

The Militarization of the Baltic Sea region

Dr. Horst Leps, draft - as of 07.04.2020

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1. Introduction



Baltic tension zone

From a text by top US politicians:

The year is 2020: The Russian military is conducting a large exercise in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea that borders the NATO member states Lithuania and Poland. An observer aircraft from the Western alliance accidentally crosses into Russian airspace and is shot down by a surface-to-air missile. NATO rushes air squadrons and combat vessels into the region. Both sides warn that they will consider using nuclear weapons if their vital interests are threatened.

(Moniz / Nunn 2019)

Such scenarios are hardly known in Germany. The danger - not only for peace, but even for the survival of Europe - originating from the Baltic Sea, is ignored. For this reason, the political and military conditions in the Baltic Sea region will be described and documented in this text.

It concerns the elliptically shaped region of the Baltic Sea and the mainland bordering to the east with focus on Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg, the two Russian regions situated on the edge of the Baltic Sea, on the Baltic States situated between these cities and on the neighboring states Poland, Belarus and Finland. Referring to Russia's behavior, the western states are since the NATO summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016) undertaking a massive rearmament in this region. The purpose of this text is to look at these questions,

- what the preparations consist of
- what future war picture they are based on,
- which political alternatives are possible and
- what conclusions can be drawn for the peace movement and its political campaigns.

Because this is a topic that is hardly addressed in public, the text includes many quotes. Thus readers can shape their own pictures, at least they should get incitements for own questions.

2. The Militarisation of the Baltic Sea

Flotilla Admiral Christian Bock, commander of Operation Flotilla 1 (Baltic Sea) of the German Navy stated accurately at the "Kiel International Seapower Symposium 2019":

No area in Europe is as militarised as the Baltic Sea region, where NATO and the EU as well as Russia are in close proximity. With the revival of the defense of Germany and of the Alliance, the Baltic Sea Region, i.a. as a link to the eastern NATO partners, is for the German Navy again in the center of the maritime defense efforts.

(Stockfisch, 9/2019: 31)

Merle Weber from the militarization information center in Tübingen (Tübinger Informationsstelle Militarisierung) describes the history of this situation:

Military structures around the Baltic Sea

Analogous to the escalation of Western-Russian relations, a process of comprehensive militarisation of the region has taken place in recent years. The first buck up was decided in 2014 as a "Readiness Action Plan" at the NATO summit in Wales and was also implemented. NATO increased its military presence in the form of exercises below, on and over the Baltic Sea. In addition, the "NATO Response Force" was increased from 13,000 to 40,000 soldiers, an increase of 300 percent. This force structure can be deployed worldwide within 5 to 30 days, making it the NATO Rapid Response Force. However, it was not only enlarged, but also restructured internally. With the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), colloquially known as the Spearhead, there is now a sub-organization within the NATO Response Force that can be relocated even faster to the respective areas of operation. To ease the relocation, and above all the arrival of the Spearhead soldiers, there are also the "NATO Force Integration Units" in the potential countries of deployment. Their task is to provide the incoming NATO troops in the country of deployment with quick orientation and to build support networks on site. According to the Readiness Action Plan, it was decided to set up eight such docking stations for Europe, four of them in the Baltic Sea region (Poland and the Baltic States). In addition NATO's Standing Naval Forces were also expanded. As a first step, NATO has increased its presence in the Baltic Sea region, increased the reinforcement troops and reduced their relocation times, and set up structures at the Russian border to receive this reinforcement.

The "Enhanced Forward Presence" followed at the next NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016. With this program, NATO's presence on its eastern flank was drastically strengthened. With one battalion each in Poland and the three Baltic states, a total of around 4,000 NATO soldiers are now stationed on the eastern flank (in addition there are troops deployed bilaterally by the United States as part of the "European Deterrence Initiative"). The soldiers are rotating, but that does not, however, change the fact that the alliance has built up a permanent presence of troops directly at the Russian border, which is illegal according to the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

Third round: NATO summit in Brussels 2018. The "Readiness Initiative", also known as "4×30", was decided upon. In 2020, 30 aircraft squadrons, 30 warships and 30 infantry battalions (up to 36,000 soldiers) plus support forces shall be ready to use within 30 days or less. In addition, it was decided upon a logistics command in Ulm to organize fast transports "to, through and from Europe", i.e. above all smooth troop and material transfers to Eastern Europe. In the event of a conflict with Russia, this means: in 3 to 5 days, the Spearhead is on site and is incorporated by the integration units, in 30 days the rest of the NATO Response Force is on site, and after that the 3×30 the Readiness Initiative. As a remark, this expanded supply means, regardless of the Baltic Sea region, in principle more NATO troops in higher readiness, troops that of course can also be deployed in other crisis regions.

