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neither NATO, nor EU?

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Mandatory Military Service and Small European States: Ready to Fight Yesterday's Battles

Abstract: This article critically analyzes Estonia's defense strategy and the usefulness of mandatory military service and corresponding reserve forces. Due to the end of the Cold War, some states have switched from a conscript system to a professional army. Small states do not have an abundance of resources. NATO members that have chosen to maintain mandatory military service, like Estonia, have debated whether such a structure is an efficient use of resources. This article will add to that debate by using human security and societal security concepts to offer a more complete understanding of Estonia's security challenges. This article concludes that having a mandatory military service based reserve aimed at territorial defense is outdated. However, this article also concludes that mandatory military and civil service could play a significant role in improving national security, if it was aimed at integrating and improving society, not defending territory.

Keywords: Mandatory military service, small states, Estonia, societal security

Introduction:

Global events in recent years have produced new security challenges for small states in Europe. After a relative calm in the early 2000's, a series of crises and events have highlighted the need for research in small state security. Starting in 2008 the financial crisis left many small Western European countries bankrupt with streets filled with mass protesters. In the post-Soviet space the Russia-Georgia war was unfortunately not an isolated event, but a sign of further geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West. Over 1,500 have died in the ongoing Ukrainian conflict and the annexation of Crimea by Russia has caused small states to be even more concerned about territorial defence.

In this complicated and changing security environment small states must rethink their national defence strategies to ensure that they are the most effective. The recent events in Ukraine confirm that security threats are not as simple as defending from a neighboring state as in the past. Conflicts are waged by various actors and by various means. The Ukraine crisis shows the severity of hybrid conflicts where there is a merging of international and domestic threats. What type of strategies can small states take to better secure themselves from these threats? For NATO members, can the collective defence of NATO still be effective in dealing with new soft security threats?

This article will play a small part in answering these questions by critically analyzing Estonia's defense strategy and the usefulness of mandatory military service and corresponding reserve forces. Not all small European states have not taken the same strategy towards defence. Some are NATO members focusing on collective defence. Others like Sweden or Finland are not NATO members and instead use a strategy of cooperative defence. All states are faced with the question of whether their militaries should be geared towards total territorial defence or not. Within this debate the question of mandatory military service is one of the main pillars. States have agonized over the decision to transform their militaries to a professional army, or to maintain conscription, and thus a large reserve force. With limited resources, states can ill afford to over extend themselves.

The process of reevaluating defence strategies for small states has already begun. Estonian researcher Martin Hurt (2014) evaluated Estonia's national defence strategy and readiness in light of the Ukrainian crisis and came to the conclusion that Estonia needs to improve the quality not quantity of the forces. Specifically more forces that are able to rapidly deploy are needed. Estonian researcher, Maria Mälksoo (2010) evaluated NATO's ability to defend against new soft security threats such as cyber and energy security threats. She found that the application of NATO's article 5 is questionable for these new security threats, although NATO could still play an active role via article 4. Latvian scholar Jānis Bērziņš (2014) analyzed the implications of Russia's actions in Ukraine for Latvia's defence forces. Bērziņš suggests that NATO's article 5 might not be sufficient as a response to Russia's new strategy of warfare where it does not directly attack but encourages local uprisings. Russia's new strategy of warfare includes several phases the first of which are not military but destabilize a region. Another Latvian researcher Raimonds Rublovskis (2014) comes to a similar conclusion, that Latvia needs to rethink „fundamental reassessment of the entire Latvian defence and security system is needed“ (Ibid.). In addition to increased military capabilities, the stability and internal security of the state.

While conscription has been mentioned in the ongoing debate it has not played a major role. Over the past two decades across Europe there has been a slow but steady trend shifting away from conscription to a professional or all volunteer army. France suspended conscription in 1996, and ended it in 2001, Lithuania suspended conscription in 2008, Sweden in 2010, and Germany ended conscription in 2011. Yet others have remained committed to conscription. Those committed are both members and nonmembers of NATO (Finland and Estonia for example). It remains unclear how the changes in the security environment will impact the debate on mandatory military service.

This paper will add to this literature by analyzing mandatory military service in Estonia. Using a societal security framework, it will go beyond the simple professional vs. conscription dichotomy that is traditionally associated with a territory vs. collective defence debate. Societal security can provide an added depth in understanding current conflicts. Looking at the post-Soviet space, inter-state conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine went hand in hand with internal security problems. A fragmented and disgruntled society can be seen as a threat enabler. By focusing on society and the groups that make up society, this article does

not claim to offer all solutions to small state security. Small states need comprehensive strategies to deal with complicated security threats.

Traditionally mandatory military service has been studied from a military standpoint, with little attempt to gauge the impact of military service on societal resilience or societal security. This paper will take Estonia as a case study to evaluate how effective Estonia's mandatory military service is in enabling Estonia to defend itself against Russia's new generation of warfare and against the complicated security challenges. Estonia is an excellent case study for numerous reasons. As a small state member of NATO, bordering Russia with a complicated history Estonia has found itself at the center of the geopolitical tensions between the West and Russia. In addition, Estonia has a fractured society with a large portion of ethnic Russians who identify positively with Russia.

This paper will follow with an overview of the literature on small state security and societal security. It will be followed by an overview of European small state military reforms and an analysis of Estonia's current mandatory military service structure and what potential changes could better equip it to improve Estonia's security status. It is hoped that the conclusions from this paper will be beneficial for all European small states, especially those whose internal security is not as secure as it could be.

