



SWP-CNA Meeting on Baltic Security¹

Berlin, Germany October 6, 2014

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Executive Summary

On October 6, 2014, CNA gathered a group of current and former senior government officials, military officers, and security analysts from the Baltic States, Sweden, Finland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany to discuss Baltic security in the shadow of events in Crimea and Ukraine. The meeting was a collaborative effort by CNA and its German partner, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs).

The purpose of the meeting, held in an informal setting at the SWP headquarters in Berlin and under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution, was to enable a candid exchange of views. In response to Russia's new "ambiguous warfare" doctrine and demonstrated willingness to use force to achieve political goals, the nations along the Baltic littoral are accelerating measures to enhance their defense capabilities and exploring nationally-acceptable ways to share information such as the Recognized Maritime Picture. In the event of an incursion by irregular troops using deception operations – approach utilized by the Russians in Crimea – civilian police would be the first responders, backed up by national militaries. But both police and armed forces must be capable of a much higher degree of coordinated action, than they currently are. A major strategic communications effort is also urgently needed.

Regional Perspectives on Baltic Security

In the face of increased Russian military activity and Vladimir Putin's comment to EU President Barroso that Russian forces could be in "Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw and Bucharest within two days," participants from the eastern littoral of the Baltic made no secret of their anxiety. Moscow seems to believe that with the Obama administration weak and Europe divided, Russia has a window of opportunity during which it can act to increase regional instability and thereby achieve its objective of "Finlandizing" the Baltic Republics and undermining the NATO Alliance.

Baltic participants acknowledged that they needed to improve national military capabilities and address political vulnerabilities. When the Baltic Republics and Poland joined NATO they were encouraged to develop niche military specialties rather than worry about territorial defense, which was thought unnecessary. This mistake is being addressed but it will take time. Citizens in the Baltic Republics are glad to be in NATO but ask apprehensively: "Why can some NATO countries be defended with the stationing of troops and equipment and others not? Will NATO really respond if we are attacked?"

Sweden is also increasing its defense budget and taking steps to address deficiencies. During the Cold War, the Swedish Navy was focused on repelling a sea-borne invasion of the homeland. After the fall of

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the Soviet Union in 1989, the Swedes sharply reduced the size of their military, restructuring their forces to primarily support international peacekeeping operations. Political consensus on the need for an enhanced defense capability changed after the Russian attack on Georgia in 2008. Russian military incursions into Swedish air and maritime space, which began in 2013 and are on-going, have brought the issue into acute focus. A Swedish diplomat participating in the Berlin meeting listed the policies reaffirmed by the recently elected Social Democratic government:

- The new government has no intention of asking to join NATO.
- Sweden is increasing its defense spending.
- Sweden has a partnership with NATO and seeks an even closer relationship with NATO.
- Partnership with the Baltic States “is in our DNA.”

A senior Finnish military officer noted that Finland did not let down its guard after the end of the Cold War. Finland maintains conscription and can mobilize 230,000 active-duty and reserve troops. When the Russians enter Finnish air space, he explained, we send up F-18s. Russia is testing, “going to see where the windows are open.” As in Sweden, NATO membership for Finland does not have popular support – a poll taken in July and August 2014 indicated that only 26 percent of Finns support membership in NATO. Instead, Finland and Sweden are deepening their bi-lateral collaboration on defense matters and seeking other ways of enhancing partnership with NATO. At the September 2014 NATO summit in Wales, Sweden and Finland signed Host Nation Support Agreements which establish the legal basis for accepting NATO deployment on Swedish or Finnish territory in the event of crisis or conflict. Baltic participants at the Berlin meeting argued that this did not go far enough. They said “We want to eliminate uncertainty; we want Finland and Sweden to join NATO.”

A Polish participant appealed to Germany to assume management of security in the region “as the United States is occupied elsewhere.” Russia perceives Germany to be the key player, and it is thus incumbent on Germany to counter Moscow’s view that Germany will accommodate Russia to avoid military action. But a German Foreign Office official dismissed the idea of increased German military presence in the Baltic Sea, pointing out that Germany had taken the lead within the EU on sanctions and that Chancellor Merkel was in diplomatic dialogue with President Putin. He added that, while Germany should not make itself smaller than it is, “we never forget that on a number of important international issues, we need the Russian Federation to cooperate within the U.N. Security Council.” However, a senior German participant with close ties to the Merkel government pointed out that Germany is reevaluating its proper role in global security.