(Weber 2019)

Vice Admiral Brinkmann, Deputy Inspector of the Navy, justified in a contribution to the magazine "MarineForum" these activities with the presence and the politics of Russia:

The military potential of Russia is challenging us on the northern flank; Russia's military-backed power politics has turned the Baltic Sea into a vulnerable navel string to our allies in the Baltic States. No longer a front state, Germany gets, however, on the north flank a hub function to support our partners in the east.

(Brinkmann 2019: 7)

He presumably only refers to political guidelines that the soldier must adhere to¹. Because the plans for the expansion of the NATO armed forces began earlier urged for by the Baltic countries and Poland, as WikiLeaks posted and as was published by the Guardian in 2010:

Washington and its western allies have for the first time since the end of the cold war drawn up classified military plans to defend the most vulnerable parts of eastern Europe against Russian threats.

The US state department ordered an information blackout when the decision was taken earlier this year. Since January the blueprint has been refined.

Nine Nato divisions – US, British, German, and Polish – have been identified for combat operations in the event of armed aggression against Poland or the three Baltic states. North Polish and German ports have been listed for the receipt of naval assault forces and British and US warships...

The policy shift represents a sea change in Nato defence planning and in assessments of the threat posed by what a Polish official calls "a resurgent Russia."

Officially the US and Nato term Russia a "partner" and not an adversary, with the Germans, French, and Italians in particular tending to be deferential in dealings with Moscow. But the east Europeans, with their bitter experience of Moscow domination, argue that the Russians respect strength, despise and exploit weakness and division, and that Nato will enjoy better relations only if its most exposed and vulnerable members feel secure...

Repeatedly calling for the Baltic military plans to be kept utterly secret, Clinton and other senior US officials acknowledge that the policy shift "would also likely lead to an unnecessary increase in Nato-Russia tensions ... Washington strongly believes that the details of Nato's contingency plans should remain in confidential channels."

(The Guardian 2010, cf. Weber 2019)

Also these remarks by Admiral Brinkmann belong to this context:

¹ This reasoning is not convincing. Because it contains no reference to concrete Russian behavior. First it is the „military potential of Russia“ itself, without it being named and quantified, then it is a „military-backed power politics of Russia“, for which one could give examples from other parts of the world, but not in the Baltic Sea. And that's why the Baltic Sea is a „vulnerable navel string“ to the Baltic States. Logical arguments look different. – Soldiers are not responsible for political reasoning, they presuppose them.

First of all we have a very own interest in ensuring that the Baltic Sea does not become a mare clausum. The Baltic Sea is part of the north flank and forms a strategic unit with the North Sea and the Arctic Ocean, which must always be thought of as such. ...

It is in this region that we, as the country with the greatest economic and military potential, have a special responsibility. As Navy, we will make every effort to fulfill this responsibility. This is expressed in various initiatives for which we have the lead or the informal leadership.

(Brinkmann 2019: 7)

The Baltic Sea as a "Sea of Peace", in which the neighboring countries organize their mutual security, is rejected. "We" have no interest in that. Who is "we"? Why are "we" not interested? A reason is missing.

But then the Baltic Sea is supposed to be a region of confrontation with the well-known military opponent, integrated into the great context of NATO (see also Pawlak/Bruns 2019: 20). And this is exactly where Germany as a "semi-hegemonic power in the middle of Europe" (Brinkmann 2019: 5) has the opportunity to rise to the three-quarter hegemony: Germany as the leading power of the West in the Baltic Sea region. After all, it could be that the US is concentrating on the Pacific towards China, which gives Germany even more opportunities:

In view of the fact that new geopolitical centers of gravity are emerging, especially in Asia, an organisation of burden sharing between Europeans and Americans will have to be considered more intensively than before. As Europeans, we will have to take on more tasks around the European and African continents as American involvement moves to the Asia-Pacific region.

(Brinkmann 2019: 9)

The German Foreign Policy and Security consensus paper "New Power - New Responsibility" argued even before the Ukraine crisis:

Yet the United States – conscious of its reduced resources – is sending clear signals that their engagement in the world will be more selective in future, and that its expectations of partners will be correspondingly higher. This means that Europe, and Germany in particular, will have to take on a lot more tasks and responsibilities.

(SWP / GMF 2013: 5)

This means that Europe must be led formally and informally by Germany, especially in the Baltic Sea region. The Ukraine crisis is therefore not a trigger, but an accelerator of this strive for armament and supremacy.

