1984) and H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society – A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan 1995).
[21]D. W. Larson, T.V. Paul, and W. Wohlforth, 'Status and World Order', in T.V. Paul, D. W. Larson, and W. Wohlforth (eds.), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2014) pp. 7-8. For further discussion on status see, for example, R. Schweller, 'Realism and the Present Great Power System', in E. Kapstein and M. Mastanduno (eds.), *Unipolar Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press 1999), D. Larson and A. Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers. Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy', *International Security* 34(4) (2010), T. Volgy, R. Corbetta, K. Grant, and R. Baird (eds.), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politic*. (New York: Palgrave 2011), W. Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity Status Competition and Great Power War' in J. Ikenberry, M. Mastanduno, and W. Wohlforth (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011), W. Thompson 'Status Conflict, Hierarchies, and Interpretation Dilemmas', in T.V. Paul, D. W. Larson, and W. Wohlforth (eds.), *Status in World Politics* and J. Renshon, *Fighting for Status* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2017).

middle powers may have an interest in gaining recognition from others confirming a certain identity or role, for example being a competent and trustworthy partner.[22] The three basic ends — survival, influence, and status — are not mutually exclusive. What matters in our empirical analysis is which of them the political leadership *prioritizes* in questions related to the use of their armed forces.[23]

When it comes to military **means**, the short-term perspective concerns the quality, quantity, and level of preparedness of the armed forces.[24] In the long-term perspective, the calculus shifts towards the nations' strategic resources, including the projected size of the defense budget, the defense industrial base, manpower, innovation, and military infrastructure, as well as the logistical base.[25] Regarding the use of force, Barry Posen introduced a useful distinction between means deployed for national defense and means on foreign soil, i.e. "in the theatres in which they would fight".[26] We have used a similar distinction between military capabilities primarily developed for *national defense* and capabilities primarily related to *expeditionary warfare* outside the state's own region.[27] This distinction is useful for this article as well since it focuses on the two main alternative responses to the changes in the external security environment discussed in the previous section. Regarding *expeditionary warfare*, previous research has identified spectra ranging from superpowers' efforts of global power projection via regional power projection to contribution warfare.[28] We expect that the new allies' efforts regarding expeditionary warfare will mainly be restricted toward contribution warfare.

When addressing the **ways**, we find few agreements in the literature.[29] In a study on middle powers' strategic adjustment, we focused on one fundamental aspect of how states use and develop their military resources: the choice between *unilateral* or *multilateral* approaches.[30] Since this dichotomy directs the attention to questions related to how far states are prepared to integrate their resources with allies, as well as different levels of ambition when

[22]P. V. Jakobsen, J. Ringsmose and H. L. Saxi, 'Prestige-Seeking Small States', *European Journal of International Security* 3(2) (2018), J. Ångström, 'Contribution Warfare: Sweden's Lessons from the War in Afghanistan', *Parameters* 50(4) (2020).

[23]On the possibility of pursuing different kinds of ends simultaneously, see S. Tangredi, 'Assessing New Missions', in H. Binnendijk (ed.), *Transforming America's Military* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press 2002).

[24]J. Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Brassey's 2002).

[25]A. Tellis, J. Bially, C. Layne, and M. McPherson, *Measuring national power in the postindustrial age* (Santa Barbara, CA: Rand 2001).

[26]B. Posen, 'Command of the Commons', *International Security* 28(1) (2003) p. 18.

[27]H. Edström and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Middle Powers: Competing for Security, Influence and Status in the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge 2020).

[28]B. Posen, 'Command of the Commons'; J. Vance, 'Tactics without Strategy, or why the Canadian Forces do not Campaign' in A. English, D. Gosselin, H. Coombs, and L. Hickey (eds.), *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press 2005), S. Brooks and W. Wohlforth, 'The Rise and Fall of Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century' *International Security* 40(3) (2016), J. Ångström, 'Contribution Warfare'.

[29]For additional interpretations of this element of strategy, see, for example, B. Buzan, *An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (New York: St. Martin´s Press 1987), L. Freedman, 'The Revolution in Strategic Affairs' *Adelphi Papers*, 38(3) (1998), C. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

[30]H. Edström and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Middle Powers.*

Table 1. Military strategy.

Ends	Means	Ways
• Survival • Influence • Status	• National defense • Expeditionary warfare	• Unilateral approach • Multilateral approach

it comes to developing unilateral military capabilities, this approach is suitable also for this study.

To be able to contribute to international Peace Support Operations (PSOs), states must develop several capabilities. One such key capability is *interoperability* with armed forces from other states. This includes developing new professional skills and tactics, such as counter-insurgency strategies. Since the opponent in this kind of warfare mostly is a non-state actor, it creates a need for *smaller, lighter, and mobile units* that can adjust to a complex and changing conflict environment. Consequently, these capabilities create demands for *professional* soldiers. Regarding military capacities, expeditionary warfare also creates demands on various *logistic chains* and *transport systems* for the deployment of military units outside the own region.

