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**Estonia in the Shadow of Russian Threat: Is NATO
Doing Enough to Assure Its Member?**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: Bezpečnostní studia

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Year of the defence: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on

Nikos Štěpánek

References

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Abstract

This thesis is applying the neglected concept of assurance on assuring efforts of NATO towards Estonia. This small Baltic republic lives in a fear of conflict with its Russian neighbour which would be impossible to win without help from abroad. The author asks, whether the effort to assure Estonians, that NATO would come to help in case of conflict is successful and what can be improved. To reveal, whether Estonia is assured, the author conducted research interviews in Tallinn with Estonians from the state administration, military, academics, experts from think-tanks and journalist. To get a full picture, the author also used public opinion polls. The thesis uses the concept of assurance as it was defined by Jeffrey W. Knopf. The concept is understudied and almost not used for empirical research. Importance of assuring allies is rising in contemporary's world and this thesis is trying to fill the research gap and show a possible direction for further research on the assurance of allies. Last but not least, the author is contributing to the debate about the defence of the Baltics.

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce pomocí opomíjeného konceptu ujištění (assurance) vyhodnocuje snahu NATO o ujištění Estonska před ruskou hrozbou. Estonci se obávají možného konfliktu s Ruskou federací, ve kterém by sami neměli šanci zvítězit. Autor se snaží zjistit, jestli je snaha NATO o ujištění Estonců, že by nezůstali v případě konfliktu sami, úspěšná a co by případně mohlo NATO zlepšit. Práce využívá rozhovory s Estonci, které autor pořídil přímo v Tallinnu. Mezi respondenty jsou zastoupeni úředníci z ministerstev, vojáci, akademici, experti z think-tanků či novinář. Kromě rozhovorů práce využívá i průzkum veřejného mínění. Diplomová práce využívá definici konceptu assurance podle Jeffreyho W. Knopfa. Koncept není v praxi příliš používaný a téměř nikdo se mu nevěnuje ani z teoretického hlediska. Ujištění spojenců přitom v současném světě nabývá na důležitosti. Tato diplomová práce se snaží přispět k rozvoji konceptu, naznačit další možný vývoj empirického výzkumu a v neposlední řadě přispět do debaty ohledně obrany Pobaltí.

Keywords

Assurance, NATO, Estonia, Russia, Baltics, Knopf

Klíčová slova

Ujištění spojenců, NATO, Estonsko, Rusko, Pobaltí, Knopf

Název práce

Estonsko ve stínu ruské hrozby: Dělá NATO dost pro ujištění svého člena?

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List of Abbreviations

EDI - European Deterrence Initiative

ERR - Estonian Public Broadcasting

EU – The European Union

eFP – Enhanced Forward Presence

GFP - Global Fire Power

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NMS - National Military Strategy

NRF - NATO Response Force

NSS - National Security Strategy

RAP - Readiness Action Plan

VJTF - Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

Introduction

This thesis discusses the problem of assurance of allies, concretely the case of assuring Estonia by NATO. Estonia is in a difficult situation as its Russian neighbour has been more aggressive in recent years. Based on the historical experience and current increased tensions, there is a risk of conflict between Russia and Estonia. In such a conflict, Estonians would be dependent on help from its allies from NATO.

The original intention of this thesis was to describe the situation in Estonia, evaluate whether Estonia is assured by NATO and give recommendations for increasing of assurance. Therefore, the author expected that Estonia will not be assured and that there will be a lot of space for improvement. The thesis develops the argument in the following steps. Firstly, it was necessary to reveal, to what extent are Estonians afraid of Russia. Without knowledge of this, it would not make sense to start research on assurance. After describing why and to what extent is Estonia afraid of Russia, the author of the thesis wanted to know, what Estonians think about NATO's assuring efforts. When evaluating this, political and military measures adopted by NATO had to be described. After revealing, that Estonians are assured, the thesis continues with recommendations. However, the recommendations are only about small improvements because of satisfaction. The author did not expect that Estonians will be that satisfied with NATO's assuring efforts and tries to explain the reasons for it in a final discussion.

The thesis uses the concept of assurance. However, the assurance of allies remains understudied and only a few works on this topic exist. The author of this thesis uses the definition of assurance by Jeffrey W. Knopf who was the first one who tried to distinguish between different varieties of assurance and put some order into this topic. Empirical research about assurance of allies is almost non-existent.

For evaluating whether Estonia is assured or not, the thesis uses its own set of three conditions which are based on the existing literature. Those are *confidence in assurer*, *sufficient military capabilities* and *actions*. For each condition, the author firstly discusses the current situation and then presents the opinion of Estonian experts and the public. Their opinion, which the author got through research interviews, is crucial when deciding, whether Estonians are assured or not.

Experts for the interviews were chosen from various fields and included government officials from ministries and defence forces, academics, researchers from think-tanks or journalists. The author of the thesis met eight respondents in Tallinn in the last quarter of the

year 2019. One official participated through an online questionnaire. For the opinion of the public, the author used official statistics created for the Ministry of Defence.

The thesis is trying to contribute to the understudied concept, use it for empirical research and provide readers with an unusual insight into the Estonian situation. The thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter describes the concept of assurance as was described by Jeffrey W. Knopf. The second chapter is focused on defining the conditions for successful assurance according to existing literature. The third chapter explains the method used for the research and the evolution of the research. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the research itself and has five sections. The first section provides the reader with basic information about Estonia. The second section discusses, to what extent are Estonians afraid of Russia. The third section outlines NATO's political measures and subsequent fourth section does the same for military measures. Each of those sections contains the opinion of the respondents on the issue. The fifth section is answering the question of what can NATO do better. The fifth chapter is a discussion about the findings.

1. Concepts of assurance by Jeffrey W. Knopf

The term “*assurance*” was first used by Thomas C. Schelling in his book about coercive strategies *Arms and Influence* (1966), however, assurance was presented just as a part of deterrence. According to Schelling, it is necessary to assure adversary, that it won't be punished if it complies. Nevertheless, since Schelling's time, not much changed as deterrence attracts almost all the attention, while assurance is rather neglected. It is partially because assurance is seen as a logical part of deterrence which doesn't require more research and it is not seen as a stand-alone strategy. The term assurance can also have more meanings, for example, it can be used as a verb or noun. According to the Oxford dictionary, assurance is “*a statement that something will certainly be true or will certainly happen, particularly when there has been doubt about it*”. However, this definition is way too broad and inappropriate for the discipline of International Relations. What is more, terms like assurance, assurances and reassurance are often used interchangeably.

A great example is the Nuclear Posture Review Report (2010) of Obama's administration. In different parts of the text, all three terms – assurance, assurances and reassurance – are used for a description of the same phenomenon. For instance, in this case: “... *contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners...*” (pp. xi) word reassurance is used. However, in other parts of the text which is talking about the same thing,

authors use word assurances: “*security assurances to our allies and partners*” (pp. xii) and assurance: “*assurance of our allies and partners*” (pp. xii). All of them were supposed to mean the same thing, but the word used is different.

There are also examples in media. As a great instance can serve article of Los Angeles Times (2019) with title “*U.S. officials try to contain the damage and assure allies after Trump’s Syria withdrawal*”. However, in the first paragraph author suddenly uses a different term: “*attempt to ... reassure spooked allies about U.S. intentions*”.

As an example, from the academic sphere can serve the study of Keith Payne, Thomas Scheber and Kurt Guthe (2010) called “*U.S. Extended Deterrence and Assurance for Allies in Northeast Asia*”. Even though authors use the word assurance most of the time, there are also cases when they talk about the reassurance of allies (pp. 8-19).

Jeffrey W. Knopf (2012, pp. 376) was the first one who tried to distinguish between different varieties of assurance and put some order into this topic. Knopf defines assurance as “*attempts by one state or set of states to convince another state or set of states that the senders either will not cause or will not allow the recipients’ security to be harmed*” or as “*a strategy that seeks to influence another actor’s behaviour by alleviating a perceived source of insecurity and/or giving the actor a greater sense of security*”.

In the same article, Knopf (2012, pp. 382) says, that “*there is an extensive literature on alliances, but very little in this literature explores what makes a state regard the commitment of an ally as credible. Instead, most of the literature seeks to explain state alliance choices, i.e. why states join the alliances they do*”. A lot of literature is also focused on how alliances influence the balance of power, or how do they balance threats.

The author of this thesis uses types of assurance as were formulated by Jeffrey W. Knopf. It is important to stress out, that Knopf is the only one, who tried to conceptualize different types of this phenomenon. According to Knopf (2012, pp. 376), assurance can be “*a component of deterrence, a measure directed at allies, a strategy directed at potential adversaries, and a tool for preventing nuclear proliferation*”. Therefore, there are four basic assurance types: *Assurance as a Component of Deterrence*, *Assurance as a Promise to Alliance Commitments*, *a Reassurance of an Adversary* and *Non-Proliferation-related Security Assurances*. All of them are non-coercive strategies, in other words, the actor is not using threats as in the case of deterrence.

This thesis is focused on the type of assurance as a promise to alliance commitments. Assurance, in this case, can be used as a stand-alone strategy directed at allies. This variant of alliance-related assurance “*emphasizes promises to protect friends rather than to refrain from attacking states if they comply with one’s deterrent or compellent demands*” (Knopf, 2012, pp. 381).

As an example, can serve Bush’s US defence strategy from 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, where assurance of allies was mentioned as one of the four goals (QDR, 2001, pp. 11) Bush’s administration wanted to convince allies that the USA will not abandon them in a time of need, however, it wasn’t aiming at assuring allies, that they won’t end up in a conflict because of the US actions. However, it is still a type of positive assurance¹. This remained a strategy also during Obama’s administration (Nuclear Posture Review Report 2010), however official documents sometimes called it assurance and sometimes reassurance as was already shown. Important is, that this kind of assurance was encompassing ensuring ally facing both nuclear and non-nuclear threats.

Alliance-related type of assurance is also closely related to the concept of security guarantees and extended deterrence². Even though extended deterrence might look similar to alliance-related assurance, it is not the same. According to Knopf (2012, pp. 382), “*extended deterrence is meant to affect the calculations of adversaries, and its effectiveness is measured by whether or not it keeps them from an attack they might otherwise have attempted. Extended deterrence might also be intended to assure allies, but if so the relevant measure of effectiveness is whether the ally feels protected, not whether the adversary is deterred, and if the ally lacks confidence in extended deterrence it will not be assured*”. Therefore, extended deterrence may serve as a tool for assuring, but doesn’t guarantee assuring of ally automatically. This issue is well illustrated in “*Healey Theorem*” from the 1960s, according to which “*it takes only five per*

¹ On the other hand, *reassurance* is the negative one. As Knopf (2012) writes: “*a promise by state A not to attack state B ... should be distinguished from the positive form of assurance implied by a commitment to come to the defence of one’s allies if they are attacked*”.

² “*Extended deterrence involves defence guarantees by a state to its allies, usually -- but not exclusively -- in the form of formal military alliances, the purpose of which is to deter a common opponent from undertaking military moves that might affect the political and military interests of the allies. Extended deterrence thus depends on the sharing of important security interests, as well as coordination, between the guarantor and the ally. In order to succeed, it also requires sufficient political will from both sides to enter into, and maintain, this security relationship*” (Evron, 2012).

cent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians, but ninety-five per cent credibility to reassure the Europeans” (Yost, 2009, pp. 756).

2. Conditions for successful assurance

Evaluating if an ally is assured is not easy. As Knopf (2012, pp. 383) writes, “*there is virtually no empirical research on what makes alliance-related assurance effective*”. According to Mehta (2019), efforts to quantify and test assurance suffer in the academic world, while the need to understand assurance is increasing. Therefore, creating conditions for success can be challenging. General requirements for assurance in this thesis are based on the writings of other authors. Even though the concept of assurance is understudied, Knopf is not the only one who wrote an article about assurance. Based on the findings from the existing literature, the author of this thesis will try to define his own conditions and describe a framework for evaluating whether an ally is assured or not.

Assurance is closely linked to the United States in the academic literature. Almost all the works are oriented on the assuring efforts and strategies of the USA and their relationship with allies in different regions. According to David S. Yost (2009), who is discussing *Assurance and US Extended Deterrence in NATO* in his article, there are six conditions which, if fulfilled, help to assure allies. First is confidence in the reliability of the United States based on the shared values, interests and purposes. Second is the openness of the USA to allied influence. European NATO members want to have some influence on the behaviour of the US to avoid two risks – that they would have to go to conflict because of the USA and that the USA might not go into conflict because of them. The third is the US military presence in Europe. Fourth is the US nuclear presence in Europe as a link to US strategic nuclear forces. The fifth is allied roles in the nuclear posture and the sixth is agreed strategic policy. In other words, important are widespread participation, survivability and flexibility together with the other elements of assurance, like consultations and involvement in risk and responsibility-sharing.