3. The region - Baltic Sea/Baltic States

3.1 Political structure

One is used to consider the Baltic Sea region as divided into three political groups:

1. Nato countries: Germany, Denmark, (Norway,) Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. Germany and the German Navy, the Baltic States and Poland with a historically-politically complicated relationship with the Soviet Union and Russia.
2. "Neutral" countries: Sweden and Finland, which are connected to the West via the EU.
3. Russia with its two Baltic Sea entrances² (Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg), thrown back (almost) to the borders of Peter the Great, with borders to Latvia and Estonia. And Belarus, which does not have its own Baltic coast, but has borders with the Baltic states Latvia and Lithuania, especially with Russia. Russia and Belarus are politically and economically linked, but not without tensions.
4. (Rüsch 2019, Krökel 2019, UAWIRE 2020)

NATO sees the context differently. At the summit in Warsaw in 2016, the alliance decided to increase its activity in the Baltic Sea region:

In the Baltic Sea region, where the security situation has deteriorated since 2014, the Alliance has developed mutually beneficial partnership relations with Finland and Sweden on a broad range of issues. We appreciate the significant contributions of Finland and Sweden to NATO-led operations. We are dedicated to the continuous process of further strengthening our cooperation with these enhanced opportunities partners, including through regular political consultations, shared situational awareness, and joint exercises, in order to respond to common challenges in a timely and effective manner.

(Nato 2016)

² „A third of the traffic of goods and half of all container loads in Russia are shipped across the Baltic Sea.“ (Bock 2019: 1)

Sweden and Finland can be considered as de facto NATO countries (Mattern 2016):

In the current security context of heightened concerns about Russian military and non-military activities, NATO is stepping up cooperation with partner countries Sweden and Finland, with a particular focus on ensuring security in the Baltic Sea region. This includes: regular political dialogue and consultations; exchanges of information on hybrid warfare; coordinating training and exercises; and developing better joint situational awareness to address common threats and develop joint actions, if needed. Both partners participate in the enhanced NATO Response Force (NRF) in a supplementary role and subject to national decisions. Additionally, both partners have signed a memorandum of understanding on Host Nation Support which, also following a national decision, allows for logistical support to Allied forces located on, or in transit through, their territory during exercises or in a crisis.

(Nato Sweden, cf. Szymański 2019)

Swedish and Finnish neutrality are history (Mattern 2016). In regard to the Baltic Sea Swedish authors state:

Finland and Sweden, no longer neutral but not yet in NATO, face the prospect of operating in the shadow of Russia's current A2/AD capabilities, as well as the possibility that in a crisis Moscow might move its systems forward to their islands of Åland or Gotland, respectively. This would of course draw Sweden and/or Finland into the conflict. Similarly, Sweden could be drawn in because of NATO's need to use its airspace or territory in order to circumvent a Russian missile threat from the Kaliningrad exclave. Sweden has already taken a number of steps to adapt to the threat from Russia's new A2/AD capabilities³, including putting a garrison on the island of Gotland, dispersing aircraft at peacetime bases, purchasing the Patriot air defence system and forming closer defence ties with the United States.

(Dalsjö / Berglund / Jonsson 2019: 16)

Ultimately, there is only one predominant political-military bloc on the one side in the Baltic Sea, consisting of NATO and its allies, and Russia with short coastlines on the other side. So also according to Admiral Bock:

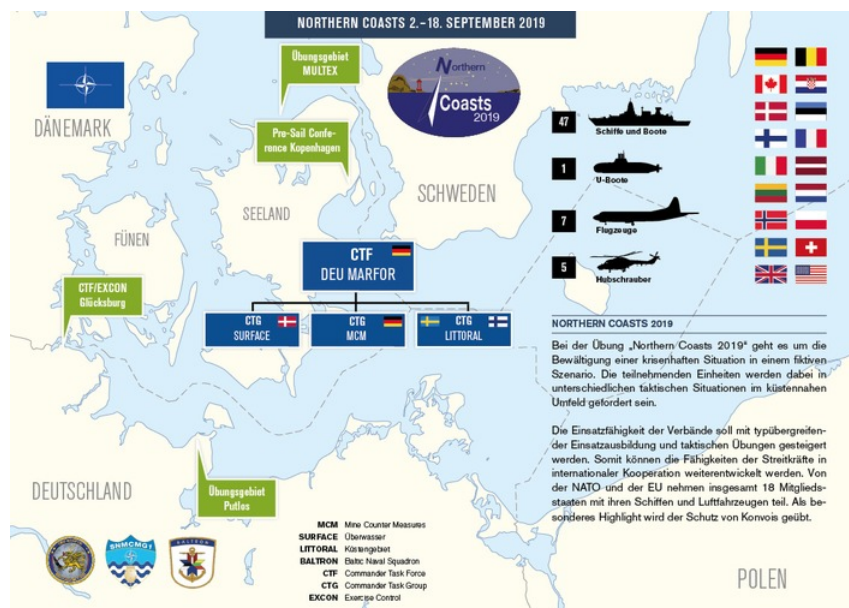
³ What is meant is Russia's ability from Kaliningrad to massively limit the warfare-capabilities of other countries in the Baltic Sea.

