

## BOOK REVIEW

OLEVS NIKERS, OTTO TABURNS (editors), *Baltic Sea Security. Regional and Sectoral Perspectives*, Washington DC, The Jamestown Foundation, 2021, 120 pages.

The book is a part of a project coordinated by the Baltic Sea Security Initiative (BSSI) that took place between 2019 and 2020. The experts and professionals that contributed to this research have developed suggestions for decision makers concerning defense and security cooperation in the region. The book contains eleven articles, divided into two parts. The first part of the volume takes into consideration regional perspectives concerning Baltic Sea security, highlighting geographical and national aspects. The second part of the book includes topics regarding threat perception, civil-military cooperation, resilience to disinformation, energy security, political and military deterrence etc.

The first part of the volume considers the challenges of the actors from the Baltic Sea region, different threat perceptions among the allies, examples of cooperation and solidarity between NATO member states and other allies, and the important role of Poland and Germany in the region. Intra-regional military cooperation, cross-border exercises, the creation of a “NATO military Schengen zone” (Nikers and Taburns 19, 2021), investments into national and international civil- military defense interactions, positive developments “to enhance the Alliance’s deterrence posture in the region” (Nikers and Taburns 21, 2021).

The role of Germany and Poland in the region is extremely important. Germany is significant for US troop deployment and “for hosting pre-positioned stocks of incoming forces” (Nikers and Taburns 21, 2021) and Poland constitutes “a geo-strategic link with the three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania” (Ibidem). In the future, Germany is expected to become one of the most important leaders in the Baltic Sea security. The attitude of German society is important for shaping the country’s strategic culture. Surveys conducted in 2019 by the Korber Foundation and the Center for Military History and Social Science of the Federal Armed Forces showed an ambivalent

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attitude among German population regarding the country's role in the international arena. Climate change, inflation and migration are ranked higher than Russian aggression or the "outbreak of war in Europe". Regarding this, "the attitudes of Germany's society are rather anti-militarist, anti-atlantic and multilateral" (Nikers and Taburns 26, 2021). In recent years, the terms "resilience" and "comprehensive approach" have gained more attention. The *Konzeption der Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces Concept) defines resilience "as the armed forces robustness and ability to act; it covers inter alia cognitive, material, and organizational aspects" (Ibidem). The Baltic Sea Region's Security also depends on Sweden's cooperation with the US, Finland and Norway. Also, Sweden will assure the US of its support regarding its Baltic allies, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Russia has a geopolitical and geo-strategic interest in the region. Russia's trade "is dependent on Baltic ports for around 30 percent of all overseas imports and exports" (Nikers and Taburns 38, 2021). The Russian regime seeks to control the Baltic states, to weaken the NATO alliance, exploit the internal divisions of European countries and prevent Sweden and Norway from joining NATO. Concerning Russian aggression, the authors are speaking about two types of deterrence; *deterrence by punishment* meaning that "the enemy fears it will lose something if it is counter-attacked" (Nikers and Taburns 42, 2021) and *deterrence by denial*, which includes "viable military land forces that possess properties to deny territory to an aggressor through use of firepower and maneuver" (Nikers and Taburns 51, 2021). For small territorial states, preventing the loss of land is vital. The "defense posture", especially in the case of the Baltic states is treated by the authors as "resilience capabilities" or a "thornbrush/porcupine strategy of making the Baltic States uneasily occupied by Russian forces" (Nikers and Taburns 55, 2021). The Baltic Sea Region's security involves "transnational cooperation and societal awareness" (Nikers and Taburns 76, 2021). The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) includes the three Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), Poland, and Germany. The cooperation between the partners should improve the Baltic regional economic sector by „joining measures in the energy sector“. The European Union's Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) is the main instrument that contributes to the improvement of the energy security sector by ensuring „physical security“, price (economic) security and geopolitical security" (Nikers and Taburns 77, 2021). Disinformation led to the discreditation of trust in the government.