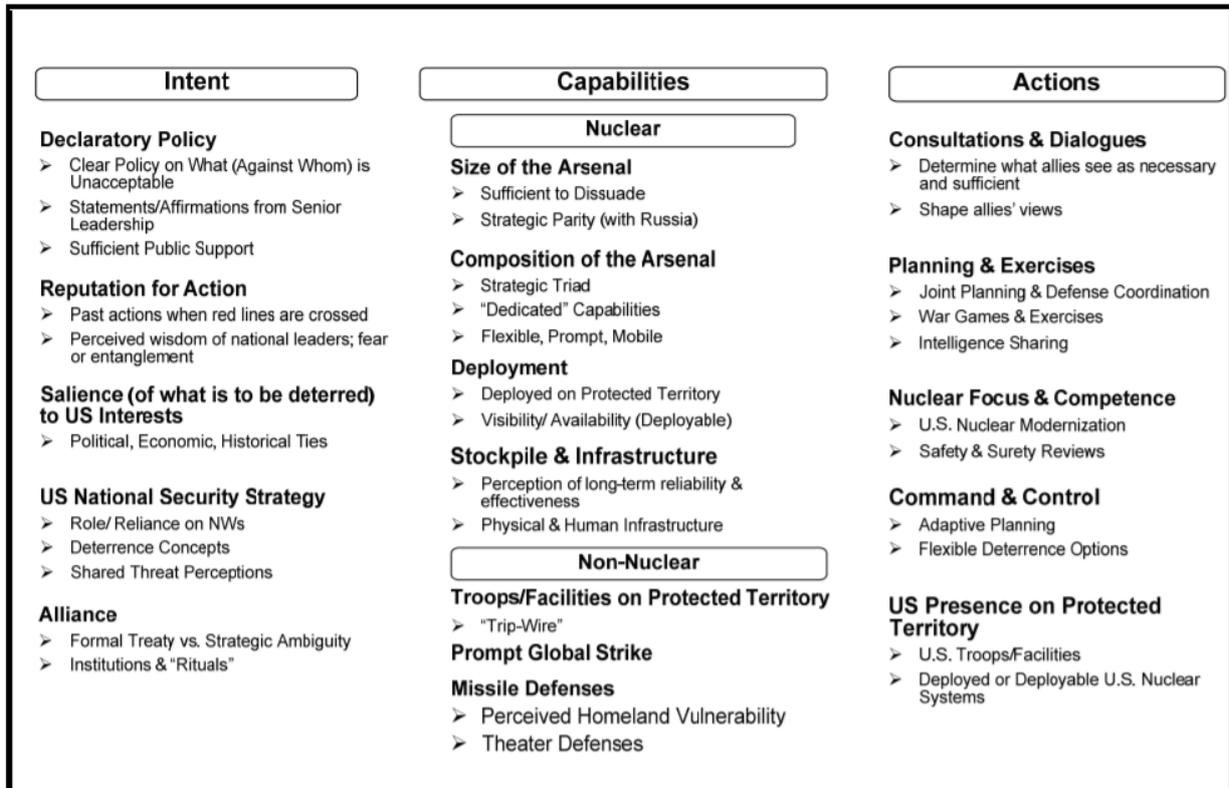
Murdock and Yeats (2009) are similarly as Yost discussing assurance with the emphasis on nuclear weapons. However, many of their observations can be used also for the conventional forces and the assurance of allies in general. Murdock and Yeats (2009, pp.1) note, that “*to be able to extend deterrence requires that we can deter our allies’ adversaries; assurance requires that allies believe that we can and will do so*”. If deterrent is not credible, then ally won’t be assured. However, ally doesn’t have to be assured, even though the deterrent is credible.

Murdock and Yeats (2009, pp. 3) also stress out, that “*assurance capabilities and communication strategies must be tailored to the strategic culture, threat perceptions, values, and specific concerns of each ally*”. That is similar as with the deterrence, which should be tailored to a concrete situation and form of warfare. It is not important, what we think is necessary for “*our*” ally to be assured, it is important what “*our*” ally thinks is necessary. To understand, what ally needs, consultations are necessary. As Murdock and Yeats (2009, pp. 3) say, “*meaningful consultation means knowing more than what an ally wants –it means knowing why they want it*”. Those consultations should, therefore, go into greater depth and should not consist just of briefings.

There are three conditions for successful assurance according to Murdock and Yeats (2009). First, it is important, how “*our*” ally understands “*our*” words and actions towards the deterred adversary. Some allies may require visible and concrete symbols of deterrence, even though the real effect on the adversary is low³. Second, assurance requires mechanisms “*of participation and/or burden-sharing to bring the ally ‘into the act’ of extending deterrence*”. Third, ally has to see, that “*our*” commitment is long-term. Murdock and Yeats put factors which are affecting the credibility of extended deterrence and assurance into three categories. Those are intent, capabilities and actions.

³ Adversary is usually more concerned by overall capability of the deterring country.

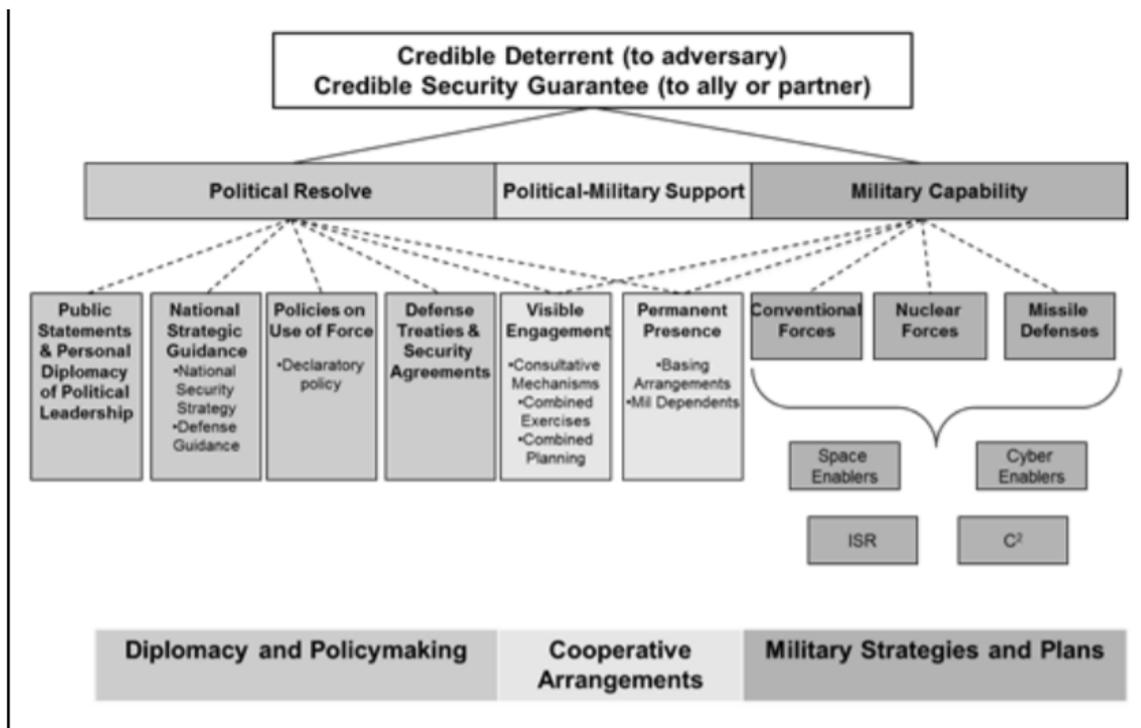
Factors Affecting the Credibility of Extended Deterrence and Assurance



(Murdock and Yeats, 2009, pp. 14)

Anderson, Larsen and Holdorf (2013, pp. 6) claim, that for successful assurance are necessary “*consistent, constant, and visible demonstrations of ... political resolve and military capabilities*”. Similarly, as Murdock and Yeats, authors also note, that requirements of extended deterrence and assurance may be different. According to Anderson, Larsen and Holdorf, demonstrating political resolve should consist of credible pledges supported by political and military leaders. A political commitment must be supported by forces which are capable to fulfil the proclamations. In this context, the presence of forces on the allied territory is important, because it can serve as a tripwire. Conventional forces are critical in this case and essential part of assurance.

Conceptual Framework of Extended Deterrence and Assurance



(Anderson, 2013, pp. 8)

Mehta (2019) argues, that emerging technologies may make extended deterrence more effective while making assuring of ally harder at the same time. For example, the USA may use drones instead of humans to provide security for an ally. That may decrease costs and increase effectiveness. However, such a move may increase risk of small-scale conflict and make allies feel less assured because a drone is not as strong trip-wire as a human soldier. According to Mehta, that may lead to more risky behaviour from states which do not feel assured, to test their ally's commitment.

Based on the overview above, we can say, that assurance generally requires three things: clear intentions, sufficient military capabilities and resolute actions. Among intentions belong declaratory policy, reputation for action and strategy. All of these can be considered as a part of political resolve. Military capabilities can be divided between nuclear and non-nuclear. When talking about nuclear capabilities, important are size, composition, deployment and stockpiling of the arsenal. With non-nuclear forces, the focus should be placed on the size, quality, effectivity, flexibility and operation ability of the forces. In the category of non-nuclear forces belong for example troops or missile defences. Among actions belong consultations and dialogues (during which can ally consult issues and have a chance to express desires and needs) planning and exercises and permanent presence of forces on allied territory.

Assurance is, therefore, working when all these three conditions are fulfilled:

First condition: *An object of assurance has to have confidence in its assurer*⁴

An object of assurance has to believe, that assurer will help him. This belief requires clear intentions, strategy and also the motivation of the assurer. Another important thing is the reputation for action. If assurer broke promises before, it can be hard to look credible. These components should be fulfilled, otherwise, an object of assurance cannot consider assurer credible and reliable and loses confidence in it.

Second condition: *An object of assurance has to perceive the military capabilities of its assurer as sufficient*

If the object of assurance doesn't perceive assurer's forces as sufficient, then it cannot be assured. Military capabilities ensuring security warranties given by the assurer cannot be considered weak. This applies both to the forces in the region and to military capabilities in general (both conventional and nuclear).

Third condition: *An object of assurance has to appreciate actions undertaken by its assurer*

Among actions belong declaration of support in a speech of a politician, consultations with assurer, joint planning, exercises or permanent presence of assurer's forces on the territory of its ally. However, every state has different preferences and needs. It is necessary to ask, what has assuring effect and why. For instance, we should not try to establish a base in case our ally doesn't want it, even though it could have a good impact on their security. It may deter the adversary, but it won't assure the ally.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the aim of the research and the logic behind it. Author of this thesis starts with the research questions and then moves to an overview of the methodology used by other authors who did similar research. Data collecting and subsequent analysis are also described.

Firstly, it was necessary to reveal, to what extent are Estonians afraid of Russia. Without knowledge of this, it would not make sense to start research on assurance. However, based on

⁴ Assurer - an actor in international relations who is trying to assure other actor about fulfilling commitment to its security in a case of need.

the common knowledge, the author of this thesis presupposed that Estonians are afraid of Russia at least to some extent and did not expect a completely negative answer in this matter. Author of this thesis starts the empirical part with evaluating of Estonian fear based on the public opinion polls and research interviews. After this kind of introduction, other parts of the empirical chapter follow.

Secondly, the author of the thesis wanted to know, what Estonians think about NATO's assuring efforts. Are they satisfied with the current state of things or not? When evaluating this, the author of this thesis had to introduce all political and military measures adopted by NATO. Subsequently, the author of this thesis used public opinion polls and information obtained during research interviews to conclude whether Estonians are assured or not. It is necessary to stress out, that in this case were used conditions introduced in the previous chapter. Same as in the first case, the author of this thesis expected, that Estonians will not be assured. Based on the assumptions that there is an anarchic system of international relations and nobody can be one hundred per cent sure about that an ally will come to help, Estonians should never be assured. Nevertheless, in this part, the author comes to a surprising conclusion that Estonians are assured by their allies from NATO.