States that prioritize national defense are expected to give greater attention to *unilateral* capabilities related to the defense of their own territory. However, due to power asymmetries with potentially threatening states, less resourceful states may also give priority to efforts related to *collective defense* within an alliance. If possible, these states will invest in *technologically advanced military equipment*, such as air defense systems. In Table 1 below, the operationalization of the elements of military strategy is summarized.

The influence of national characteristics

Scholars working in the neoclassical realist tradition have explained differences in strategic choices and performances by referring to national characteristics related to the domestic systems of states.[31] Unlike some of the research within this tradition, we do not enter the arena of domestic politics. Instead, we hold on to the classical realist core assumption of states being unitary actors and focus our attention on national characteristics.[32] Our first intervening variable, *relative power*, relates to research on middle powers and small states.[33] However, even though this research tradition dates back to the Cold

[31]See, for example, G. Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', *World Politics* 51(1) (1998), R. Schweller, 'Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing', *International Security* 29(2) (2004), B. Rathbun, 'A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism', *Security Studies* 17(2) (2008).

[32]J. Legro and A. Moravcsik, 'Is Anybody Still a Realist?', *International Security* 24(2) (1999).

[33]See, for example, A. Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1959); D. Vital, *The Inequality of States* (Oxford: Calderon Press 1967); R. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press 1968); C. Holbraad, *Middle Powers in International Politics*, M. Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books/RUSI 1986); B. Gilley and A. O'Neil (eds.), *Middle Powers and the Rise of China* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press 2014).

War era, there is no agreement on how these different categories should be separated and which indicators to use when identifying a particular category.[34] Our definition of middle powers is mainly inspired by the "positional approach" characterized by its focus on quantifiable indicators such as population size, military expenditures, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[35] A problem with quantitative definitions is that the "cut-off line" that separates different categories is always arbitrary.[36] To limit this problem, our indicators combine economic and military elements of national power and do not specify a specific quantity for each cut-off line.

The eleven new allies are categorized as being either middle powers or small states. To qualify as a middle power, a state must meet the double criteria of being ranked top 20 on accumulated GDP and military expenditures. Furthermore, these states must also be recognized by other states as having this status. Therefore, membership in The Group of Twenty (G20) was used as an additional criterion.[37] None of the new allies fulfills this 20-20-20 criterion. However, according to James Manicom and Jeffrey Reeves, states ranking roughly within the range of ten to 30 on various capability indexes can be characterized as middle powers.[38] Using this criterion, Poland is the only state qualifying as a middle power.

To be able to analyze if differences in defense strategies covariates with differences in power resources among the remaining ten new allies, we added a third subcategory of middle powers, *minor* middle powers. However, since there is no "minor middle power club" corresponding to the G20, we focused solely on GDP and military expenditures. The data regarding average GDP 2010-2019 were retrieved from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and are summarized in Table 2 below.

Data regarding average military expenditure were collected from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and are summarized in Table 3 below.

To qualify as a minor middle power, a state must meet the double criteria of being ranked top 70 on both economic and military capabilities.

[34]On the contested nature of the middle power concept, see A. Chapnick, 'The Middle Power', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 7(2) (1999); E. Jordaan, 'The Concept of Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers', *Politikon* 30(2) (2003); D. Cooper, 'Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence: Implications of the Proliferation Security Initiative for "Middle Power Theory"', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7(3) (2011); J. Manicom and J. Reeves, 'Locating Middle Powers in International Relation Theory', in B. Gilley and A. O'Neil (eds.) *Middle Powers and the Rise of China* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 2014); A. Patience, 'Imagining Middle Powers', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68(2). For surveys on trends in small state research and various approaches to defining small states, see I. Neumann and S. Gstöhl, 'Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?', in C. Ingebritsen, I. Neumann, S. Gstöhl, and J. Beyer (eds.), *Small States in International Relations* (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press 2006) and H. Edström, D. Gyllensporre, and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States. Responding to the External Shocks of the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge 2019).

[35]A. Carr, 'Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systematic Impact Approach', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68(1) (2014) pp. 71-72.

[36]I. Neumann and S. Gstöhl, 'Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?'.

[37]H. Edström and J. Westberg *Military strategy of middle powers*, pp. 20-27.

[38]J. Manicom and J. Reeves, 'Locating Middle Powers in International Relation Theory'.