The Baltic Sea is the lifeline of strategic importance for all countries and the best example of an extremely dense, interwoven network of dependencies with diverging interests of the players. ... today nine out of ten states in this region belong to the western group, Russia's geographical sphere of influence in the Gulf of Finland and the upstream Kaliningrad Oblast is significantly lower than before. "

(Bock 2019: 1)

The Baltic Sea could therefore be the inland sea of NATO and/or the EU if it weren't for St. Petersburg at the end of the Gulf of Finland and the Russian region of Kaliningrad, the northern part of the former German East Prussia. The Kaliningrad region in particular is considered by the western navies to impair their freedom of movement in the Baltic Sea. From there, the sea connections to the Baltic States could be cut off in the event of war, making successful warfare against Russia in this region impossible.

3.2 Military Confrontation



Maneuver Northern Coasts

Tensions between the western states (NATO and EU) and Russia have existed in the Baltic Sea region since 2014 (Ukraine crisis). Armament is taking place. The

number, as well as the size of maneuvers of both the western countries (Baltops⁴ lead by USA, Northern Coasts⁵ lead by Germany and Baltic Protector⁶ lead by GB) and of Russia (Ocean Shield⁷) are growing. In 2017 China participated in a Russian maneuver.

In 2015, experts from the "German Institute for International and Security Affairs" analyzed the relationship between NATO and Russia in the Baltic Sea region:

Firstly, as a result of the crisis between the West and Russia, the institutional renewal process that started in the late 2000s and the revitalized political dialogue in regard to Baltic Sea cooperation has been interrupted ... All parties involved see a great risk that disagreements could further widen the gap.

Secondly, the militarisation is increasing on both sides, as can be seen in armament, flight maneuvers and large-scale military exercises. Both parties justify their demonstration of power by the arming of their counterpart and the threat it causes.

As trust has been lost and there is a lack of regional institutional frameworks to deal with security-related issues, further military rearmament is likely. Security might therefore be threatened. Some military incidents already indicate potential for the control over events to go lost escalating the situation unintentionally.

(Etzold / Steinicke 2015)

Both parts have strategic weaknesses that are interrelated: the "Suwalki gap" and the separated Kaliningrad area. Connections are crossing each other: that of NATO over sea and in the air to the Baltic States with that over sea and in the air from St. Petersburg to Kaliningrad. The options for action are for both parts limited:

⁴ „BALTOPS (Baltic Operations) is an annual military exercise, held and sponsored by the Commander, United States Naval Forces Europe, since 1971, in the Baltic Sea and the regions surrounding it.“ Also navies from other NATO countries were regularly involved right from the start. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BALTOPS>

⁵ Presse- und Informationszentrum Marine: „Nasse Flanke Ostsee“- Marine startet Übung „Northern Coasts“, <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/67428/4361434>

⁶ „Baltic Protector marks the first deployment of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) Maritime Task Group, with command of the group conducted by HMS Albion. A total of 3,000 military personnel and 17 vessels from nine nations will contribute to the first major maritime training deployment of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) in the coming weeks.

⁷ Hemicker 2019

1. Russia has only two very narrow strips of the Baltic Sea coast compared to NATO and the (ex-) neutral states connected to NATO. Access to the Baltic Sea is only possible from a few places. And Russia has in the NATO-Russia Founding Act⁸ made a commitment to military restraint through the Kaliningrad area.
2. NATO's options for action are very limited in the east of the Baltic Sea and to the south in central Europe because of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany⁹: No relevant permanent deployments in the Baltic States and Poland, no deployments of foreign troops in the area of Ex-GDR.