Thirdly, the original plan of the author was to describe what should NATO do better, so Estonia could feel more assured. Paradoxically, there was not much to tell in this part, as Estonians are assured and there is no need for fundamental changes. What is more, this part of the thesis about possible improvement serves as another argument which supports the conclusion that Estonians are assured. In case they were not assured, they would require more changes in NATO's assuring efforts.

During the writing of the thesis, the author reached an unexpected conclusion. Thus, there was a need to add a part, where the cause of it is discussed and possible reasons for successful assurance of Estonians described.

Now let's have a look at the discussion about how to evaluate assurance and on a concrete example of research conducted about assurance of Baltic states. The scholarly literature is divided when it comes to the most appropriate research strategy. According to Eric C. Paulson (2017), who researched the assurance of Baltic states, assurance levels can be measured to a large extent by simply asking those who should be assured. This approach was also used in this thesis.

On the other hand, Mehta (2019) claims, that *“it is unlikely that our allies will delineate what precisely will assure them, for fear of drawing a sort of ‘red-line’ of extended deterrence”*. Mehta is also unsure what we can consider as evidence, that ally is assured. Another problem might arise when an object of assurance doesn't have all information about assurer and therefore cannot make informed decisions. Hypothetically, there can be a situation, when assurer did all the necessary steps, but cannot reveal all of them to their ally. Even though the measures are sufficient, the object of assurance will not be satisfied in such a case.

One might get an idea, that measuring the amount of deterrence against adversary may help us to evaluate the level of assurance of an ally. There are two problems. Firstly, we should keep in mind, that successful deterrence doesn't automatically mean assured ally. Secondly, measuring the effectiveness of deterrence is almost impossible. Some authors claim, that believing in deterrence is like believing in God (Halas 2019). Contrary to this, Paulson (2017, pp. 13) claims, that it is possible to measure both deterrence and assurance. However, his criteria are rather unclear and hypothetical.

There were limitations to already mentioned Paulson's research. The main problem is, that he tried to generalize the results of the survey – not interviews - among 13 military and civilian students from Baltic Defence College on the whole Baltic region. Add to this, two out of those 13 respondents weren't even from the Baltic states but from Poland and Ukraine. Respondents were attaching numbers to types of assurance and had to decide which are the best according to them.

Author of this thesis decided to use Paulson's idea, that the best way how to know if an ally is assured, is to ask him. However, contrary to Paulson, author of this thesis tried to have respondents from various environments and interviewed them, instead of just letting them rank types of assurance. Author of this thesis believed, that information gained from interviews held in Estonia in combination with open sources will enable to decide, if the conditions from the previous chapter are fulfilled.

When starting with the research to evaluate if the state is assured, the author of this thesis decided to collect data both for public opinion and for the opinion of the government. Nevertheless, data about the government's opinion were almost impossible to gain because of the sensitivity of the topic. Add to this, ministers or presidents do not usually have time to participate in academic research. Hence, the author decided to substitute the government's opinion by people who have insight into the problematic. As ideal respondents were chosen higher officials from the state administration (for example from the Ministry of Defence or

Foreign Affairs). Author of this thesis expected that those respondents will have sufficient insight and that they might say out loud things, which we couldn't hear from the highest representatives of the state. Then, this thesis also used interviews with journalists, academics or experts from think-tanks. Those people are the ones who know what is going on in their country and society and have sufficient knowledge of the issue

Public opinion is also important for assurance, as citizens also represent the state and their opinion has to impact on the government. There might be serious consequences if the public wouldn't feel assured. For instance, confidence in the aid from ally may strengthen the will to fight the adversary. Some factors of assurance may be harder to evaluate, as the public doesn't have access to a certain type of information. For instance, when it comes to evaluating consultations and joint planning which are hidden to the public. Citizens also do not have to fully understand the effectivity of military equipment and other things. However, three conditions for successful assurance as were set by the author of this thesis should be confirmable also in case of the public.

As was already said, this thesis primarily uses unique qualitative data from interviews held by the author of the thesis. Author supplements research interviews with already existing quantitative data from the Estonian Ministry of Defence, which publishes a survey about national defence two times per year since 2012. Citizens are asked in March and October. Questions are various – from the will to defend to country to the perception of NATO. These surveys present a reliable source of information, as they are conducted on behalf of the state and done by independent research company Tuuru-uuringute AS. Surveys truly represent the opinion of the population as they have over one thousand respondents who are Estonian residents and in the age of fifteen or older. Add to this, the author of this thesis decided to make his survey for students of Estonian universities, to get some other data to compare with the results from the surveys ordered by the Ministry of Defence.

3.1 Data collection - Interviews

Even though the surveys contain a lot of useful information, the data do not provide in-depth insights. More in-depth responses are better for validating the conditions of assurance and such can be gained only through interviews as was already mentioned above. Here is described the logic behind the selection of respondents.

The author tried to interview officers from the Ministry of Defence, Interior and Foreign Affairs and also people from the military and Defence League. Those were chosen as the

representatives of state administration. The author also asked for the interview all PR departments of parliamentary political parties, academics from Tallinn University and the University of Tartu, researches from the think-tank International Centre for Defence and Security and journalists from Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR).

Contact email was sent to forty people and institutions. Author of this thesis asked only those, whose work was at least somehow related to security issues. For instance, email was sent to the director of NATO and EU department, but not to the director of the legal department.

Generally, all persons who were contacted from the ministries were in leading positions – Secretary generals, Undersecretaries or Directors of the department. In the case of academics, journalists and think-tank analysts, the only criterion was their relevance for the topic of the thesis.

Nevertheless, not everyone wanted to be interviewed. It is understandable as the topic of state security is highly sensitive. This might create bias because only those willing to speak will participate. Moreover, it is just not possible to make interviews with everyone relevant to the topic. On the other hand, there is no other option on how to get the information from “insiders” and this was the only way.

Author of this thesis prepared thirteen questions for the research interviews which were the following:

- 1) How do you perceive Russia? (As a threat, partner, ...)
- 2) After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, many feared, that Baltic states will become another target of Russian aggression. How high is the probability, that Russia will try to disrupt Estonian sovereignty by military action, according to you?

The first two questions intended to reveal the respondent's attitude towards the adversary. It was possible, that some respondents would not see Russia as a threat at all. Author of this thesis tried to be as impartial as possible and questions were composed in a way not to give hints which would lead to “correct answers”.

- 3) Estonian allies from NATO are trying to assure the Baltic States, that they would support them in the case of dispute or conflict with Russia. They have sent planes, soldiers and there were also exercises. Do you see NATO's commitment to Estonia's defence as credible? And what Estonians think in general about this issue?
- 4) Is the topic of “Defending Baltics” getting enough attention in NATO?

Third and fourth question were trying to collect information to confirm or disprove the first condition of successful assurance as was described in the previous chapter.

- 5) Do you think, that Allied forces currently stationed in Estonia have a deterring effect on Russia?

The fifth question is related to the second condition.

- 6) What is more important for assurance of Estonian public – how the forces look or their real effectivity? Hypothetically, if it is more preferable to have few F-35 jets which can be destroyed during the first minutes of the conflict on the airfield, or if it is better to have a battalion of soldiers which can slow-down possible Russian advance.
- 7) Is there a difference for you, if the allied forces in Estonia are from Great Britain or the USA, or for example from Bulgaria or Romania? What is more assuring?

Sixth and seventh question are related to both second and third condition. It is discussing both capabilities and action (sending of troops and equipment).

- 8) Do you think that some public pro-Russian statements made by leaders of Allied countries weaken NATO cohesion and therefore the security of Estonia?
- 9) What can NATO do better to assure Estonia?

Questions number 8 and 9 are related to the third condition. Aim of question number 9 was to reveal what is important for Estonia and if are Estonians getting it or not.

- 10) Do you think that the USA would use nuclear weapons against Russia because of conflict in Estonia?

This question is related to the second condition. Respondents were asked if they believe in extended deterrence which should ensure their security.

- 11) Would you like to have Allied (the US, UK's, French) nuclear weapons on Estonian territory?

The last question is related to the third condition. The author was trying to reveal if such a measure would be welcomed or not.

Some questions could be formulated slightly differently according to the specialization of the respondent and they also differ a bit from the ones which were presented in the thesis proposal. Additional questions were asked when it was necessary.

Out of the forty people which author of this thesis contacted, only eight were willing to meet and one filled anonymous questionnaire online which was offered to everyone in case they

didn't want to meet in person. The rest refused to meet, didn't find themselves informed enough to participate or didn't respond at all despite numerous attempts to contact them.

Finally, respondents were following: moderator, editor and commentator of ERR television news Tarmo Maiberg; professor of comparative politics at Tallinn University who is also specialised on Russian minority in Estonia Raivo Vetik; lecturer from School of Governance, Law and Society of Tallinn University Tiina Pajuste; former Estonian Ministry of Defence official and current researcher of ICDS think-tank with specialization on NATO and EU Martin Hurt; Secretary General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rainer Saks and other two officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who wanted to stay in anonymity. The last respondent was from Estonian Defence League, but he wished to stay in the anonymity too. One respondent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs filled out an anonymous online questionnaire based on the questions above. This way of participation was offered to everyone whom the author had to contact repeatedly.

The author met the respondents at their workplace and asked them questions which are listed above. Interviews took around thirty minutes and in some exceptional cases an hour. All respondents were asked for permission to record the interview and only two of them refused. In those cases, the author of this thesis took notes. Few respondents wished not to be quoted when answering the question which they considered controversial.

3.2 Data collection - Questionnaires

Questionnaires for students were based on the same questions as interviews, however, they were shorter and simpler. Author of this thesis used Google Forms and questionnaires were sent to the study departments of Tallinn Technical University, Tallinn University and the University of Tartu. Coordinators promised to send questionnaires to students.

Questionnaires were translated into Estonian to ensure, that only Estonian citizens will answer the questions. The author decided to use a Likert scale consisting of four answers: Strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Respondents had to express their opinion on seven claims. This type of research is also considered qualitative, as we want to know what is the opinion of our respondents.

This kind of research also has its limitations. It does not represent the whole population, but only a small segment of young people who are studying at the universities. Another bias can be caused by the fact, that only those who are interested in this topic will answer. However,

this survey was prepared only as supportive material for the main research, which consists of interviews with insiders and analysis of already existing data from the Ministry of Defence.

Nevertheless, contacting students was much harder than expected. Even though the university sent the questionnaires, only fifteen people responded. Small participation was probably caused by a high number of other questionnaires which were students asked to complete by their peers as this is a very popular way to collect data for the thesis. In conclusion, this way of collecting data has proven to be ineffective and inappropriate for the research. Thus, the author decided to completely abandon it and not use it in the thesis.

3.3 Analysis of gathered information

Analysis of the interviews was done qualitatively. Answers were taken all together, summed up and presented by the author of this thesis. Risk in using this approach might lay in subjective explanation of gathered information. Another thing is, that information collected in this case are very specific and it is not possible to repeat the research with the same questions and the same respondents. In case someone would like to make similar research, the circumstances and respondents will be different. Transcripts of interviews are not part of the thesis to ensure the anonymity of respondents. Results of a survey published by the Ministry of Defence was interpreted and set into the context of the security situation of Estonia.

4. Estonia in the shadow of the Russian threat

The empirical section of the thesis consists of six different parts. The first part serves as a brief introduction of the Republic of Estonia and the author focuses mainly on its history. After the introduction comes second part dedicated to a question, to which extent are Estonians afraid of Russia. Subsequently, in the third part author discusses NATO's strategy towards Russia. After that fourth section about military measures follows. The fifth part is focused on the possible improvement of measures undertaken by NATO. Last sixth part is dedicated to discussion about the findings.

4.1 Basic information about Estonia

The Republic of Estonia is a small country in Eastern Europe on the shore of the Baltic sea. Estonia shares a border with Latvia (333 kilometres) and Russia (324 kilometres). From a geographical perspective, most of the country are lowlands with a lot of bogs and forests. The highest point has 318 metres (CIA, 2020).

With 1,2 million inhabitants Estonia belongs among sparsely populated countries. More than one-third of people live in the capital city of Tallinn. Almost 25% of the population is Russian speaking minority. Estonians represent around 70% of the population and the remaining 5% is composed of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Finns and other minorities. Russian influence is visible also in the matter of religion, as the largest church is the Orthodox (16,2%). The second-largest church is Lutheran (9,9%), however, 54% of Estonians declare no faith (CIA, 2020).

The Estonian Republic was established in 1918, however, it had to fight Russia for its existence in the war of independence. Estonians, who were supported by Finland and Great Britain, won and the war ended in 1920 with the signing of the peace agreement in the Estonian city of Tartu. Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic promised to respect independence and sovereignty of the State of Estonia and officially gave up rights over Estonian people and territory. However, this pledge was broken in 1940, when USSR invaded Baltic states and incorporated them into the Union (CIA, 2020).