Table 2. The average GDP 2010-2019.[39]

	GDP	GDP PER CAPITA
	IN USD BILLIONS	NOMINAL IN USD
	(WORLD RANK)	
POLAND	523.4 (24)	13,769
CZECHIA	217.1 (49)	20,590
ROMANIA	198.1 (51)	9,985
HUNGARY	138.9 (59)	14,069
SLOVAKIA	96.9 (64)	17,878
CROATIA	57.2 (76)	13,590
BULGARIA	57.2 (77)	7,979
SLOVENIA	48.9 (84)	23,736
LITHUANIA	45.8 (89)	15,765
LATVIA	29.6 (102)	14,821
ESTONIA	25.5 (103)	19,293

Table 3. The average military expenditures 2010-2019.[40]

	MILITARY EXPENDITURES IN USD MILLIONS (WORLD RANK)
POLAND	10,004 (23)
ROMANIA	2,986 (51)
CZECHIA	2,279 (56)
HUNGARY	1,421 (64)
SLOVAKIA	1,138 (66)
CROATIA	971 (71)
BULGARIA	898 (72)
LITHUANIA	584 (79)
SLOVENIA	539 (80)
ESTONIA	491 (86)
LATVIA	399 (95)

Consequently, we divide the new allies into three categories: (i) the middle power Poland, (ii) the minor middle powers Czechia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia; and (ii) the small states Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia. We expect that the two categories of comparable more resourceful states will have greater ambitions when it comes to strategic priorities related to military strategic ends, means, and ways.

Our second intervening variable, *geographical characteristics*, is related to both realist research and research on military strategy. These fields of science recognize the importance of geography in explanations of both outcomes of conflicts and differences in defense planning.[41] According to Gray, geography "explains more about a polity's national security issues than does any other factor".[42] We have decided to focus on one single geographical aspect, i.e.,

[39]IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database* 2021.
[40]SIPRI *Military Expenditure Database* 2021.
[41]C. Gray, *Strategy and History. Essays on Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge 2006); H. Morgenthau. *Politics Among Nations*, C. Layne, 'This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the 'Pax Americana'', *International Studies Quarterly* 56(1) (2012); J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2018).
[42]C. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2015) p. 84.

a shared land border with Russia. Arguably, the change in the regional security environment that occurred after Russia's armed aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 was most alarming to states bordering Russia. We therefore expect the four states sharing a land border with Russia (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland) to be more reluctant to dismantle military resources related to national defense, especially land forces. Moreover, we expect these four states to respond more firmly to the deteriorating regional security order.

Adjusting to a changing external strategic environment[43]

The bulk of the primary sources used in this study consist of defense white papers, national strategies, and strategic defense reviews. Additionally, we used documents such as programs for the modernization of the armed forces, military strategies, and doctrines, as well as defense action plans. There is always a risk that officially released strategic documents are declaratory rather than operational in their nature. Moreover, there are also confidential aspects of defense planning and military strategy that cannot be found in public documents. Obviously, these aspects are not included in our study. We claim, however, that in democracies, official strategic documents serve as political guidance and direction for the armed forces.[44] Consequently, their internal role in this regard would be paradoxical if they only were declaratory. Moreover, we have continuously challenged claims regarding military capacities presented in national official documents and complemented official documents with assessments on each state's military capacities published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Table 4. The result of the exploration.

	MILITARY STRATEGY		
	ENDS	MEANS	WAYS
BULGARIA	Survival	Expeditionary warfare	Multilateral approach
CROATIA	Survival	Expeditionary warfare	Multilateral approach
CZECHIA	Influence/Survival	National defence	Multilateral approach
ESTONIA	Survival	National defence	Multilateral approach
HUNGARY	Survival/Status	National defence	Multilateral approach
LATVIA	Survival	National defence	Multilateral approach
LITHUANIA	Survival	National defence	Multilateral approach
POLAND	Survival/Status	National defence	Multi- & Unilateral approach
ROMANIA	Status	Expeditionary warfare	Multilateral approach
SLOVAKIA	Survival	Expeditionary warfare	Multilateral approach
SLOVENIA	Survival/Status	Expeditionary warfare	Multilateral approach

[43]For an extended analysis of the military strategies of the 11 new allies see, H. Edström and J Westberg, *The Military Strategies of the New European Allies. A Comparative Study* (Abingdon: Routledge 2023).
[44]See, for example, H. Edström, *Hur Styrs Försvarsmakten? – Politisk Och Militär Syn På Försvarsdoktrin Under 1990-talet* (Umeå: Umeå University 2003).

In Table 4 below, the result of our exploration is summarized. Notably, two common strategies appear, the first including Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovakia, and the second the three Baltic States. Moreover, all four middle powers preferred individual strategies.

The ends-element

Ten of the new allies gave, in one way or another, priority to *survival*. The only exception was Romania which prioritized *status*. Six of the cases, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, focused solely on survival, while Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia emphasized survival in addition to one of the other two main ends. The six states focusing solely on survival are all categorized as small states. In the second group, all but Slovenia are categorized as minor middle powers. Czechia initially gave priority solely to *influence*. However, following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Czech government has put as much emphasis on survival. We find that three states, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia, have given as much priority to survival as to *status*. This indicates a general tendency that increased size correlates with increased ambitions regarding ends related to influence and status among minor middle powers and small states.