Implications of Russia’s New Ambiguous Warfare

Russia, the group agreed, is probing the region’s vulnerabilities not just with Tupolev bombers but also in other, more subtle ways. Moscow, one expert explained, is convinced that the West is fomenting “color revolutions” around the world as a form of warfare and that Russia is itself a potential target. In defense, Russia is trying to use against the West the same tactics of hybrid warfare or controlled chaos which Russia believes the West is planning to use against it. The scenario, as we have seen imperfectly played out in Ukraine, is:

- Forces favorable to Russia destabilize the country and encourage repression.
- Economic damage results, leading to state collapse.

- Russia steps in as a savior, deploying its peacekeeping forces and providing humanitarian assistance.

This Russian “New Generation” warfare, a second expert added, builds on previously developed Russian strategy and tactics. The Russians have placed “influence” at the center of their operational planning and are prepared to use internal communications, deception operations, psychological operations, and external communications to achieve their goal. It is not a military campaign in the classic sense of the term: there are no uniformed troops and thus no war, no invasion, and no trigger of NATO Article 5.

Berlin meeting participants speculated that Russia might try to bring about its own “color revolution” in the Baltics by provoking Russian-speaking residents and aiding right-wing extremist groups, thereby justifying armed intervention against “Nazis.” Lack of progress within the Baltic Republics to integrate minority populations was recognized as a vulnerability. Russian-speakers are the most numerous, but there are other minority populations as well.

In discussing how the Balts would deal with the “little green men” – the mysterious forces which suddenly appeared in Crimea and eastern Ukraine – participants agreed that the police and Ministry of Interior troops should be the first responders backed up by the military. However, there was a degree of uncertainty as to whether the regular police could manage the situation. Combined civilian and military exercises would be helpful. NATO allies and partners need to build up police and intelligence capabilities to be able to detect asymmetric probes and deal with them.

Most urgently required, the group agreed, was a concerted effort at strategic communications. During the Cold War, the West knew how to counter Soviet propaganda. We dealt with it. We put great emphasis on educating and informing our publics. This is the instrument to frustrate Russian aggression. Unless the population is aware and educated, you leave the information battlefield to whoever wishes to seize it. “The Russians lie,” one Baltic participant commented, “and we hesitate to tell the truth.”

Maritime Security in the Baltic Sea

Russia’s stepped up naval and air presence in the region has raised concern about the ability of the countries along the Baltic littoral to monitor maritime activity and, potentially, to share intelligence and coordinate response to hostile action. Naval officers and expert analysts at the Berlin meeting outlined existing measures.

In June 2014, the European Union adopted a Maritime Security Strategy which identified the EU’s key maritime security interests. The EU’s 2014 strategy actually builds on the 2009 EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), which is being implemented by Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Even before the promulgation of these strategies under the EU aegis, Baltic Sea nations devised cooperative measures to ensure freedom of navigation, collaborate on search-and-rescue operations, enhance environmental protection, and promote commerce. Not surprisingly, this has resulted in a multiplicity of organizations both national and international with responsibilities and interests in the Baltic maritime domain but with no overarching coordination mechanism. Participants at the Berlin meeting agreed that due to a lack of political consensus, it is doubtful that such a mechanism could be agreed on in the near term.

Currently the most promising regional maritime information sharing activity is SUCBAS, Sea Surveillance Cooperation Baltic Sea which expands the model first developed by Sweden and Finland to all the countries around the Baltic Sea (Russia was invited to join but has not agreed to participate.) SUCBAS entails automated solutions to support sustainable multinational Maritime Situational Awareness. It is an unclassified, open system fully operational 24/7 which uses existing national systems and sensors. Each participating nation determines the level at which it wishes to cooperate. The data enhances each individual nation's Recognized Maritime Picture to create a higher level of common maritime safety and security in the Baltic Sea. SUCBAS does not require a regional command center.

A German naval officer explained that data from SUCBAS and other sources feeds into the Central Command for Maritime Emergencies (Havariekommando) in Cuxhaven. Under the German Federal System, there are 16 state and federal agencies which are involved with maritime security in the Baltic. An interagency circle chaired by the German Ministry of Transport seeks to resolve issues and promote maritime security in all German waters. Data sharing among German agencies is not general but depends on the incident.

Recent actions by Russian Federation forces in Ukraine and in the Baltic region have led German security analysts to conclude that a naval threat from Russia might come not from gray hulls but from other maritime platforms. This would be consistent with Russia's "New Generation" warfare tactics and would require a first response from civilian law enforcement or maritime security personnel. This possibility again underlines the need for training and closer coordination between national civilian and military forces.

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