Estonia became independent again in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. Last Russian soldiers left the country in 1994. Even though many Russians returned to Russia, there was a lot of those who decided to stay in Estonia. Nevertheless, due to the strict citizenship policies, automatic citizenship was given only to those, who were Estonian citizens before 1940 and their descendants. Others had to pass the Estonian language and citizenship test or apply for Russian citizenship. In consequence, thousands of Russians (almost 40% of the whole Estonian population at that time) in Estonia became stateless persons (Griffiths, 2017). In January 2019, there were 76 148 people without citizenship (Vahtla, 2019). Those can vote in local elections but are restricted from the general elections. If parents are lawful residents of Estonia at least for five years, they can apply for citizenship for their children (CIA, 2020).

Another milestone in Estonia's history came in 2004 when the country entered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU). In 2011, Estonians joined the Eurozone. Russia didn't like NATO's expansion, especially into the Baltics, and protested against it. When four jets arrived in Lithuania because of NATO's air policing mission, Russian lower house of Parliament adopted a resolution which denounced NATO expansion in general and deployment of the jets specifically (Myers, 2004).

In 2007, Estonian authorities removed the statue of a Soviet soldier. That led to protests, which are known as the Bronze Night riots. Estonians perceived the statue as a symbol of occupation and government urged Tallinn city council to move the statue and soldiers buried at

the site on the cemetery. During the riot protesters from Russian-speaking minority clashed with the police and public and private property was also damaged (Cavegn, 2017).

Riots were fuelled by false information from Russian news, that statue and war graves are being destroyed. From the second day of protests, 27th April 2007, Estonia had to face numerous cyber-attacks. Some of them lasted for weeks. Among targets were banks, media and websites of government bodies. Attacks came from Russian IP addresses, online instructions were in Russian language and when Estonia's appeals to Moscow for help were ignored (McGuinness, 2017). This event was a lecture for Estonia and since then it started to focus more on cybersecurity.

The so-called colour revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) had an impact on the Russian grand strategy, which shifted from collaboration to open competition with the West. Russia decided to re-establish its great power status and went on the track of revisionism. This anti-status quo orientation resulted in the Georgian war in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Mazloomi, 2018).

Based both on historical experience and also on events of 2007, or kidnapping of an Estonian border guard in 2014 (BBC, 2015), Estonia has reasons to be worried about its security. After Russian attacks on Georgia and Ukraine, the threat of military invasion became broadly discussed topic. What is more, Russia continues with small daily provocations. Among those is a violation of airspace, naval intimidation or spreading of disinformation.

In 2012, Estonia spent 340 million Euros on defence, which was equivalent to 1,9% of its GDP. In 2015, Estonia increased spending on defence on 418 million Euros, which was 2,02% of Estonia's GDP at that time, and remains over 2% threshold since then (NATO, 2019).

Estonian defence forces consist of Land Forces, Navy, Air Force, Estonian Defence League (Reserves) and Border Guards (which belongs below the Ministry of Interior). According to the website of the Ministry of Defence (2020), Estonian male citizens aged between 18 and 27 have to undergo compulsory military service in the length between 8 and 11 months. The length depends on the education and position provided by the Defence Forces to the conscript. Non-commissioned officers, reserve officers, and specialists serve 11 months. After the compulsory service, reservists train once in every five years to refresh the skills and to learn about new arms and equipment.

4.2 Are Estonians afraid of Russia?

This part is a first step of the research as was described in the methodological chapter. The author of this thesis wants to reveal to what extent are Estonians afraid of Russia. Without knowledge of this, it would not make sense to start research on assurance. However, the author doesn't expect that Estonians would not be afraid at all. Based on the introduction above, we can say that historical experience is not good and therefore we should expect at least some fear of the history repeating itself. Estonia is also more than wary because of recent Russian activities.

Most of the persons who were interviewed by the author of this thesis declared, that Russia is a threat to Estonia's security. However, they think, that this threat is rather long-term than immediate. Nobody feels threatened on a daily basis, however, according to Tiina Pajuste "*it is back in everyone's mind that we are next to strong military power*". Almost everyone mentioned bad historical experience with Russian neighbour and most of the respondents think that such experience has implications for today and helps to create mistrust.

Respondents claim that the mindset of Estonia and Russia is very different. They are aware of the fact, that Russia sees Estonia as its sphere of influence. However, as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rainer Saks put it: "*Estonians won't change their policy to have better economic ties with anybody. If you want to have to good economic relations with Estonia, you have to accept its foreign and security policy*".

Joining of NATO and the EU is perceived as the strongest possible security guarantee, without which would Estonia share the faith of Georgia and Ukraine. Most of the respondents think, that Baltic states are independent and safe just because of "*great integration into the West*". However, that doesn't mean that Russia won't test the resolve of Baltics states, NATO and the EU. A proclamation, that Estonia has to be ready for anything was repeated numerously during the interviews.

According to some respondents, it is now more about deterrence than defence: "*NATO has to be sure that Kremlin understands that price of testing resolve in Baltic states would be very high and all member states would respond resolutely. This is very important for us*", says one of the officials.

Overall, interviewed Estonians hope, that the relationship with Russia will get better in the future, as it would be beneficial for both states and the region as a whole. Nevertheless,

according to the respondents, there is not much what Estonia can do - the ball is on Russian court.

Estonian public is not afraid of direct military invasion either. At least not for now. According to the Turu-uuringute AS research for the Ministry of Defence from March 2019 (pp. 32), only 4% of people who live in Estonia see a large-scale military attack by a foreign country or limited military attack against a strategic site as very probable. Only 17% of people see the large-scale attack as rather probable and 16% of people see the limited military attack as rather probable. This puts military threat from a foreign state, which is Russia in this case, at the very bottom of the chart of the risks Estonians are afraid of.

Most of the people are afraid of cyber-attacks (75%), fake news (71%) and foreign state interference into Estonia's policy or economy (66%). These three threats were at the top of the chart and more people considered them probable in comparison to previous polls. What is more, all of these issues are usually mentioned in context with Russia. Even though the citizens are not afraid of the direct military intervention, there is a concern about the "*influence*" Russia might project over Estonia.

Whole 39% of people living in Estonia considered "*Russian activities in restoring its authority*" as a certain threat to peace and security in the world between 2018 and 2019 (Turu-uuringute, 2019, pp. 11). Another 31% saw it as a threat "*to some extent*". Only 24% of people were sure, that these activities are not a threat. Results are consistent during the last years. People are more concerned about cyber-attacks, terrorism, migration or climate change.

There is a big difference between Estonians and other nationalities (mainly Russians). Half of Estonians (52%) saw Russia as a certain threat to peace and security. That is in sharp contrast with the opinion of the minorities – only 11% of respondents with a different nationality than Estonian consider Russia certain threat.

Most of the people from Estonia are optimistic about the future (Turu-uuringute, 2019, pp. 27). 28% of them think that situation will become more secure in the upcoming decade, 37% believe, that situation will remain the same and only 20% of people are afraid that the situation will be less secure.

According to Tarmo Maiberg, Estonian journalist, Russian speaking Estonians who have higher education and more contact with "the West" are more hostile towards Russia. Raivo

Vetik, Estonian academic who has researched⁵ Russian minority in Estonia, says, that there is not just a difference based on the education, but also age. Young Russians are more similar to young Estonians and have similar opinions. This indicates, that the Russian minority might better integrate into Estonian society in the future.

To conclude this part, we can say, that Estonians are afraid of Russia. However, it is rather a fear that Russians will meddle into Estonian affairs in various ways - like spreading of disinformation or cyber-attacks. Direct military invasion is not considered an immediate threat; however, Estonians are aware of this possibility and are trying to prepare for it. Assurance from Estonia's allies is more than welcomed and necessary in this setting. Without it, Russia could dare to escalate its provocations dramatically.

4.3 NATO's political measures

This part is focused on NATO's strategy towards Russia and represents the second step of the research about whether Estonia is assured. Firstly, the author discusses "political" measures adopted by NATO. Those consist mainly of declarations or sanctions. This is important for the first condition of assurance which says, that object of assurance has to believe that assurer will help him. This part also contributes to the third condition of assurance as it includes a description of assurer's actions. For instance, among actions belong concrete declaration of support from politicians (for example speech, or state visit) or financial aid. Secondly, the opinion of the respondents on the measures is described. Thirdly, the author presents the opinion of the public.

When Russia annexed Crimea and started the war in Eastern Ukraine, NATO countries had to react. Politicians were giving speeches to assure allies; NATO countries were discussing further steps and first countermeasures were applied. One of the main aims was to assure countries of the NATO's "Eastern flank" and also signal to Russia, that the Alliance is ready to defend Baltic states, Poland and every other ally. The motivation for NATO to react on Russia's activities resolutely was strong. If NATO would not be able to defend its members in case of a crisis, it would mean the end of the Alliance.

In April 2014, NATO suspended cooperation with Russia because of its actions against Ukraine (Rychterová, 2014). What is more, foreign ministers ordered military commanders to

⁵ VETIK, Raivo, 2019. National Identity as Interethnic (De)mobilization: A Relational Approach. *Ethnopolitics* [online]. 18(4), 406-422 [cit. 2020-03-03]. DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2019.1613065. ISSN 1744-9057. Accessible through: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17449057.2019.1613065>

prepare plans for reinforcing NATO's defence on the Eastern flank. NATO countries also offered more planes for Air Policing mission (Reuters, 2014). States like the USA and Poland generally want a tougher approach towards Russia, while France and Germany are usually more reluctant (Ainso, 2019).

There were various measures undertaken against Russia, however, it is not the aim of this thesis to describe all of them. In general, we can say that the EU, the United States and some other Western countries like Canada or Norway imposed sanctions against businesses, individuals and officials from Russia and Ukraine. According to the website RiskAdvisory.com, on 27th September 2019, the sanction list contained more than 500 companies and 300 individuals.

Even though Germany is sometimes criticised for a "softer approach" towards Russia, it is also able to denounce Russian activities sharply (Forsberg, 2016). The fact that Germany sees partnership and cooperation with Russia desirable in a long-term doesn't mean that Germans would not care about their allies. As a great illustration can serve assuring speech of Angela Merkel in Riga from August 2014, in which German chancellor ensured, that "*Article V of the NATO treaty [...] is not something which just exists on paper, but is also something which must be filled with life*" (Reuters, 2014b). Such declarations of support are very important for assuring of ally and makes promises credible.

On September the 3rd, the day before a summit of NATO in Wales, Barrack Obama gave a speech in Estonia's capital city Tallinn - another important display of support which fulfils the third condition of assurance. Obama declared, that attack on one is an attack on all and promised, that the armed forces of the United States would help Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and any other ally if attacked. US determination to defend Baltic states was stressed out by Obama's statement, that "*the defence of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defence of Berlin and Paris and London.*" Add to this, Obama mentioned, that Baltic states are not "*post-Soviet territory, but sovereign and independent nations with the right to make their own decisions*" (Garamone, 2014). Also, other politicians from NATO countries, like David Cameron, showed support and various government officials paid visits to the Baltic capitals. All those actions fit within the third condition of assurance.

For the description of the evolution of NATO's strategy is the best to sum-up declarations from NATO summits which took place between 2014 and 2019. First NATO summit after the annexation of Crimea took place between 4th and 5th of September 2014 in Wales. NATO countries declared, that Russia's aggressive behaviour is dangerous for peace in

Europe and stressed out that *“the greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territories and our populations against attack, as set out in Article V of the Washington Treaty”*.

As a reaction on Russia’s actions, NATO leaders approved the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which was created to strengthen collective defence and crisis management capability. Declaration also mentions *“continuing need for assurance”*, and explicitly mentions continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern part of the Alliance on a rotational basis. According to the document, those forces *“provide the fundamental baseline requirement for assurance and deterrence, and are flexible and scalable in response to the evolving security situation”*.

Among other mentioned measures were enhancing of responsiveness of NATO Response Force (NRF) and the creation of Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) able to be deployed within a few days. Attention was also focused on command and control together with planning and exercising. NATO leaders also acknowledged the need to address hybrid threats and the necessity to increase defence spending.

On Warsaw summit in 2016, NATO denounced Russia’s *“large-scale snap exercises contrary to the spirit of the Vienna Document, and provocative military activities near NATO borders, including the Baltic Sea region [...]; its irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric [...] and its repeated violations of NATO Allied airspace”*. Declaration describes Russia as unpredictable and untransparent.