The six small states that focused solely on survival explicitly emphasized their priority by presenting their *territorial integrity* as a "vital interest" (Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, and Slovakia) in contrast to other "important" interests.[45] Others within this group formulated this priority as the "main task" of the armed forces (Estonia) or an "overarching aim of the defence policy" (Latvia).[46] The three Baltic States constitute a separate group among the new allies, as they relate *survival* primarily to the territorial integrity of the state and concerns related to Russian minorities. Less geographically exposed small states such as Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovakia, relate the *survival* to both the state itself and the nation. The three Baltic states' land bordering Russia seems to be a possible explanation for these differences within the category of small states.

The four states that prioritized survival in addition to influence or status presented security as one of several core objectives. Examples of complementary objectives within this second group were establishing a "reputation as a trustworthy and reliable ally" (Czechia), gaining international prestige and

[45]Bulgarian Council of Ministers (CM), *Updated Plan for Organizational Build-up and Modernization of the Armed Forces* 2008; Bulgarian Parliament (NA) *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria* 2011, pp. 30-31; Croatian Ministry of Defense (MoD) *Strategic Defence Review* 2005, p. 12; Croatian MoD, *Strategic Defence Review* 2013; Lithuanian NA *National Security Strategy* 2002, p. 3; Lithuanian NA *National Security Strategy* 2012 p. 4; Slovakian National Council (NC), *Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic* 2001; Slovakian NC, *Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic* 2005, p. 3.

[46]Estonian Government, *National Security Concept* 2004 p. 3; Estonian MoD *National Defence Strategy* 2011, p. 5; Latvian MoD, *Report on State Defence Policy and Armed Forces Development* 2004, pp. 8-9; Latvian NA, *National Security Concept* 2011, p. 2.

influence (Hungary and Poland), and "a strong international position" (Poland) or reputation and national identity (Slovenia).[47] For Romania, its interest in promoting status concerned its position as a NATO and EU member and finding support for Romania's security, economic, and political development.[48] The governments of Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia also emphasized protecting national identity, values, and, occasionally, a diaspora living in neighboring states.

The means-element

We observe that one-half of the cases, i.e., Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, gave priority to *expeditionary warfare*, while the remaining half, i.e., Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, instead focused on means for *national defense*. The overall pattern in priorities of means indicates that both small states and minor middle powers without land borders to Russia have adjusted their military means along the lines of the new security dynamics. On the other hand, all states with land borders to Russia have continued to prioritize means related to national defense.

However, a closer look at the extent to which these states actually have transformed their defenses provides a more nuanced picture. Regarding expeditionary warfare, Romania — the only minor middle power among the group of states consistently prioritizing expeditionary warfare — has deployed units from all three services abroad, including combat aircraft and frigates, and had at its peak about 1,800 troops deployed to Afghanistan.[49] In the Bulgarian case, announced intentions regarding contributions to the international PSOs decreased after its memberships in NATO/EU were secured. Croatia and Slovenia, two of the small states prioritizing expeditionary warfare, let their army bear the burden when contributing to international PSOs. Additionally, the preservation of old USSR-style equipment as surplus among these states further delayed the transformation towards an expeditionary warfare-oriented military.[50] The Slovakian government officially admitted that the transformation of the Slovakian armed forces towards expeditionary warfare had been a failure.[51] Hence, our results regarding this group of states indicate that

[47]Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) *Report on the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic* 2004, p. 291; Czech MoD *White Paper on Defence* 2011; Hungarian MoFA, *National Security Strategy* 2012, p. 7; Hungarian MoD, *National Military Strategy* 2012. p. 6 and 17; Polish National Security Bureau (NSB) *National Security Strategy* 2007, p. 4-6 and 10; Polish NSB *National Security Strategy* 2014. p. 10; Slovenian MoD, *Strategic Defence Review* 2004, p. 17; Slovenian Government, *National Security Strategy* 2019, p. 6.
[48]Romanian President, *National Security Strategy* 2001, p. 4; Romanian President *National Security Strategy* 2007, p. 3.
[49]Romanian MoD, *Romanian Defence* (2013).
[50]Croatian MoD, *Strategic Defence Review* 2005, pp. 18-20; Slovenian MoD, *Strategic Defence Review* 2004, pp. 35-36; Slovenian MoD, *General Long-Term Development and Equipping Programme of the Slovenian Armed Forces up to 2025*, (2011) p. 36. Regarding the slow modernization process of the armed forces in Croatia and Slovenia, see country chapters in International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Military Balance 2018*, (London: Routledge 2018).
[51]Slovakian MoD, *White Paper on Defence* (2013) pp. 13 and 17.

middle powers, except Slovakia, seem to be more able to put actions behind their words when developing military capacities related to expeditionary warfare.