However, there are constant incidents in this tension zone¹⁰. An older statement from the "The German Institute for International and Security Affairs" states:

A security dilemma could arise from increasing military activities by all actors involved. Russia is increasing provocative military activities and violations in national air and sea territories in the Arctic and in Baltic Sea area. ... In the Baltics, NATO's air-policing mission aircrafts have, in more than 150 missions, intercepted Russian fighter jets four times as often. Since 2014, Russian fighter jets have several times almost collided with NATO or passenger aircrafts in both regions. In March

⁸ "NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces. Accordingly, it will have to rely on adequate infrastructure commensurate with the above tasks. In this context, reinforcement may take place, when necessary, in the event of defence against a threat of aggression and missions in support of peace consistent with the United Nations Charter and the OSCE governing principles, as well as for exercises consistent with the adapted CFE Treaty, the provisions of the Vienna Document 1994 and mutually agreed transparency measures. Russia will exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe." (Founding Act)

⁹ Article 5 (3): „Following the completion of the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from the territory of the present German Democratic Republic and of Berlin, units of German armed forces assigned to military alliance structures in the same way as those in the rest of German territory may also be stationed in that part of Germany, but without nuclear weapon carriers. ... Foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed in that part of Germany or deployed there.“ (Treaty on the Final Settlement)

¹⁰ An example, Russian view: „A NATO F-18 fighter jet tried to approach the aircraft of the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu over the neutral waters of the Baltic Sea, but was chased away by Russian Su-27 fighter jets.“ (Sputniknews (1) 2019)

2015, Russian forces practiced the invasion of northern Norway, as well as the Danish, Finnish and Swedish Baltic islands.

(Etzold / Steinicke 2015: 3)

What is the content of these many small conflicts? R. Lauterbach writes in "Junge Welt":

These clashes are about control over the officially neutral airspace over the Baltic Sea, where all the incidents take place. NATO has been making increasing efforts to control this airspace on Russia's doorstep since 2014. Legally, both sides are equally authorized to fly there, with air and sea being the only way for Russia to reach the Kaliningrad exclave without crossing NATO territory.

Because in this region the alliance has a problem. Russia has turned its Kaliningrad exclave into a strongly strengthened military aircraft and ship defence base. Many of Russia's most modern weapons are stationed in the region, from the "Iskander" short-range missiles that can be equipped with nuclear weapons to the S-400 anti-aircraft system and the "Bastion" type anti-ship missile complexes. In a study by the US Rand Corporation in 2016, a US military was quoted saying that given this capability, the eastern half of the Baltic Sea represents a no-fly zone for NATO in the event of a conflict.

(Lauterbach 2019, cf. Lauterbach 2017)

It is interesting that NATO set up this air-policing already before the Ukraine crisis:

In 2013, the Baltic patrol was called in when the Swedish Air Force was unable to respond to a simulated attack by Russian bombers against Stockholm

(Wikipedia Baltic Air Policing)

3.3 In the Baltics

After the Ukraine crisis 2014, NATO has significantly expanded its presence in the Baltic States. The statement by the Heads of State and Government, Warsaw (2016), states:

We have decided to establish an enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to unambiguously demonstrate,

as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression. Beginning in early 2017, enhanced forward presence will comprise multinational forces provided by framework nations and other contributing Allies on a voluntary, sustainable, and rotational basis. They will be based on four battalion-sized battlegroups that can operate in concert with national forces, present at all times in these countries, underpinned by a viable reinforcement strategy. We welcome the offers of Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States to serve as framework nations for the robust multinational presence in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland respectively.

(Nato 2016)

3.4 In the Baltic Sea

The politico-military importance of the Baltic Sea from the perspective of persons engaged at the "Center for Maritime Strategy & Security (CMSS)" by the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK):

From a Marginal Sea into a burning glass

In geographical terms, the Baltic Sea may be seen as a marginal sea, but in terms of security policy it affects the interests of the entire continent. The regular participating in maneuvers and naval visits by Belgian, British, French, Dutch and Spanish units are the clearest signs of a development that entirely follows the tradition of the Cold War. ...

Since 2014, the Baltic Sea has been the scene of the policies of NATO's maritime strategy (2011) and the European Union's maritime security strategy (2015), including an action plan. For the alliance and its member states, this results in the need for maritime presence, maritime diplomacy and international cooperation, but also for conventional deterrence and regaining of high-end capabilities on, above and below water. ...

At the same time, the US armed forces have again taken a closer look at the Baltic and North flank regions. US Marines are training in unfavorable Northern Norway, the German Army is supporting the Enhanced Forward Presence, US Air Force B-52 bombers are practicing deployment of sea mines, and the German Navy is regularly showing increased presence. The establishment of the 2nd US fleet in Norfolk (Virginia) and corresponding NATO commands on both sides of the Atlantic underlines that the Baltic Sea must be thought of in a

global context. Incidentally, this is also in line with military politics in China: „the Middle Kingdom“ carried out a sea maneuver in the Baltic Sea together with Russia in 2017.