As a reaction on this kind of behaviour, NATO enhanced deterrence and defence posture, which included forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. The most important measure adopted in Warsaw for the Baltic states is establishing of enhanced forward presence (eFP) in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Among other measures was a partnership with Finland and Sweden on *“a broad range of issues”*. The EU is another essential partner mentioned in all of the recent declarations after summits.

The summit in Brussels in 2018 mentions satisfaction with the progress alliance made, for instance in non-US defence spending. Leaders also announced the creation of the NATO Readiness Initiative. Aim of it is to have national forces at high readiness available to NATO anytime. Add to this, the document also mentions continuing exercising of rapid reinforcing of ally who came under the threat.

After the summit in London 2019, NATO agreed on updated defence plan for the Baltics and Poland, which includes strengthening of units already deployed there. Turkey threatened that it will not support the plan unless NATO declares that Kurds are terrorists. However, there were no problems related to this issue on the summit.

From the overview of the summits above, NATO seems firmly committed to defence of Estonia and other allies. The intentions, motivations and interests of the Alliance are mentioned clearly in the official documents and therefore fulfil the first condition.

4.3.1 US approach to assurance

The United States, the strongest NATO member, address assurance policy in official documents like the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Military Strategy (NMS), and Deterrence and Defence Posture Review. Conclusions of US documents are not very different from the ones made by NATO as a whole. For instance, 2015 NSS states that “*our Article V commitment to the collective defence of all NATO Members is ironclad*”. NSS of Donald Trump’s administration from 2017 (pp. 48) is staying on the same course: “*The United States remains firmly committed to our European allies and partners. [...] The United States remains committed to Article V of the Washington Treaty.*” NATO’s Eastern flank is mentioned explicitly.

Another US commitment to Baltic security exists through European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), which used to be called the European Reassurance Initiative. It was created by Barrack Obama after the annexation of Crimea and the initiative aims to increase the presence of the United States in Europe. A budget of the initiative was raised significantly by Donald Trump (Herszenhorn, 2017) in 2017 on 3,4 billion USD (Cancian, 2016). In 2019, EDI’s fiscal budget request was already 6,5 billion USD. For 2020, Pentagon requested 5,9 billion USD for the initiative. The cut is explained by different goals. The military had to invest in infrastructure and transport of the material in previous years. As these aims were accomplished, the cut was expected (Mehta, 2019b).

4.3.2 The opinion of respondents and the public on political measures

NATO’s commitment to Estonia’s defence was seen as credible by all respondents who participated in the research interview. Some of them even used terms as “*absolutely credible*”. Article V was often mentioned. As one official from Defence League put it: “*We say – never again, never alone. Membership in the EU and NATO is crucial for us.*”

Some respondents were repeatedly ensured about NATO commitments in private talks with diplomats from other countries, for example during the summits. They claim, that there is a high level of mutual trust. However, almost all responses mentioned a necessity for Estonia to be able to protect itself to some extent. Respondents also stressed out, that Estonia is not interested in any provocation against Russia, because NATO wouldn't have to help in that case.

Martin Hurt from ICDS think-tank compares Estonia's relationship with its allies from NATO as marriage. *"You need to work all the time, every day. It is not that one day it works and another day it doesn't anymore. There is no permanent guarantee, and you need to be ready to fight every day. NATO is credible today, but what about tomorrow?"*.

NATO's communication in public relation terms is highly appreciated. Assurance is seen as an important thing, but according to some respondents, it is dependent on the real defence capabilities and not solely on proclamations and resolutions. Therefore, the real strengthening of defence (and deterrence) is the most important.

Effect of Donald Trump's presidency is not seen as negative according to the respondents, as US engagement in Baltic security increased dramatically. NATO units deployed in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – as was decided in Warsaw – are considered as important signalling. Especially, because it has no end date and it will continue unless Russia changes its behaviour.

When asked if the topic of *"defending Baltic states"* gets enough attention in NATO, most of the respondents said that it does. Some interviews took place at the time of the London summit, which was often given as a great example. According to the respondents, the London summit was a confirmation that NATO is functional and that deterrence is functional too. *"We got the result which we wanted"*, says Rainer Saks, Secretary-General from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some respondents added to this, that *"not everything is known to the public but we are satisfied"*.

Tiina Pajuste from Tallinn University adds to this that, *"no member state thinks that the topic of Baltic states is irrelevant"*. However, there was also an opinion, that *"topic of defending Baltics can never get enough attention. There are many topics in NATO and every nation has its interests"*.

Sometimes, there are pro-Russian statements made by leaders of allied countries, for instance by Czech president Milos Zeman. However, respondents do not consider that a big threat for Estonia's security. *"On a practical level, there is a lot of solidarity and unity. Actual*

preparedness to respond according to article V is high. Any kind of discussion among allies is possible, for example about sanctions”, one of the respondents claim.

According to the Turu-Uuringute AS research for the Ministry of Defence from March 2019, 75% of the population is in favour of Estonian membership in NATO. Out of that, 43% are certainly in favour of and 32% rather in favour of the NATO membership. When taken by nationality, 90% of Estonians are for NATO membership, in contrast to only 44% of non-Estonians (Turu-uuringute, 2019, pp. 71).

What is more, the confidence of people of Estonia in NATO is increasing over the years. 77% of Estonians declare that they completely or rather trust NATO. However, the number of non-Estonians who trust NATO is two times lower (35%).

More than half of respondents (56%) ranked membership in NATO as the most important factor for Estonia's security. The second most important security guarantee was the will of residents to defend the country (38%) and third was the development of Estonia's independent defence capabilities (30%).

Whole 52% of people believe, that NATO would provide military aid if Estonia faced the military threat and 41% of people think that NATO membership would prevent a military attack against Estonia completely. We can take it as a confirmation of NATO's successful communication towards Estonia and its audience. Only 19% of the respondents believe that allies from NATO would limit their help to political and diplomatic support and only 12% think there would be no help for Estonia at all (Turu-uuringute, 2019, pp. 73-74).

Add to this, 18% of respondents have seen NATO measures to ensure the security of Estonia as completely sufficient and 49% as sufficient in general. Only 9% have seen them rather or completely insufficient (Turu-uuringute, 2019, pp. 75).

In this part, the author of the thesis described NATO's strategy towards Russia. Based on the official documents from NATO's summits, the author claim that NATO's interest in the Baltic region is credible. What is more, the respondents see it in the same way and NATO enjoys strong support among Estonian public too. Thus, we can say, that the first condition of assurance is fulfilled. The speeches of the politicians and other actions like increasing of EDI budget or sanctions aimed at Russian officials and companies are also highly appreciated by Estonians and therefore fulfil the third condition of assurance.

4.4 NATO's military measures

This chapter describes the military aspects of assuring Estonia. Author of this thesis firstly describes capabilities of NATO in general and after that also the capabilities stationed in Estonia. Add to this, the author describes what military actions is NATO carrying out in Estonia. Subsequently, the opinion of Estonians on those topics will be provided. The author will use information gathered during interviews with experts and public opinion polls. Their opinion will serve for deciding, whether the second and third condition of assurance are fulfilled – in other words, whether Estonians consider military capabilities of NATO sufficient and if they are satisfied with NATO's actions.

4.4.1 Comparison of Russian and NATO's military

At the very beginning, it is necessary to briefly compare the military capabilities of NATO and Russia in general. When we have a look at the numbers, there is no doubt that NATO is highly superior to Russia. The main reason for it are the United States with the largest defence budget in the world. US government spends two times more on defence than all the other countries from NATO combined. Russians are number eight when it comes to defence spending – even Germany or the United Kingdom spend more on defence than Russia (GFP, 2020).

Americans have 1 379 800 active troops and another 849 thousand in reserve (Chapter Three, 2020). The conscript-based Russian military has 900 000 active personnel and 2 million reservists. Since 2008 defence reform is Russia shifting towards smaller and more professional ground forces (Chapter Five, 2020). According to the Global Fire Power (GFP) index, Russians have the second strongest military force after the United States. However, this claim is a bit problematical because GFP presents very general numbers and lacks greater insight. For instance, GFP claims that Russia has around 13 thousand tanks, which is the highest number of tanks per country in the world. (GFP, 2020b). But when we have a look at more detailed statistics presented in The Military Balance journal (Chapter Five, 2020), we can find out that 10 200 of Russian main battle tanks (MBT) are stored and only 2 800 MBTs are active. Contrary to this the USA possess 2 389 MBTs – most of them are type M1A Abrams – and another 3 300 MBTs are stored. Therefore, the number of tanks is almost similar (Chapter Three, 2020). What is more, when we have a look at the Russian tanks, most of them are types T-72 to which Abrams tanks are superior. Russians were supposed to have a significant number of modern T-14 Armata tanks in 2020, however, none had entered operational service until the end of 2019.

The main reason for it are high cost and problems with development. The situation with tanks can serve as a great illustration of the situation in which the Russian military is – great numbers do not mean high quality automatically.

Generally, NATO is superior not only in numbers, but also in the quality of modern military technology, including drones, radars, or satellites (Janjevic, 2018). According to Sokolsky (2017), NATO is moreover advanced in *“high-precision and long-range conventional strike capabilities, nuclear weapons, missile defences, and other kinetic and non-kinetic forms of warfare”*.

Russia has the world’s second-largest nuclear arsenal after the United States (Chapter Five, 2020, pp. 194). According to the Arms Control Association (Davenport, 2019), Russia have deployed around 1 400 strategic warheads on 524 intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers. The United States have similar amount deployed on 656 delivery systems. Thousands of Russian and American warheads remain in reserve. Arms control Association counts tactical and strategic nuclear weapons together in this case. According to the estimates, the United States has 150 tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, concretely in Turkey, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Italy. Contrary to this, Russia has much more nuclear tactical warheads – around 2 000 (Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Russia, 2019). Generally, the US has a larger number of strategic warheads, while Russia is superior in tactical warheads. During recent years, Russia is trying to modernise the arsenal. State Armament Programme is successful, even though not all goals were met (Chapter Five, 2020). The United States do not want to stay aside and aim to renew strategic nuclear capabilities. Americans also focus on the development of low-yield warheads and new sea-launched missiles or defence systems (Chapter Three, 2020). We can say, that US nuclear deterrence – at least based on the capabilities - remains credible and both Russia and America would with high probability avoid nuclear exchange because it would lead to the destruction of both sides of the conflict.

As was already said, NATO has both technological and manpower superiority in conventional forces. However, the capabilities present in the Baltic region, concretely in Estonia, are more important for our research. Even though NATO is far stronger hypothetically, the capabilities in the theatre of conflict are the ones which would be decisive.

According to Richard Sokolsky (2017), there are three main reasons why NATO should be worried about the defence of its Eastern flank. Those are Russia’s military reform, willingness to use force and aggressive anti-Western foreign policy. In case of an attack on

Baltics, Russia would have an advantage in almost every aspect from geography and manpower to every major category of combat weapons.

The main concern for Estonia and Baltics is Russian Western Military District. Forces in this district were among the first modernized when reforms in the military started. Western District is composed of twenty-two manoeuvre battalions plus forces stationed in Kaliningrad (three manoeuvre battalions, Baltic fleet, two airbases and Iskander short-range nuclear-capable missiles) (Mix, 2020). Units from Kaliningrad would be able to cut so-called Suwałki Gap, the 100-kilometre border between Poland and Lithuania separating Kaliningrad from Russia's ally Belarus (Mix, 2020).

Forces of NATO would be able to deploy twenty-one battalions, including the forces of Baltic states. However, there is an important difference in strength when compared to Russia's forces in the region. Thirteen Russia's battalions in Western Military District are composed of tanks, motorized or mechanized infantry. Those can be supported by direct and indirect fire systems, for instance, ten artillery battalions from the Western Military District. Contrary to this, forces of Baltic states are composed of light infantry and NATO would lack tubed artillery, rocket launchers and surface-to-surface missiles (Sokolsky, 2017). Even though we have claimed above that NATO is generally superior to Russia in military power, the situation in the region is different because of the concentration of the great amount of Russian high-quality forces.