This claim finds further support in the Czech government's cooperation with Germany. Initially, this cooperation concerned the creation of high-readiness and deployable forces for international missions. After 2014, this cooperation refocused towards creating more robust and heavy forces for collective defense operations.[52] Contrary to Czechia, Poland has consistently focused on national defense. However, Poland has simultaneously been able to provide impressive contributions to several international military operations.

The three Baltic States have faced the common challenge of balancing between means essential for fighting alone during the initial phase of an armed conflict and developing capacities necessary for receiving and hosting allied military support. However, there are significant differences in the strategic priorities related to national defense among the three small states, as well as between them and Poland.

Among the three small states, Estonia has been most consistent and ambitious in prioritizing the development of capacities related to national and collective defense. Its military expenditures as a percentage of GDP in 2020 were the highest of all eleven new allies, i.e., 1.92 percent.[53] In 2009, well before Russia's war against Ukraine, Estonia prepared itself to respond to a sudden attack with national means and to receive allied forces by air, land, and sea by investing in air defense, mine clearance, and preparing the defense of strategically important areas.[54] In 2013, the Estonian MoD declared its ambitions to have one additional infantry brigade operational by 2022.[55] When it comes to the navy, the Estonian government has prioritized high-speed patrol vessels and mine-hunting vessels. Estonia lacks, on the one hand, combat aircraft but has, on the other hand, invested heavily in developing military cyber defense capabilities.[56] Latvia also lacks combat aircraft, and its navy is focused on tasks related to mine clearance, surveillance, as well as search and rescue operations. In addition, both countries prioritize air defense and anti-tank capabilities.[57]

However, regarding land forces, the two countries have slightly different ambitions and priorities. In 2005, Latvia declared its ambition to create a fully professionalized force and it put greater emphasis on contributing to PSOs.[58] Moreover, in 2012, the Latvian government declared that its priority was the quality of its forces, not their numbers.[59] In 2020, Latvia's defense

[52]Czech MoD, *Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic* (2017) p. 13.
[53]SIPRI, *Military Expenditure Database* (2021).
[54]Estonian MoD, *Long Term Defence Development Plan 2009 – 2018*, (2009) pp. 9-10.
[55]Estonian MoD, *National Defence Development Plan 2013 – 2022* (2013).
[56]Estonian MoD, *Cyber Security Strategy* (2014).
[57]Latvian MoD, *Report on State Defence Policy and Armed Forces Development* (2004).
[58]Latvian NA, *National Security Concept* (2005) p. 3.
[59]Latvian MoD, *State Defence Concept* (2012) p. 6.

expenditures were 1.30 percent of GDP, despite previous ambitions to reach two percent by this year.[60] Altogether, this suggests that while both Estonia and Latvia prioritize national defense against a qualified adversary, Latvia's efforts in this regard are less consistent and ambitious. The armed forces of Lithuania have a force posture similar to the other two Baltic States, focusing on military capabilities for national and collective defense. However, before Russia attacked Ukraine in 2014, Lithuania had higher ambitions regarding contributions to international PSOs compared to the other two. In 2012, the government announced its ambition, having 50 percent of the land forces prepared for deployment outside its territory.[61]

Before the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, the Polish government announced its ambitions to develop capacities for both national defense and expeditionary warfare. Regarding national defense, Poland's armed forces were to be capable of defending Polish territory both independently and as a part of NATO's collective defense. In 2009, the government stressed that the ongoing defense transformation aimed to improve the armed forces' ability to deter aggression and defend Polish territory.[62] Similar to the other states with land borders to Russia, Poland from the Russian assault on Georgia and onwards has focused on developing military capacities related to the defense against a qualified opponent. However, being a more resourceful middle power, Poland has been able to do this with higher ambitions. The core of its land forces is composed of four armored and mechanized divisions. In addition, Poland has invested in air transport capacities to facilitate rapid deployment across its territory. Moreover, the Polish government has prioritized the modernization of the air defense system, including missile defense.[63] In 2018, Poland signed an agreement worth 4.75 billion USD for the Patriot missile defense system. An additional crucial element of the Polish deterrence strategy is long-range precision weapons and in 2014, Poland was the first NATO country allowed to purchase the US Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile system. Moreover, in 2019, the US approved the sale of 32 F-35 combat aircraft.[64]

Hungary has been less inclined to transform its armed forces in any direction. It has kept the old USSR profile of its armed forces and officially admitted that no comprehensive system-level development has taken place.[65] Therefore, we conclude that its focus remains on national defense. The Czech and the Polish governments' more ambitious responses to systematic pressures

[60]Ibid p. 3; SIPRI, *Military Expenditure Database* (2021).
[61]Lithuanian MoD, *Guidelines for 2012-2017* (2012).
[62]Polish MoD, *National Defence Strategy* (2009) p. 12.
[63]Polish MoD, *White Paper on Defence* (2013) p. 205.
[64]IISS *Military Balance 2020*, (London: Routledge 2020) pp. 135 and 163.
[65]Regarding Hungary's military capacities, see country chapter in IISS *Military Balance* for the years 2005, 2013, and 2018. Regarding the government's perceived need to pursue a modernization of the armed forces, see Hungarian MoD, *National Military Strategy* 2012, p. 1 and Hungarian MoFA *National Security Strategy* 2020, p. 5.

indicate that middle powers have options regarding *both* national defense and expeditionary warfare that in most cases are not open to less resourceful small states. However, the unwillingness of the Hungarian government to transform its armed forces indicates that it is necessary to consider the potential influence of other intervening variables as well.