Small state security

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia left Europe with many more small states. NATO and EU enlargement incorporated many of those states into Europe at an institutional level. With that integration small states have a greater ability to impact Europe, for better or worse. The importance of small states in Europe has never been higher. This importance has helped research on small states grow in recent years. Academic centers have been formed such as the Center for Small State Study at the University of Iceland, as well as national think tanks such as Estonia's International Center for Defence Studies or the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. Scholars from many countries have produced a wealth of literature. Significant works on small state behavior are Ellman 1995, Hey 2003, Ingebritsen et al 2006, Steinmetz and Wivel 2010, and Sutton 2011. Since small states are overly concerned with their security much of the literature on small states deal with security either directly or indirectly. The current crisis in Ukraine highlights the importance of literature on small state security. This article will add to that research.

Much of the literature on small state security has focused on the traditional military aspects. Topics such as bandwagoning or balancing, and levels of analysis are both prominent topics. Small states have often been treated as unitary actors. While these approaches have value they leave certain aspects of small security open for explanation. It may appear that human security would be less practical given the militaristic nature of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, however just the opposite is true. A human security based analysis will put the focus on the welfare of the citizens, not the readiness and ability of the military. Thus for our analysis the question will not be to what end can conscription improve Estonia's military capabilities, rather to what extent can conscription improve Estonia's societal security and social cohesion.

Estonia's military reforms

After the end of the Cold War small states slowly began to transition their defence structures from total defence based on large reserve forces to all volunteer armies. For some small states such as Estonia a total defence strategy would have been too demanding on resources. NATO was seen as a better guarantee for a reasonable cost. Despite NATO membership Estonia has retained a quasi-territorial defense strategy relying on conscription and a large reserve force. Estonia's policy towards mandatory military service has been surprisingly stable given the changing security environment. During the last 15 years Estonia has updated its security strategy concepts to reflect the changing security environment. In the most recent 2010 security strategy Estonia added the concept social cohesion to the list. This is a critical element of security for Estonia.

The 2007 bronze soldier riots demonstrated the negative impact that can come from a fractured society. The events saw a tandem of ethnic Russians and Moscow working together. Ethnic Russians rioted over the removal of a WWII Soviet memorial and Russia was most likely responsible for cyber-attacks. Estonia has since made significant developments in cyber security landing NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence which is now located in Tallinn Estonia. What did not happen were any significant changes aimed at integrating society or improving social cohesion. This is unfortunate for many reasons.

Russia's new generation of warfare does not begin with military operations. Rather influence is achieved through other means such as intimidation, information warfare, destabilization, and so on (Bērziņš 2014, 6). These tactics allow Russia to form conditions in which they can use the military. When military operations did begin armed civilians were used. Russia supported and armed an uprising, rather than directly send in its own troops to occupy Eastern Ukraine. Both cold and hot phases of conflict with Russia are based on a weakness of internal security or societal cohesion.

As a neighbor of Russia with a complicated history, the recent developments in Ukraine have given Estonia cause for concern. The primary reaction has been political and military. Estonia asked for and received additional support from NATO including extra planes that patrol Baltic air space, military exercises and a physical presence of US troops in Estonia. Estonia has announced that they will be buying military hardware. Some discussion has been played towards the Russian speaking population in Eastern Estonia, mostly focusing on the establishment of a Russian TV channel to compete with Russian based TV channels. Little has been mentioned of other ways of increasing societal cohesion.

Estonia's major obstacle to societal cohesion is the lack of integration of Russian speakers. The Bronze soldier riots demonstrated that the policy of integration based on encouraging Russians to learn the Estonian language had largely failed. The Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the necessity of having a cohesive society.

Of the many ways to improve societal cohesion one way is the mandatory military service. Some sociologists have researched this and focused on the Russian speaker's

progress in learning the Estonian language. However the impact of the military service on integration is somewhat limited given the small number of conscripts. Many young men are able to get waivers to service for health or personal reasons. Also women are not included which limits the impact of conscription.

The positive impact on Estonia's military is also limited. The battle readiness of the reserve forces is questionable and would take some time to mobilize. This is why many countries in Europe have gone to a professional army and why Estonian researcher Martin Hurt has recommended to focus on quality and forces that are ready available instead of increasing the size of the reserve force. It does provide the military with a quality pool to recruit professional soldiers from.

Conclusions and analysis

Given the current security environment is mandatory military service obsolete? It does have limited but notable value in military terms and social cohesion. However, given the changed security climate and the limited resources small states have to secure themselves significant reforms could improve the social security of Estonia. Some in Estonia have asked if the Russian Estonians who have served their mandatory military service would be ready to fight for Estonia if an armed conflict were ever to break out between Estonia and Russia. This is the wrong question to ask. Estonia should not be wondering if Russian-Estonians are ready to die for Estonia, rather they should be asking if they are ready to live for Estonia by participating in the political process. When more Russian Estonians participation begins the social cohesion increases, the legitimacy of the government increases and Russia's ability to manipulate the Russian speaking minority decreases. This is a process that will take time, but if done right could help prevent future riots that happened in 2007 or worse a situation like Ukraine or Georgia. This paper will conclude with a list of potential solutions to mandatory military service in Estonia. They will be further studied in future versions of this paper.

- **Expand conscription to both men and women.** This would increase the number of those serving. The problem of social cohesion is not a one gender problem
- **Incorporate a civilian service in addition to military service.** Giving a selection of service opportunities would increase the number of youth serving by enabling those with health concerns to serve. It would also ease the transition to a gender neutral conscription as women could choose to serve in non-military means. Civilian service could include service in the health sector, emergency and rescue sectors and others. This would enable young Estonia-Russians to integrate into society and give them a connection to their country. It also could help them get a job in a certain industry.
- **Focus on new military tactics.** In addition to the standard territorial defence strategies, training could be given in cyber security, information warfare. While a 6 or 10 month conscription service might not be enough time to make youth proficient in technical fields, those who already have significant skills could be useful.

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