Furthermore, NATO would have a problem with sending reinforcements, mainly because of infrastructure, legal and logistic problems. Russia would be probably able to destroy NATO air support for its ground forces with its advanced S-400 air defence systems (Watling, 2019). According to the Congressional Research Service (Mix, 2020), Russian ships and submarines could *“allow [Russia] to effectively close off the Baltic Sea to NATO reinforcements.”*

According to the widely quoted RAND study written by Shlapak and Johnson (2016) based on series of wargames between 2014 and 2015, Russian forces won't have problems reaching Baltic capitals in 36 to 60 hours. NATO would have only three responses available: bloody counteroffensive, escalation (nuclear weapons) or no reaction. All options are ranked by RAND as bad. According to the study, NATO would need about seven brigades, including three heavy armoured brigades, supported by airpower in the to prevent *“fast overrun”*. Not all forces would have to be stationed in the region, but their deployment would have to be fast. Maintaining such a force would cost 2,7 billion USD per year. Results of the Shlapak's and

Johnson’s study were confirmed by other scholars, for instance, Andrew Radin (2017), who reached the same conclusion that the Baltic countries are vulnerable in terms of imbalances in conventional forces. Other authors, like Veebel (2019), think, that low-intensity hybrid scenarios are more probable than full-scale attack. Such hybrid activities may include influencing of politicians or “*systemic surgical strikes*”.

Estonia has 6 600 active Armed Personnel, 12 thousand reservists and the voluntary territorial defence called Estonian Defence League (*Eesti Kaitseliit*) with 15 800 members, out of which 6 thousand are armed. As was already said, Estonia’s military is composed of light infantry and would be transformed into insurgency force in case of occupation. Estonia’s approach can be described as total defence which is composed of territorial defence, compulsory military service, and a large reserve army (Veebel 2019).

Even though Estonia invests more than 2% of GDP into defence, most of the budget is spent on maintaining reserves. Nevertheless, Estonia also makes an effort to upgrade its air defence system and modernize a range of ground warfare equipment, including anti-tank weapons (Mix, 2020). There are no plans for buying tanks, planes or warships (Veebel 2019).

Baltic States Defence Information

	Active Armed Forces Personnel	Reserves	2019 Defense Budget	Defense Spending % of GDP
Estonia	6,600	12,000	\$669 million	2.13
Latvia	6,210	15,900	\$724 million	2.01
Lithuania	19,850	6,700	\$1.084 billion	1.98

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2019* and NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2012-2019)*, June 25, 2019.

(Mix, 2020)

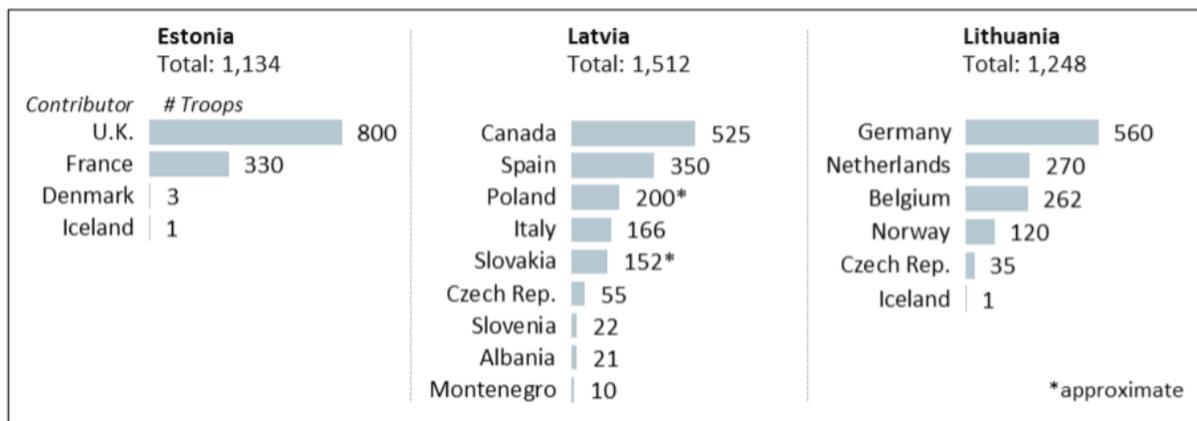
4.4.2 Military measures adopted by NATO in Estonia

NATO has adopted several measures to enhance its conventional military capabilities in Estonia. Based on the Warsaw summit decision from 2016, there are four multinational battalions (approximately between 1100 and 1500 troops) in each of the Baltic republics and Poland. The United Kingdom leads the battalion deployed in Estonia, Canada leads battalion in Latvia, and Germany is in lead in Lithuania. The United States lead the multinational battalion in Poland, with contributions from Croatia, Romania, and the UK. British soldiers deployed in Estonian city Tapa are equipped with tanks and self-propelled artillery (Whyte, 2019). Aim of

the enhanced forward presence (eFP) units is to deter Russian aggression, emphasize NATO's commitment to collective defence and serve as a tripwire in case of Russian attack (Mix, 2020). Sokolsky (2017) compares this tripwire logic to Cold War era, when “*NATO maintained a similar force in West Berlin under similar circumstances, and it was successful for more than forty years in deterring a Soviet attempt to change the status quo by force or intimidation.*”

The eFP units are called “*rotational*” (or “*continuous rotational*”). The main reason behind this is the fact, that NATO doesn't want to use the term “*permanent*”. There is a fear that it could violation of 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. However, whatever the name is, the rotation will be ongoing and there is no concrete day to which it should end (Mix, 2020).

NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States



Source: Created by CRS with information from NATO, *NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, October 2019.*

Notes: The United States leads a fourth battlegroup in Poland with contributions from Croatia, Romania, and the United Kingdom.

(Mix, 2020)

eFP units are not the only NATO units in Estonia. There are also military jets which are part of Baltic Air Policing mission, which is ongoing since 2004 when Baltic states joined the Alliance. NATO members take turns in guarding of Baltic states airspace every four months. Mission was strengthened in 2014 from eight to twelve aircraft. Estonia, like other Baltic states, has to contribute to the mission's cost. For instance, Estonia pays for providing ground service for jets and aviation fuel supplies (Mix, 2020).

Units, equipment and vehicles deployed to Estonia are one part of the measures, however, there are also other actions like exercises. Actions are highly important for the third condition of assurance. In 2019, there were various drills in Estonia: Cyber-defence oriented LOCKED SHIELDS and CYBER COALITION or large-scale exercise Spring Storm in which eFP units, Estonian and other NATO defence forces took part (10 thousand troops in total).

There were also NATO exercises in the Baltic region as a whole, on the Baltic sea or in Poland. Some drills were oriented on Article V scenarios. For instance, exercise Ramstein Alloy 1-3 focused on Air domain and it took place in Baltics in cooperation with Finland and Sweden. Among others were NOBLE JUMP 19, which tested the activation, deployment planning and readiness of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, SUMMER SHIELD in Latvia or maritime BALTOPS (NATO, 2019).

On 2020, there are other exercises planned, like TRIDENT JUPITER, BRILLIANT JUMP, which should test activation of VJTF or maritime DYNAMIC MERCY in Baltic sea. From the national exercises most important for Estonia is US-led drill DEFENDER 2020, which takes place in Baltics and should test the ability to move American division-sized force into Europe. More than 20 thousand troops were supposed to participate. However, the size of the forces will be probably significantly reduced due to coronavirus pandemic (Rempfer, 2020)

4.4.3 The opinion of respondents and the public on military measures

This part of the thesis is dedicated to the opinion of the respondents who participated in the research interview. What do they think about the measures described above? Their opinion is important for confirming the conditions of assurance, namely the second and the third one.

When asked about the power of NATO in comparison to Russia, everyone considered NATO superior. *“NATO is far stronger. Russians are good in close combat, but NATO is better in missiles, planes and technology – NATO is superior in general”*, says the source from the Estonian Defence League. Other respondents confirmed the statement.

According to the interviews, Estonians consider themselves a useful member of the Alliance as they participate in missions of NATO abroad or help with improving cybersecurity. *“Baltic states are part of NATO. It is not Estonia versus Russia. It is not even Baltics versus Russia. It is on a higher level”*, says the source from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Great confidence in Alliance was evident also when discussing nuclear weapons, which are seen as important security guarantee and successful deterrent. The opinion that Russia won't dare to test NATO's cohesion because there is a possibility of escalation into nuclear conflict was often mentioned. As an example of high trust into nuclear deterrence can serve source from Estonian Defence League, who believes, that the United States would use nuclear weapons because of Estonia. On the other hand, the source was aware of the fact, that nuclear weapons cannot be used to liberate the country and that there are some limitations. Overall, NATO's

military capabilities are in general seen as sufficient, including both conventional and nuclear weapons – therefore the second condition is fulfilled.

Even though nuclear weapons are seen as a useful deterrent, everyone was strongly against an idea of deployment of allied nuclear weapons on Estonian territory. Typical answers were “*impossible*”, “*no reason for it*”, “*absolutely not*”, or “*we are not in the 60s anymore*”. Nobody out of nine respondents considered that possible.

The opinion of respondents on eFP units was as well united – everyone highly appreciated their presence in Estonia and the fact that their mission has no end date. Most of them also agree that eFP units have intended deterring effect. “*Absolutely, by all means*”, confirms the source from Kaitseliit. When asked about the statement of Estonian minister of defence Jüri Luik from 2017, who admitted, that battalion-sized NATO Enhanced Forward Presence units “*unfortunately do not constitute a force capable of denying Russia its initial aims, while the deployment of NATO’s rapid reaction and follow-on forces is vulnerable to political and military suasion, including through anti-access/area-denial activation and nuclear threats*”, the reaction of the respondent was very straightforward and emotional. In sum, Luik’s statement was refused as words of a politician who is lacking proper knowledge, although Luik has a lot of experience in this field. The main counterargument of the respondent was NATO’s military superiority, even though Luik was not doubting that.

Many of the people interviewed compared eFP units to American troops in the West Berlin during the Cold War, same what Sokolsky (2017) did. As one of the respondents put it: “*It would be easy for Soviets to run them over militarily, but it would immediately trigger a collective response from NATO. It worked for Soviets and it works here. Others say almost the same in different words: “If you attack Baltic state, you attack alliance. I would expect that Russia doesn’t want to get into a fight with France or Britain”*”, said one of the respondents.

Martin Hurt from think-tank ICDS or Rainer Saks from the ministry of Foreign Affairs also think that British troops within eFP in Estonia have deterring effect. According to Hurt, it is a question of how to measure it, but on the other hand, there are just a few people who think that deterrence doesn’t work. One of them is Tiina Pajuste from Tallinn University. “*I do not think that in the case of eFP deterrence really works. Forces that are here are not able to make any significant impact. The presence is useful but not deterring*”, says Pajuste. According to her, the deterring aspect lays just in the possibility that NATO would come to help.

This shows us the dividing line between respondents and their understanding of eFP's role in deterrence. Most of them believe that eFP units are increasing the probability that NATO would react. The others (two respondents out of nine) think, that NATO would react anyway and therefore do not see eFP units that important in this matter. In their understanding, eFP units would have to be much stronger to have a deterring effect on their own, because now they would not be able to halt Russian advance. However, nobody is doubting, that presence of eFP units is an important gesture of solidarity and also signalling to Russia that collective defence is taken seriously.

Some respondents from the state administration claim, that there is a real force behind the eFP. *“Capabilities are coming first. We are not making so much noise about that. It is not just a symbolical gesture, we want it to be as practical as possible”*, says the source from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even though the eFP units won't be able to stop the Russian army completely, there is no doubt that Estonians want to have allied forces on their territory which are ready to fight and delay an attack.

Presence of British and French troops is highly appreciated and the main reason for it is a good experience from the past. For instance, British forces helped Estonia during its fight for independence, but it is not necessary to go that deep in history. Positive experience comes especially from the missions with British in Afghanistan and with French in the Central African Republic and Mali. This kind of confidence is very important for assurance and also fulfils the first condition as was set by the author of this thesis as the assurer has a good reputation for action.

It is evident, that Estonians are satisfied with the composition of eFP units. However, would they be satisfied, if the forces would not be from Britain and France, but for instance from the Czech Republic, Romania or Hungary? In this case, answers were split into two groups. The first group declared, that they see US, British and French units as superior. *“It is a big difference. Estonians prefer US or UK soldiers over Czech or Romanian”*, said the source from Estonian Defence League. The main reason, why British, French or US troops are preferred, are nuclear weapons. However, respondents weren't against help from other countries. Most of them thought that the best is a *“kind of mixture”*. Nevertheless, when Estonian's can choose, they prefer *“core units”* to come from nuclear powers. Respondents from the first group usually didn't want to be mentioned in the thesis, refused to be recorded and worked in the state administration. The second group declared, that all NATO countries are

equal and that there is no difference in who is deployed in Estonia. Respondents from the second group were mostly academics and journalists.