Holistic societal resilience constitutes a separate chapter signed by Viktorija Rusinaite<sup>1</sup>. The concept of societal resilience is defined as “a multi-layered domain engaging multiple aspects: economic, educational, cultural, social, historical, and communicational domains” (Nikers and Taburns 83, 2021). The holistic approach should take security into consideration at all levels. Taking into consideration the Baltic Sea Region, disinformation and influence campaigns are the most discussed subjects concerning societal resilience. As the author claims, “the aim of disinformation and information manipulations is not to spread lies, but to create an image of the world that would be receptive for pro-Kremlin ideas and policies” (Ibidem). This kind of disinformation is spread through “global channels, glocalised channels, local channels, and campaign specific channels” (Ibidem). Fake messages are spread especially on social networks. The Moscow influence campaigns want to discredit trust in local governments and transnational institutions, but also in NATO. In these circumstances, for a better understanding of NATO’s role in the Baltic Sea region, it would be necessary to explain the benefits of the organization for the security of the population. Implementing the European Code of Practice on Disinformation constitutes an important measure to combat disinformation. Beyond this, a strategy at the regional level must be improved to counter the fake messages spread on online networks and groups. According to the authors, a solution to counter Russian disinformation is to develop media alternatives for Russian speakers that aren’t controlled by the Kremlin and its allies. An example is an Estonian television channel, “ETV+”, broadcasted in Russian, and which is spread throughout the BSR. As the authors of the volume underline, “urban resilience” as a concept “is largely abandoned across the Baltic region, and the work of the institutions that operate in this field has never fully integrated” (Nikers and Taburns 87, 2021). The urban resilience topic regains its attention in Lithuania due to the action of Belarus to build “a nuclear power plant (NPP)” in Astravets, 50 kilometers from Vilnius. A possible accident at the Astravets would affect the entire continent. In this circumstance, it would be necessary to have regional cooperation to counteract the unwanted effects.

As Berry Buzan, cited by Aleksandra Kuczynska-Zonik (Nikers and Taburns 91, 2021), underlined in his study, “Rethinking Security after the Cold War”, “information threats to societal security come from inside and outside the state, and they have relevant impact on the state’s security in areas such

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<sup>1</sup> Viktorija Rusinaite, “PhD, is the Head of the European Security Program at Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis according to the site: <https://www.fpri.org/contributor/viktorija-rusinaite/>

as sustainability, conditions for the evolution of traditional patterns of language, culture, and religious and ethnic identity, as well as customs and values”.

If we are talking about the threats reaching across borders for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, “the fight against propaganda and disinformation becomes a security priority” (Nikers and Taburns 92, 2021). Lithuania’s, Latvia’s and Estonia’s counter-propaganda actions are: “1. Effective communication and promotion of national values, especially subjected to Russian influence; 2. Strengthening the independent media sector and social organizations; 3. Increasing social awareness about information manipulation, disinformation, and falsification” (Nikers and Taburns 93, 2021). Aleksandra Kuczynska-Zonik offers some recommendations concerning the fight against disinformation and propaganda: “to develop some procedures by the public and private sectors to fight propaganda in the media, to respect democratic norms (human and civic rights, freedom of speech, law and order, pluralism, and privacy), to improve communication and cooperation between society and government, and to find alternative sources of information”. Baltic Sea regional cooperation seeks to facilitate the adoption of the Baltic State maritime strategy. This will encourage “regional security”, a concept increasingly used by NATO. Another important aspect for the Baltic states, but also for NATO and the EU is “to move deterrence from a political to a military framework” (Nikers and Taburns 102, 2021). Important steps have been taken in this direction, with the US having agreements with Sweden and Finland and exercising with them in a dynamic way. Also, the United Kingdom has been exercising with the Helsinki Jaeger brigade.

The volume is considering the work of the experts to show the regional and sectoral perspectives of the Baltic states. The regional cooperation between the Baltic states is necessary, especially to counter the “hybrid” warfare challenge. The book is important to show the strategic relevance of the Baltic regional states, their military and geopolitical significance, and the need for regional cooperation to ensure the strength of societal resilience. A strategy at the regional level must be improved to counter the disinformation and fake news phenomenon. The future of the Baltic states depends on cooperation between the Baltic Sea countries and their allies, especially with NATO in order to assure security at the regional and international levels.

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