(Pawlak / Bruns 2019: 20f)

3.5 The German Navy

The “Deutsche Marine” (renamed from “Bundesmarine” in 1995, Wikipedia Bundesmarine) has an ambitious development program in the Baltic Sea: to become the leading navy of all countries bordering the Baltic Sea, against Russia. Leadership does not only mean numbers, but also politico-military leadership. According to Admiral Bock:

The navies are continuously challenged here. The permanent NATO naval forces have been cruising in the Baltic Sea for decades. In addition, the western countries of the Baltic Sea region are today increasingly developing ever stronger multinational cooperation structures. The German Navy is making an exemplary contribution to this with the Baltic Commanders Conference, the future Baltic Maritime Component Command, the Center of Excellence for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters, the ideas for a regional competence center for mine defense and daily exercises with partners at sea. All of these measures are also included in NATO's Detention and Reassurance Pillar with its EU partners and in the associated Graduated Readiness Plans. ...

Especially in the Littorals (= coastal waters; HL), the "Joint Interaction" between land-based and maritime forces is the key to countering hybrid, asymmetrical and far-reaching threats. For this missiles, special forces, mines, artillery, torpedoes and drones are used in the A2 / AD (Anti Access/Area Denial) area. The operational tempo is high, the distances and response times are particularly short. And because of these options for action, the transport routes must, in all phases of a conflict, be protected by everyone, reinforcement routes and supply providing must be secured. ...

Therefore, it makes sense, for everyone - not just the maritime strategists, to take a closer look at the Baltic Sea region.

(Bock 2019: 1)

The Operational Flotilla 1 constitutes the German Navy in the Baltic Sea. The command of Flotilla 1 is situated in Kiel, the NATO-certified Centre of Excellence

for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters (COE CSW) assigned to the command too, which is under the same management.

The Operation Flotilla 1 is one of the three major associations of the German Navy. It includes the corvettes, submarines, fleet service boats and mine hunt boats as well as the naval battalion and the command of the navy's special forces. In addition, the flotilla has supply ships that ensure that corvettes, mine-hunting boats and submarines get a high level of sea endurance.

They are all units that specialize in coastal military operations. Due to the geographical location of Germany, the Navy has extensive experience in such operations in coastal waters and so-called peripheral seas. Small, maneuverable ships and boats are required for shallow and narrow sea areas such as the North and Baltic Seas.

(Bundeswehr Einsatzflottille 1)

Admiral Brinkmann explains:

Structuring initiatives

The Kiel-based and internationally manned Center of Excellence for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters deals with questions of naval warfare in operationally demanding marginal seas such as the Baltic Sea, develops relevant policy papers and doctrines and also produces ideas for conceptual alignment.

(Brinkmann 2019: 7)

The COE CSW can be seen as a practically oriented research and development institution:

The maneuver series NORTHERN COASTS (NOCO), which takes place every year in the Baltic Sea region with the participation of almost all Baltic Sea countries, was identified as a suitable forum for practical tests and exercises.

In 2013, 2014 and 2015, parts of the COE CSW ... took part in the maneuvers and could, in cooperation with the training team, be integrated into the respective scenarios.

(Winkler 2018: 5)

Admiral Brinkmann continues:

The so-called Baltic Commanders Conference, at which the commanders of the Baltic Sea region meet, with the exception of Russia, but with the involvement of Norway, stems from a German initiative, in order to exchange information about the state of play of their own navies, but also about relevant developments in the Baltic Sea region. The conference deals with coordination of exercise activities, questions of joint training, mutual support in missions, exchange of information, development of doctrines and other security issues. It is an excellent forum that ensures a trustful dialogue in a regional context and acts as a lawyer and spokesman in regard to common interests.

The German Navy has set up the DEU MARFOR command staff, which is ultimately the result of a deficit analysis indicating a lack of adequate command skills. DEU MARFOR is a national staff with international participation, able to conduct land or aboard maritime operations for NATO, EU or UN. The focus is on the northern flank, but is not restricted only to this. The staff is structured in order to be able to grow into a so-called Baltic Maritime Component Command depending on the situation.

(Brinkmann 2019: 8)

Merle Weber about DEU MARFOR in Rostock:

Rostock is to become the control center for NATO activities in the Baltics.

The DEU MARFOR staff is and will continue to be a central component of the naval command. It was introduced on January 23, 2019 and is the product of a concentration process of in the command structures of the German Navy. ... Alone the costs for the building, built specifically for this purpose, amounts to 66 million euros, not to mention the maintenance costs and the costs of the multinational maneuvers that Rostock will arrange also in the future. The staff currently consists of 100 personal positions, 25 of which are intended for soldiers from partner countries. By 2025, however, there is expected to be 180 positions, with 75 for partner countries. Until then, the concentrated, national staff together with the international positions shall become an official NATO command structure (BMCC, Baltic Maritime Component Command) for the Baltic Sea region.