The ways-element

When it comes to ways, the unilateral and multilateral approaches have potentially both national and international dimensions related to expeditionary warfare and PSOs. Regarding the later dimension, none of the new European allies has articulated preferences for a unilateral approach, which is not surprising, since our selection of cases is limited to middle powers and small states. The national dimension has two distinct outcomes: (i) conducting territorial defense operations to defend the own country against armed aggression; and (ii) contributing to NATO collective defense operations outside the country's own territory. While collective defense by definition includes a multilateral approach, the operations on domestic soil can include both unilateral and multilateral approaches. Based on these distinctions, we have clustered the cases into four categories.

The first category includes states that *mainly focus on international PSOs* and seldom elaborate on aspects of defending their own state and/or other allies. This category only includes Romania, which made substantial military contributions to different organizational contexts, hence making its multilateral approach trustworthy.[66] The second category includes states that focus both on *defending their own state* and *the territory of the allies* as well, and, at the same time, are willing to contribute to international PSOs. This category includes the minor middle powers Czechia and Slovakia. However, huge challenges in Slovakia's defense transformation process, related to understaffed professional forces, failed armaments projects and a low level of interoperability create reasons to question its ability to put deeds behind the articulated ambitions.[67] The third category includes states with a *balanced approach*, using both unilateral and multilateral approaches. Currently, only Poland is included in this category. By contributing quite impressive resources to several different contexts regarding both the use of military force and the development of military power, the Polish government has indicated its preference for a multilateral approach.[68] On several occasions, Poland has

[66]Romanian MoD, *Romanian Defence* (2013); Romanian MoD, *White Paper on Defense* (2017) p. 34.
[67]Slovakian MoD, *White Paper on Defence* (2013) pp. 17-18.
[68]Polish NSB, *National Security Strategy* (2007) pp. 10-12; Polish MoD, *National Defence Strategy* (2009) p. 6. Notably, all services have participated in NATO-led operations. Polish military has also contributed to several EU-led missions (*Concordia, Althea*, EUFOR Tchad/RCA, EUFOR RD Congo, and EU Training Mission Mali) as well as to UN-led operations (UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT)) Moreover, Polish armed forces have participated in the US-led operations *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan and *Iraqi Freedom*. See Polish MoD *White Paper on Defence 2013*, p. 50.

assumed the role of a framework nation. In 2010, Poland acted as a framework nation for a battle group established together with Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia. In 2013, Poland was responsible for coordinating the Weimar Combat Group, including forces from France and Germany, as well as Poland. In 2016 and 2019, Poland acted as the leading nation for the Visegrad Combat Group with Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia, as well as Ukraine in 2016 and Croatia in 2019.[69] However, the government has also continuously expressed its preparedness for a unilateral approach if deemed necessary in the national context.[70] Arguably, this approach would not be an alternative if Poland did not have the power and resources to make such a strategy credible. Poland's greater ambitions when it comes to both means and ways support the argument that Poland should be considered a "middle power" in a class of its own among the new allies.

The fourth category includes states that *lack the necessary resources making a unilateral approach compelling* in the national as well as in international context. All states categorized as small states belong to this category, indicating a strong correlation between relative power and ability to develop credible unilateral capacities. In all these cases, the lack of convincing national air power makes the multilateral approach a necessity rather than an option. In all but the Bulgarian case, the lack of convincing resources also includes maritime means. Hungary is difficult to squeeze into any of the four categories. With outdated means for the army and having to lease rather than procure combat aircraft for the air force, the capacity of the armed forces of Hungary indicates that this case also should be included in the fourth category. However, we have also noted recent tendencies towards increasing ambition regarding the capacity of the armed forces and increased emphasis on political unilateralism.[71]

Strategic responses to changing security dynamics

How have the eleven new allies responded to the systematic pressures emanating from their membership in the two alliances and the changes in their external security environment during the two first decades of the twenty-first century? The question is answered in two subsections. The first focuses on the eleven new allies' responses to the systematic pressures related to the new European security dynamics and the membership processes to develop and improve their capability to contribute to allied efforts related to international PSOs and expeditionary warfare in general. The second subsection focuses on responses to the deteriorating European security environment that has created a renewed need for military capabilities related to national and collective defense against a qualified state opponent.