All interviewed persons appreciated the fact that soldiers from eFP units are visible and can talk to civilians. The bond between locals and NATO troops is good. Estonians are interested in activities of eFP units, welcome them and support them. Presence of friendly nations is overall seen as a good sign. Some respondents think, that public is not aware of real effectivity of military capabilities and therefore the psychological effect is only about the fact that *“allied forces are here”*.

“You will never achieve hundred per cent assurance in everything. But more NATO forces you see in the public, the better effect it has. That is why British battlegroup is visible in Estonia. They have their STRATCOM events, they try to participate in public events and show themselves. They talk with people and they are trying to be everywhere. It is important that they are communicating the message ‘we are here’,” Martin Hurt from ICDS explains.

“Whenever there is a rotation, it is in the news”, says Tiina Pajuste from Tallinn University. According to her, people feel more secure when they know that allies are in Estonia and ready to help. Nevertheless, according to Tarmo Maiberg, a journalist from Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), NATO activities in Estonia not a big topic anymore in the news. *“It was a big topic between 2014 and 2016, but there are so many drills that you just let them go without mentioning. We are used to it. We know why the forces are here”,* says Maiberg. He added, that ERR is not covering NATO activities with any special programme, there is just reportage time to time.

Overall, there is satisfaction with the presence of eFP units. They were seen by all respondents as the most important for assurance of Estonia and also as useful military capability for the region. The *“act”* of deployment is understood as important signalling from NATO. Thus, eFP units fulfil both second and third condition of assurance.

Nevertheless, eFP units are not the only welcomed and successful measure. The same can be said about Baltic Air Policing. Investing in its own air force is still considered too expensive and not necessary for small Baltic countries according to the interviews. However, respondents stressed out that Baltic states are trying to help with providing air surveillance for NATO purposes. Emphasis on the fact that Estonia is not free-riding on NATO’s help was often present during the interviews. Air Policing was moreover often given as a good example of

developing cooperation with countries with which Estonians usually do not have that much contact.

Cooperation with allies from other countries is also significantly strengthened during exercises. Those have very high importance according to all respondents. Most of them mentioned exercises as the second most important measure after deployment of NATO soldiers in Estonia. Even though some interviewed officials preferred US, British or French troops when asked about the composition of eFP units, everyone welcomed joint exercises. *“In terms of practical cooperation on a small scale, it is better to have fewer partners. But if we launch military exercises, we try to attract more allies”*, explains one of the respondents who didn't want to be mentioned. According to the source from Estonian Defence League, experience with the exercises is very good. *“Exercises are the best for assurance because they are the most visible”*, the source claims. Defence League especially appreciates that NATO forces can simulate Russian attack and provide Estonians with feedback. In return, Estonians can help NATO to train fighting against Russian guerrilla, which might be helpful in case of counterattack into Russian territory.

According to the research conducted by research company Tuuru-uuringute AS for the ministry of defence (2019), most of the respondents consider NATO measures to ensure the security of Estonia sufficient. Precisely, 18% of people see the measures completely sufficient and 40% consider them sufficient in general. 24% of people who live in Estonia have no opinion on this topic and only 9% said, that the measures are rather not sufficient or completely insufficient.

Another question in the poll was aimed at the perception of NATO allied forces in Estonia. Generally, 38% of people who live in Estonia fully support their presence, 36% rather support, 9% rather do not support and 8% do not support at all. The rest has no opinion in this case. This conforms with the opinion of experts who were interviewed by the author of this thesis. Nevertheless, there are big differences between nationalities. Whole 91% of Estonians fully or rather support the presence of NATO forces in Estonia. That is in sharp contrast to other nationalities, where only 37% of respondents fully or rather support NATO's presence in the country. 21% do not support NATO's presence at all and 24% of respondents from other nationalities were rather not supportive. It is not surprising, that those who support NATO membership are also in favour of the presence of NATO units in Estonia and vice versa (Tuuru-uuringute, 2019, pp. 76).

Poll also examined, whether people living in Estonia think, that NATO battle groups stationed in the country increased Estonia's security. 61% of people think that Estonia is more secure and only 23% think that deployment of the battle group has no effect. Only 8% of respondents think that the country is less secure because of this measure. There is again a sharp contrast between Estonians (77% of them think that Estonia is more secure) and citizens of other nationalities (only 27% think that Estonia is more secure, 45% think it has no effect and 17% think that the measure weakened the security). To conclude, we can say that public opinion is in favour of NATO's measures and Estonians are feeling safer. The attitude of citizens of other nationalities, especially of the Russian minority, is lukewarm.

This chapter revealed that respondents consider NATO capabilities sufficient, both conventional and nuclear. Therefore, we can confirm the second condition of assurance which says that assurer's military capabilities have to be perceived sufficient. The third condition of assurance which says, that an object of assurance has to appreciate actions undertaken by its assurer. In other words, Estonians have to be satisfied with NATO's actions. We can say, that this condition is also fulfilled, as Estonians appreciate the presence of eFP units, exercises or Air Policing mission. Those are not appreciated only by experts but also by the public.

4.5 What can NATO do better?

Following chapter is focused on recommendations to NATO which were gathered from Estonians during the interviews. What would they like to improve? What should NATO do better to assure Estonia? And is there something what Estonians are lacking from NATO?

The first category where is a room for improvement are military measures. Even though respondents were overall satisfied, there is always room for improvement as one of them said. There is a big desire for enhancing naval capabilities. According to Rainer Saks from the ministry of foreign affairs, securing of the Baltic sea is the priority now. Others were more concrete, and among suggestions were establishing of NATO's naval base, mobile coastal defence, increased maritime presence, visits of allied vessels and overall strengthening of maritime deterrence. The main reason for this is the increased Russian activity on the Baltic sea. However, some respondents think, that it is not an immediate need and that *"Estonians have to keep in mind that someone is paying for it"*.

When it comes to the land capabilities, respondents were mostly satisfied as measures during the last years were primarily land-centric. Strength of eFP units is considered sufficient for now. *"What we would do with 10 thousand of troops in the woods now"*, says journalist

Tarmo Maiberg. Add to this, there is a fear among some respondents that further increasing of land capabilities could lead to unwanted escalation. Another reason is financial, as Estonia has to provide barracks, roads, storages, training fields and other infrastructure. Instead of deploying more soldiers into Estonia, respondents would like to see the improvement in the plans for the deployment of NATO reinforcements in the case of conflict. Hand in hand with this issue comes financing of infrastructure, for instance, roads and railways. A good example of improving mobility can be newly prepared Rail Baltic. Even though it will be primarily constructed for civil purposes, it will increase military mobility too.

Strengthening of air defence was also often mentioned. Even though the Air Policing is highly appreciated, it is still seen as a peacetime operation which wouldn't be that useful in a real crisis. Therefore, there is a high demand for other types of air defence, for instance, anti-missile and anti-aircraft systems. There is a study from the think-tank ICDS from 2018, which elaborates more on this topic. The situation with the air defence is similar to naval capabilities. Air defence is expensive and it is not needed immediately.

There is also concern about new threats, for instance, those in cyberspace. Estonia would like to see improving Article V capabilities for "hybrid" warfare. For instance, this includes the improvement of legislation in member states of NATO.

Exercises should continue as they are set now according to the respondents, however, nobody would be against a higher number of them. Especially more frequent naval exercises, like BALTOPS, would be highly appreciated.

The second category where is a room for improvement are political measures. Overall, Estonia is satisfied with the political support it receives from its partners. As a great instance can serve the London summit. However, according to the respondents, there should be more cooperation in tackling of hybrid threats, cybersecurity, energetic security, military mobility or when buying military equipment. Nordstream 2, which is raising concern in Baltics, was also mentioned during the interviews as an example when states should cooperate more and think about the consequences of their decisions. Some respondents also stressed out need for strengthening of EU-NATO ties.

According to the source from the Estonian ministry of foreign affairs, Estonia would like to see quicker NATO enlargement. For instance, Estonians would not have a problem with discussing incorporating Ukraine or Georgia into the Alliance. *"NATO is capable to secure a member and it also brings stability. We can see that in Balkans. NATO is making Europe a*

better neighbourhood for everybody. That Russia sees NATO's enlargement as a provocation? That is their problem. We take it into consideration. We can't ignore it, but we are very clear, that every nation can make their own choice", says the source from the ministry.

One respondent also said, that Northern countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) are sometimes too polite to Russia and that Estonians would like to see tougher approach.

Very last recommendation, which came from Tiina Pajuste was rather general: *"NATO should try to be as unite as possible in front of the public and limit extremes which could escalate the situation"*.

To conclude, even though there is always something that can be improved, Estonians are overall satisfied with the current situation. All the suggested measures are building on the measures already applied by NATO. There is conformity among Allies in what should be done and there is nothing basic what would Estonia lack.

5. Discussion

The conclusion that Estonians are assured and overall satisfied with NATO's measures is unexpected. As was described in the chapter about methodology, the author of the thesis wanted to describe whether Estonia is assured or not and then describe what should be done to improve the situation. Therefore, the negative outcome was expected beforehand. However, answers of respondents unexpectedly confirmed all conditions of assurance. Estonians see NATO's commitment credible, military capabilities sufficient and also appreciate the actions. Satisfaction is also indirectly confirmed by the recommendations because there is nothing that would Estonians require immediately. There is always room for improvement, but the important thing is, that most of the requirements for improvements were building on already existing measures. Therefore, we can say that the way NATO is on the right track when assuring Estonia.

There are three possible explanations of why respondents claimed that they are satisfied with the measures. The first explanation is, that some respondents were not saying the truth. They might exaggerate trust into NATO because supporting the alliance is their job and they did not want to threaten NATO's effort by saying that the measures are ineffective. For instance, if they said that they are afraid NATO would not help Estonia, it could be dangerous for Estonia's defence. One might say, that author of the thesis ensured their anonymity, therefore they could say whatever they wanted. However, it is understandable, that they would not like

to put their country under the threat. In case Estonians would tell everyone that they do not believe in NATO, it could encourage Russia to increase its provocations.

The second explanation is, that respondents refuse to admit NATO's weaknesses and have blind trust in the Alliance, even though they know that there are some problems. This might be a cause as Estonians know they would not be able to successfully defend the country without help from abroad. Therefore, there is no other option for them than to believe in NATO, even though they might do not trust it fully.

The third and more probable explanation is, that respondents were telling the truth and really believe in what they were saying. Estonians think, that they do maximum for their security - they are not free-riding NATO, they participate actively and are ready to defend their country with the help from abroad or without it. Estonians do maximum to ensure the security of their country and they do not have any reason to think that their allies would betray them in case of need. Estonia's reliance on allies might be also explained with good historical experience - Finland and Great Britain came for help during the Estonian War of Independence. This experience is much different from the one of Czechoslovakia with the Munich treaty. With such a bad historical experience, Estonia might not be that confident when it comes to help from abroad.

However, even if Estonia would be left alone, its citizens are ready to hide in the woods and start with the guerrilla warfare. There is a great resolve within society and it was also evident during the interviews.

Conclusion

Based on the research interviews and public opinion poll, the author of the thesis concludes that Estonians are assured. To claim this, three conditions of assurance as were created by the author, had to be confirmed. The first condition, which says that Estonia has to have confidence in NATO, was confirmed in chapter 4.3. *NATO's political measures*. The author presented evidence in the form of official communiqués released after summits or examples of historical cooperation between Estonia and its allies. NATO seems dedicated to Estonia's defence and proclamations are followed by actions. Intentions and motivation are clear. The second condition, which says that Estonia has to perceive NATO's military capabilities as sufficient, was confirmed in chapter 4.4 *NATO's military measures*. Estonians are satisfied with the nuclear capabilities; however, they resolutely refuse any deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory. What is more, Estonians are also satisfied with conventional

capabilities which NATO possesses and the alliance is considered superior to Russia according to the respondents, even though Russian forces outnumber NATO in the region. In the case of the conflict, Estonians rely on NATO's reinforcements and the tripwire effect of the eFP units. The current strength of the eFP units is considered sufficient and Estonians do not need to further strengthen them as it would be expensive and without a clear purpose. As one of the respondents said: "*What we would do with 10 thousand troops in the woods now*". The third condition, which says that Estonians have to appreciate actions undertaken by NATO, was confirmed both in chapters 4.3.2 and 4.4.3 *Opinion of respondents and the public*. Estonians think, that their problems are discussed within NATO, do not feel abandoned and appreciate declarations of support. Moreover, Estonians are also satisfied with eFP, international exercises or Air Policing mission. Public opinion poll shows that Estonians feels more secure because of NATO's measures and that presence of eFP units is appreciated.