(Weber 2019)

The establishment of the BMCC in Rostock does not literally violate the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, but it does, however, violate the intention (see Art 5.3 on S. 12). Although an integrated command is not a "foreign force", but because it is supposed to command such forces, the term can, however, be applied.

Admiral Brinkmann continues:

In Eckernförde, the way has been paved to transform the submarine training center into an international training center. Thereby we offer smaller partners opportunities to maintain their capabilities which would otherwise require immense own efforts. At the German Navy Damage Control Training Center in Neustadt, we offer partners possibilities to train and certify their units.

And finally, we are, within the Framework Nation Concept, about to set up a Mine Warfare Centre of Excellence in the Kiel/Eckernförde region, from which we expect a lot of synergy and valuable impulses in the areas of procurement, training, operation and use of these naval means of warfare.

These few examples illustrate what means of action there are available for those who want to shape strategies. Our little navy is already shouldering a lot of work to organize neighborhood and partnership in the Baltic Sea region and to live in this region. ...

Nevertheless, further actions are required:

First, national defense plans need to be adapted. ...

In the future, possible conflict scenarios or a military confrontation will appear significantly different also in the Baltic Sea than we are used to from the past.

In the future, drones and digitalization will become a determining factor, words and viruses will replace the black powder of the past. Hybrid forms of warfare must be thought of in a situation where friend and foe can hardly be distinguished, where open and covert regular and irregular, symmetrical and asymmetrical military and non-military means are used, where the enemy is only a part-time bomber or drone pilot, where the borders between war and peace blur.

(Brinkmann 2019: 8f)

The German Navy will be enlarged in the future.

According to marine inspector Andreas Krause, the German Navy will grow significantly in the coming years. "We need more ships and aircrafts in order to be able to provide national and alliance defence as well as international crisis management in parallel," said the Vice Admiral to the German Press Agency dpa.

It is therefore planned to strengthen the fleet by an average of one ship each year by 2031. "We will then have a fleet that is 30 percent larger than today." (Kieler Nachrichten 2019)

3.6 Other western navies

The US reactivates the "Second Fleet" responsible for the North Atlantic and thus also for the Baltic Sea:

BALTOPS 2019 is headed by Vice Admiral Andrew L. "Woody" Lewis, commander of the U.S. 2nd Fleet. The legendary "Second Fleet" was formally dissolved around eight years ago. In May last year (2018) it was reactivated as an active fleet of the U.S. Navy. BALTOPS 2019 thus marks a turning point in the national maritime defense strategy of the USA - this is shown by the "resurrection" of the U.S. 2nd US fleet and its symbolic return to Europe.

(Dewitz 2019)

Great Britain is also active in the Baltic Sea:

The British are coming with Armada to the Baltic Sea ... This means the operation "Baltic Protector". In several of the kingdom's bases, ships are loaded with equipment for a several months operation in the Baltic Sea. The journey of the fleet starts in May and is expected to last into the summer. It will be the first operation of the newly created Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) led by the UK. Royal Navy units are involved in this battle group, along with ships and soldiers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. The fleet, consisting of 20 ships and boats, is led by the British fleet flagship "Albion" with a unit of the "Royal Marines" marine infantry. ...

Great Britain sends eight units with around 2,000 soldiers to the Baltic Sea. The partner nations participate with another 1,000 soldiers. "The deployment of our mariners and naval infantry at the side of our allies in the Baltic Sea underscores Britain's leading role in Europe," said the minister.

The focus will be on amphibious landing operations, which are also planned on the coast of Schleswig-Holstein.

(Behling (2) 2019)

Great Britain has created its own framework for this, the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF):

In addition to the framework nation United Kingdom, the Scandinavian NATO countries Denmark and Norway, the Baltic NATO countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the NATO member Netherlands as well as the two countries Finland and Sweden, which are not members of NATO, are participating.

(Wikipedia JEF)

It looks as if there is a framework and command competition for the Baltic Sea: Should the Baltic Sea be dominated by US, Britain or Germany?

3.7 The German Air Force – Luftwaffe

According to General Gerhartz, Inspector of the German Air Force, also the Air Force is adapting to the new situation:

Moreover we are determined to use the VJTF (NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task) as an opportunity for further development and professionalization. Germany is currently a leading nation for the "VJTF-Land" combat brigade, and the Air Force is participating in "VJTF-Air" with a mix of skills: flying air defense and air attack with our Eurofighters, ground-based air defense with the Patriot system, air transport with the A400M as well as the ability to "suppress enemy air defense" with our tornadoes.