[69]Polish Government, *Agreement on enhanced defense cooperation with the USA* (2020).
[70]Polish MoD, *White Paper on Defence* (2013) p. 15.
[71]Hungarian MoFA, *National Security Strategy* (2020) p. 5 and country chapter in IISS *Military Balance* 2013 and 2018.

The new European security dynamics and membership processes

Regarding strategic *ends*, the new security dynamics and pressures related to the membership processes during the first decade of the twenty-first century suggest that states should give higher priority to goals related to influence and status. Moreover, the priorities of the new allies may also reflect an internalization of the liberal values common to the EU and NATO. In addition, the new allies may, or may not, have internalized threat perceptions related to the post-national security paradigm elaborated on in a previous section of this article. When it comes to *means*, the new dynamics suggest that even less resourceful states will increase their efforts to develop capacities for expeditionary warfare, making them capable of contributing to PSOs or coalitions of willing led by more resourceful states. To afford this defense transformation, most states would have to reduce the size of their armed forces and limit the amount of heavy military equipment associated with twenty-century interstate warfare. Regarding *ways*, the new European security dynamics suggest a decreased emphasis on unilateral approaches and an increased emphasis on multilateral approaches.

In their analysis of the strategic environment during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, all new allies except Estonia expressed concerns primarily related to non-state actors such as international terrorism and organized crime. The sources of these transnational threats were often located in unstable regions and authoritarian or failed states, creating incitements and legitimacy for international military operations. This broadened conceptualization of security also included non-antagonistic threats such as the spread of epidemics and climate change. Before Russia's war against Georgia in 2008, a majority of the new allies estimated that a large-scale military attack directed against any NATO member where highly unlikely within a predicable time horizon. In 2007, the Polish government expressed concerns about Russia's attempt to reinforce its international position.

However, the government still concluded that a large-scale armed conflict was unlikely in the foreseeable future.[72] In 2005, the Latvian government concluded that there was no direct military threat to either Latvia itself or any other Baltic State. In 2006, the government of Lithuania reported that new unconventional security challenges were replacing traditional threats of armed aggression against sovereign states.[73] Estonia, the only new ally that went against this trend, already in 2004 warned that the new international security environment had not reached a state of stability. Consequently, the Estonian government concluded that it had to prepare for possible military threats related to unexpected re-deployment of military forces and large-scale military

[72]Polish NSB, *National Security Strategy* (2007) pp. 2, 8, and 10.
[73]Lithuanian MoD, *White Paper on Lithuanian Defence Policy* (2006).

maneuvers near Estonian territory, as well as intentional violations of Estonia's air space, land border, and territorial waters.[74]

To what extent were these changing threat perceptions followed by changes in the military strategies of the new allies? Regarding strategic *ends*, more states than expected continued to prioritize survival. More ambitious aims related to status and influence were pursued primarily by the states classified as minor middle powers or middle powers. Consequently, our results indicate that the "post-national" security paradigm was not fully internalized among the new allies. Regarding the internalization of liberal values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and free market economy, all new allies expressed support for these principles both before and after joining the EU and NATO. However, the priority of these values compared to other ends such as national identity and traditions were slightly different. The Baltic States, Bulgaria, Czechia, and Slovakia, gave these values the status of vital interest, while Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia, gave even greater priority to objectives related to sovereignty, national integrity, and identity.

When it comes to the *means* and the responses by the new allies to pressures regarding transforming their armed forces for contributions to international PSOs, there are some elements common to most states. All states presented at least some ambitions to provide military resources and had at least parts of their armed forces manned with professional soldiers. Moreover, except for the three Baltic States, Czechia, and Slovakia, all new allies made significant reductions in the size of their land forces. Czechia, which decreased the numbers from three brigades in 2000 to two brigades in 2020, seems to have undertaken major reductions already during the 1990s. Slovakia has kept the same level since the beginning of the new millennium.[75]

In addition, as presented in Table 5 below, we observe significant reductions in numbers related to some key equipment, such as main battle tanks (MBTs) and combat aircraft.

Table 5. The number of MBTs and combat aircraft of some of the new allies.[76]

	MAIN BATTLE TANKS		COMBAT AIRCRAFT	
	2000	2020	2000	2020
BULGARIA	1 475	90	181	21
CROATIA	300	75	41	11
CZECHIA	792	30	110	38
HUNGARY	806	44	68	14
POLAND	1 704	606	267	95
ROMANIA	1 253	400	323	56
SLOVAKIA	275	30	84	23

[74]Estonian Government, *National Security Concept* (2004) p. 6.
[75]See relevant country chapter in IISS *Military Balance* for 2000; 2010; 2020.
[76]IISS *Military Balance* 2000; 2020.