Overall satisfaction was indirectly confirmed by the fact that Estonians do not require an immediate change of the measures and do not lack anything basic. However, that does not mean Estonians do not have any desires. For instance, strengthening of naval capabilities or need for better air defence systems were often mentioned. On the political level, Estonians would appreciate closer cooperation for instance when NATO countries buy military equipment or more unity on some topics like Nordstream 2. However, satisfaction prevails.

Nevertheless, one might ask, what is more assuring in the case of Estonia– NATO's overall capabilities or specific measures and actions? The author of this thesis claim, that NATO's superiority over Russia itself would not be enough. Military exercises, statements made by politicians and other similar actions are important and appreciated signalling of NATO's dedication to Estonia's defence as was confirmed during the interviews. Without those actions and more general measures, NATO's commitment to Estonia's security would be much more theoretical which would leave space for doubts. On the other hand, if NATO was weak in general, similar or same measures and actions would probably have little effect. Thus, the overall capabilities are necessary for the credibility of further demonstration of commitment to ally's security. For successful assurance of an ally, assurer must ensure both.

Finding that Estonians are assured and satisfied is surprising and it is a question why it is like that. The amount of uncertainty among Estonians is still surprisingly low and normally we would expect more anxiety due to the anarchic nature of international relations. The simplest answer is that NATO has decided for the right measures to assure its member. Proclamations are met with the actions, which are tailored to ally's needs. Other explanation might be that

Estonia has no other option than belief in NATO. Currently, there are no reasons why Estonians should doubt NATO's willingness to come to help in case of conflict. Estonia is trying not to free-ride and contribute as much as possible. Nevertheless, Estonia's strong believe in NATO is not granted for years to come and it will require a lot of effort from NATO to keep assurance on this level.

Even though assuring an ally is not an easy task, this thesis has shown that it is not impossible. Method of interviews in combination with public opinion polls and overall description of the situation looks like a suitable approach for those who will research assurance in the future. Moreover, this research confirmed already acquired knowledge about assurance as the conditions were applicable and functional.

This thesis tried to contribute to the understudied concept of assurance. Empirical research about assurance is almost non-existent but more than needed in the contemporary world. The author hopes that this thesis might contribute to the development of the concept and the debate about the defence of the Baltic states, concretely the Republic of Estonia.

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CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Diploma thesis project

**Estonia in the Shadow of Russian Threat:
Is NATO Doing Enough to Assure Its Ally?**



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Study programme: Security Studies

Year of project submission: 2019

Introduction to the topic

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, there is a fear that similar scenario could repeat again somewhere along the Russian borders. The Baltic region, composed of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, is among those who feel the most threatened. In contrast to Ukraine, however, Baltic States enjoy the benefits of NATO membership. Does the NATO membership make Baltic States feel more secure? The aim of this diploma thesis is to evaluate if Estonians feel protected by its allies (NATO), or in other words if is allied commitment enough from the Estonian point of view. The author plans to interview representatives and officials of the Estonian administration and other institutions in order to reveal their opinion on this issue.

The fear of the Baltic States of Russian neighbour is based on historical experience. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were a part of the Russian Empire since 1721. They got independence after the First World War, however lost it again in 1940 due to the Soviet invasion. Baltic States regained independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. However, some people still see the Baltic region as “Russian sphere of influence”. During the time of occupation, a lot of Russians came to the Baltics and many of them stayed even after 1989. There is a fear, that Russian speaking minority may serve Russia as a reason for intervention. In January 2019 Estonia had a population of 1 324 820, out of which 328 299 were Russians (Statistics Estonia, 2019).

NATO decided to demonstrate its willingness to defend the Baltic States, because of Russian rhetoric and behaviour. Its assurance efforts weren't only rhetorical, but also practical. NATO countries sent troops, vehicles and planes and participated in exercises in the Baltics. Russia reacted with its own military manoeuvres and small incidents, which might one consider as a provocation, for instance, repeated violations of the Estonian air space.

Research target

The aim of this diploma thesis is to reveal, what Estonians think about assuring efforts of its allies. Do they feel protected and safe? In other words, do Estonians believe, that NATO would help them in the case of conflict with Russian neighbour? And is there something, what NATO can do better, so Estonia could feel more assured?

Data are going to be gathered through the interviews, primarily with higher Estonian representatives and officials from the administration. The author decided to use this approach, because those respondents should be well informed, and they represent Estonian state to some

extent. If such interviews will not be possible for various reasons, the author is planning to ask other Estonians who have at least some insight into the problematics, for instance, scholars in think-tanks or students in schools like Baltic Defence College in Tartu.

Literature review

This diploma thesis is mainly based on the article of Jeffrey W. Knopf (2012), in which he defines assurance as “*attempts by one state or set of states to convince another state or set of states that the senders either will not cause or will not allow the recipients’ security to be harmed*” or as “*a strategy that seeks to influence another actor’s behaviour by alleviating a perceived source of insecurity and/or giving the actor a greater sense of security*”. Understanding of assurance is not the same among scholars so it is necessary to define it specifically. Knopf’s definition fits the purpose of this thesis the most as it takes into consideration assuring of an ally.

The concept of assurance is not widely used and the amount of literature on it is also limited. As Knopf (2012) writes in the article: “*there is an extensive literature on alliances, but very little in this literature explores what makes a state regard the commitment of an ally as credible. Instead, most of the literature seeks to explain state alliance choices, i.e. why states join the alliances they do*”. A lot of literature is also focused on how alliances influence the balance of power, or how do they balance threats.

The term “assurance” was first used by Thomas C. Schelling in his book about coercive strategies *Arms and Influence* (1966), however, assurance was presented just as a part of deterrence. Since that time, nothing changed as deterrence attracts all the attention, while assurance is neglected.

Even though the concept of assurance is understudied, Knopf is not the only one who wrote an article about it. For instance, David S. Yost (2009) wrote an article called *Assurance and US extended deterrence in NATO*, in which he discusses the assurance as a part of American defence policy goals. Yost also defines conditions, which help to strengthen assurance.

Among other authors focused on assurance are Clark A. Murdock and Jessica M. Yeats (2009). As in the case of Yost, their work is also oriented on the United States and nuclear weapons, concretely extended deterrence and assurance. Murdoc and Yeats describe conditions under which assurance can be successful.

Other authors discussing the issue of assurance are Justin V. Anderson and Jeffrey A. Larsen (2013). They claim, that for a state to feel protected requires consistent, constant, and visible demonstrations of political resolve and military capabilities.

The author of this thesis will use the works of authors mentioned above to define conditions under which ally is assured. Their work will also help to formulate questions for interviews. Those questions are aimed to discover if are those conditions fulfilled or not. After the interviews are done, author will evaluate, if Estonia is assured or not according to the respondents.

Assurance is closely linked to the United States in the academic literature. All the works are oriented on the assuring efforts and strategies of the USA and on their relationship with allies in different regions. Nevertheless, the author of this diploma thesis focuses on NATO as a whole and not just in the USA.

Similar research to this diploma thesis was done by Eric C. Paulson, Colonel of the United States Air Force. Paulson created a survey for students of Baltic Defence College in order to discover if the military of Baltic states feels assured by the USA or not. This approach makes sense, as the students will be in the leading positions of the military one day. However, Paulson received only a few responses. It is also questionable to which extent such research represents the opinion of other military officials. As this diploma thesis is focused on Estonia in general (as a state), author would like to use interviews instead of surveys, because data gathered in this way can provide more in-depth look. Also, respondents won't be just from the military. However, Paulson's work serves as a source of inspiration.

There is also a lot of literature about deterrence, however, it is not the main concept for this diploma thesis so it will be included just in the list of references as it is closely linked to the problematics of assurance. Rest of the literature focuses on describing the current situation in Estonia and the relationship between NATO and Russia.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

The thesis is based on the concept of assurance. However, this concept is not used frequently and remains understudied. The author will use the definition of assurance as was formulated by Jeffrey W. Knopf. It is important to stress out, that Knopf is one of the few authors, who tried to conceptualize this phenomenon. The term "assurance" was first used by Thomas C. Schelling in his book about coercive strategies *Arms and Influence* (1966), however, assurance was

presented just as a part of deterrence. Since that time, not much changed as deterrence attracts all the attention, while assurance is neglected.

The term assurance can have more meanings nowadays. What is more, terms like assurance, assurances and reassurance were used interchangeably. According to Knopf, assurance can be “*a component of deterrence, a measure directed at allies, a strategy directed at potential adversaries, and a tool for preventing nuclear proliferation*”. Knopf (2012) distinguishes between assurance as *a component of deterrence*, assurance as *a promise to alliance commitments*, *a reassurance of an adversary* and as a *Non-Proliferation-related Security Assurances*. All of them are non-coercive strategies, in other words, the actor is not using threats as in the case of deterrence. For the aim of this diploma thesis, the most relevant variation of assurance is the one as *a promise to alliance commitments*.

Evaluating if an ally is assured is not easy. As Knopf (2012) writes, “*there is virtually no empirical research on what makes alliance-related assurance effective*”. According to Eric C. Paulson (2017), Colonel of the United States Air Force, assurance levels can be measured to a large extent by simply asking those who should be assured. This is the reason, why the author of this diploma thesis also decided to make interviews with Estonian officials and representatives.

One might get an idea, that measuring the amount of deterrence against adversary may help us to evaluate the level of assurance of an ally. There are two problems. Firstly, we should keep in mind, that successful deterrence doesn't automatically mean assured ally. Secondly, measuring effectiveness of deterrence is almost impossible. What is more, some authors claim, that believing, that deterrence can prevent attack from an adversary is like believing in God (Halas, 2019).

Based on the literature, the author of the thesis will write down basic conditions for assurance to work. Furthermore, the author will try to seek, if those conditions are fulfilled or not, based on the interviews.

The author will try to answer these research questions:

- 1) What Estonian representatives and officials think about NATO's assuring efforts?
- 2) What should NATO do better according to the Estonian representatives and officials, so Estonia could feel more assured?

Empirical data and analytical technique

Data are going to be gathered through the interviews with Estonian representatives and officials. The author is planning at first to ask officials of institutions as Ministry of Defence, Estonian Defence Forces, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a presidential office, political parties etc. The author of the thesis would like to interview around 15 people, however the final number may differ depending on the circumstances like reachability of respondents.

The questions will be like these:

- 1) What is the first thing which comes to your mind when you hear the word “Russia”?
- 2) After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, many feared, that Baltic states will become another target of Russian aggression. How probable is the possibility, that Russia will repeat the Crimea scenario in the Baltics, according to you?
- 3) Your Allies from NATO are trying to assure you, that they would support Estonia in the case of dispute or conflict with Russia. NATO have sent planes, soldiers and there were also exercises. Do you feel assured by their claims, that they would help you in the case of need?
- 4) Do you feel more secure today than back in 2014?
- 5) Is the topic of “Defending Baltics” getting enough attention in NATO according to you?
- 6) Do you think, that forces currently stationed in Estonia have a deterring effect on Russia?
- 7) Do you agree with the claim, that Russia is not attacking, just because it doesn’t want to?
- 8) What should Estonia do better to strengthen its security?
- 9) Do you think that state with nuclear weapons is less prone to be invaded than the one without them?
- 10) Would you like to have Allied nuclear weapons on your territory?
- 11) Do you think that the United States would use nuclear weapons against Russia because of Estonia?
- 12) What can your allies in NATO do better, so you could feel more secure?
- 13) Do you think, that NATO should focus more on deterring Russia from using “weapons of hybrid warfare” like cyber-attacks and disinformation?
- 14) Survey: Rank methods of assurance. 1 = providing the most assurance, 6 = providing the least assurance.
 - a) Nuclear weapons deployed to Estonia
 - b) Increased number of NATO soldiers in Estonia

- c) Increased number of NATO military equipment (planes, tanks, ships)
- d) Setting up more of permanent NATO bases
- e) More NATO exercises in the region
- f) Consultations and joint planning
- g) Public statements by NATO leadership, or by leaders of NATO countries

Questions for the interviews are based on the literature about assurance, as was explained above. After the interviews are done, the author will evaluate, if Estonia is assured or not according to the respondents.

Planned thesis outline

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Theory
 - Concept of assurance
 - The setting of conditions for successful assurance
- 3) Method
- 4) Background on Estonia
- 5) Interviews
- 6) Findings evaluation
- 7) Conclusion

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