The downsizing of land and air forces was in most cases motivated by the need to modernize the armed forces and/or to enable the allocation of resources for developing new capabilities. In some cases, for example, Romania and Slovakia, there were also explicit references to EU and NATO standards and membership criteria.[77] When it comes to force reductions, a majority of the new allies adjusted their force structure to expectations related to the membership processes as well as to the new stable and peaceful European security order. However, as previously mentioned, ambitions and actual ability to contribute to common efforts within the EU and NATO vary between the new allies.

Regarding *ways*, the new European security dynamics and the post-national security paradigm emphasize the need for multilateral cooperation when conducting international operations. For small states and minor middle powers, unilateral approaches are not an alternative when it comes to expeditionary warfare. Not even the most resourceful state among the new allies, Poland, has expressed any unilateral ambitions related to international operations.

Responses to a deteriorating European security order

Notably, Estonia was the only country that responded to Russia's attack against Georgia in 2008 by immediately increasing the size of its armed forces. The Estonian MoD emphasized the necessity of having the capacity to resist potential aggression until the arrival of allied forces.[78] Moreover, the government expressed a need to increase the capacities related to advanced air defense equipment, as well as the anti-tank and mechanized capabilities within the brigade's framework. Following Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014, the Estonian MoD announced several additional measures. The two other Baltic States did not react as promptly to the Russian-Georgian War. However, after 2014, all three Baltic States intensified both their external and internal efforts to deter Russia from any further military aggression.[79]

Czechia, Poland, and Romania all responded firmly to Russia's attack on Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. In 2015, the Czech government admitted that the personnel strength of the armed forces temporarily had decreased during the last couple of years even though the tasks had remained unchanged. Two years later, the government announced its ambitions to foster close

[77]Romanian President, *National Security Strategy* (2001) p. 23; Slovakian NC, *Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic* (2001) p. 3.
[78]Estonian MoD, *Long Term Defence Development Plan 2009 – 2018* (2009) p. 9.
[79]Estonian Government *National Security Concept 2017*, p. 11; Estonian MoD, *National Defence Development Plan 2013 – 2022* (2013); Estonian MoD, *Cyber Security Strategy* (2014); Estonian MoD, *National Defence Development Plan 2017 – 2026* (2017); Latvian MoD, *National Defense Concept* (2016); Latvian NA, *National Security Concept* (2020); Lithuanian MoD, *Guidelines for 2016-2021* (2015) p. 3; Lithuanian NA *National Security Strategy* (2017) p. 7; Lithuanian MoD, *White Paper on Lithuanian Defence Policy* (2017), p. 12.

defense cooperation with Germany. Moreover, the government concluded that it was essential to develop new army units and to increase the personnel strength by an additional 5,000 military professionals.[80] In 2017, the Polish government proposed, and later implemented, several reinforcements of its armed forces discussed in a previous section. In 2016, the Romanian government presented priorities regarding military capacities related to armed conflicts between advanced adversaries including new combat aircraft and naval vessels. Moreover, the government announced that the new organization of the army was to include two division headquarters. In 2020, the government presented its intentions of enabling and strengthening NATO's enhanced forward presence on Romanian soil.[81]

Regarding the five remaining new European allies – Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia – it is difficult to find clear examples of firm responses to the Russian aggressions. Notably, all five lack a land border with Russia. However, the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has created a situation in which several of our cases most likely will have to reconsider questions related to geographical exposure. Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia all share borders with Ukraine. Arguably, the European states that previously followed the post-national path are ill-prepared for the return of the old European security order. Considering the time gap between deciding strategies for force generation and, once these strategies are implemented, establishing strategies for the use of the new military force, these states will now face a situation where they will have to rely on collective efforts and the possibility of sharing already existing military resources with like-minded countries.

Conclusion

Our overarching conclusion is that sharing a border with Russia in combination with a weak position in the international system explains why the three Baltic States formulated rather similar strategies. Arguably, the lack of a shared border with Russia explains why Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia, and potentially Slovenia, could afford designing strategies focusing on expeditionary warfare rather than national defense despite also being small states. Finally, regarding the rather individual strategies of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania respectively, we conclude that their position as middle powers allowed them to design their strategies rather independently. Consequently, we conclude that geographical characteristics, i.e., bordering a threatening great power, in combination with the position in the system, i.e., a weak

[80]Czech MoD, *Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic* (2017) p. 13.
[81]Romanian NA, *White Paper on Defense* (2016) pp. 32-33; Romanian MoD, *Military Strategy* (2016); Romanian President, *National Defense Strategy* (2020) p. 14.

small state, could trigger a perception of strategic exposure and hence lead to certain common strategic preferences. Small states lacking the former seem to have the opportunity to design expeditionary means. States with a stronger position in the system, and potentially also lacking a shared border with a threatening great power, have space to elaborate more freely on all three elements of the strategy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the authors(s).

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