For the VJTF 2023 we have more plans. In addition to the abilities mentioned, we will introduce a 'Joint Force Air Component Headquarters' as a leadership element for air forces, special forces components of the Air Force, transport helicopters and short-range anti-aircraft missile forces (binational) to support the army brigade as well as organic support components for the operation of an airfield.

(Gerhartz 2019)

3.8 The Russian Navy

Memo in a newspaper about a Russian Baltic Sea maneuver 2019:

Altogether, almost 70 ships and boats and 58 aircrafts were involved in the Ocean Shield 2019 exercise, reports colleague Frank Behling, who for Kieler Nachrichten has an eye on what's happening in the Baltic Sea: Russia's Navy is operating in the Baltic Sea and for the first time in almost 30 years with 70 ships and boats and 58 aircrafts. Under the name "Ocean Shield 2019", almost 10,000 soldiers are said to be active in the biggest sea maneuver of the year. ...

Since the weekend, Russia has surprisingly shifted the focus of its activities towards Germany and Denmark. Several units passed in short succession Rügen and Fehmarn on their way to the Great Belt. Russian warships also occasionally cruised in front of the Bay of Kiel.

(Wiegold 2019)

One thing is certain: Russia has overtrumped NATO, which in June assembled 55 ships with 8600 soldiers for the exercise "Baltops 2019" off Kiel.

(Behling (1) 2019)

But there are other voices too. A Finnish author considers the Russian Baltic fleet to be rather weak and lagging behind:

To begin with the geographic realities of the Baltic Fleet needs to be acknowledged. The main base, Baltiysk, sits in Kaliningrad. There it is not only within artillery distance from a NATO-country, but it also lacks a land connection to the Russian mainland, and any ship wanting to exit the port to reach the Baltic Sea has to do so by transiting the two kilometer long and 400 meter wide Strait of Baltiysk which cuts through the Vistula Spit. The second base is located in Kronstadt, just outside of St Petersburg. While the base is located closer to the Russian mainland and more easily defendable, it comes at cost of any vessel wanting to head over to the Baltic Sea proper having to run the full 400 km length of the 40 km wide Gulf of Finland. The Gulf of Finland is also shallow, making submarine operations with conventional submarines challenging. It is often forgotten in the Finnish discussions exactly how bad the geostrategic realities are for the Russian Baltic Fleet in the grand scheme of things.

The Russian Baltic Fleet feature a varied fleet, made up of a significant number of vessels of Cold War designs, including a single destroyer, frigates, light corvettes, and FACs. In addition, seven modern corvettes of three(!) different classes are found. ...

The Russian Baltic Fleet feature a varied fleet, made up of a significant number of vessels of Cold War designs, including a single destroyer, frigates, light corvettes, and FACs. In addition, seven modern corvettes of three(!) different classes are found. ...

In short, the majority of the Baltic Fleet is far from any kind of swarming *wunderwaffe*.

(Corporal Frisk 2019)

The escalation of the maneuvers has brought even China to the Baltic Sea:

It is the first joint maneuver in the Baltic Sea: Russia and China are planning a military exercise with a total of ten ships. Now the Chinese fleet has been sighted.

(Spiegel-Online 2017)

The authors of the Institute for Security Policy Kiel University (ISPK) see it this way:

Compared to the decimated Russian Baltic Sea fleet, NATO and its close partners (Finland and Sweden) enjoy noticeable qualitative and quantitative advantages. ... The crucial question is whether NATO, in the event of a conflict started by Russia, will succeed in securing strategic supplies in the Baltics through the Baltic Sea. Whether this task will be successful can not be determined by a comparison of maritime capabilities and capacities but must above all take Russia's air attack capabilities and their medium-range missiles into account.

(Stöhs / Pawlak 2019: 249)

According to the Kiel Centre of Excellence for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters, Russia has massively expanded its Kaliningrad base:

In the past few years, the Russian Federation has, in particular in the Kaliningrad exclave, set up a large number of different weapon systems for the construction of a comprehensive A2/AD-zone (Anti-Access/Area Denial). This NATO term describes the ability to deny opposing forces access to an area of operations - here the Baltic

Sea - by military means or at least to make it more difficult. Russia has achieved this with the S-300 and 5-400 Triumf mobile anti-aircraft systems and the K-300P Bastion mobile coastal defense system or the Iskander-M mobile short-range ballistic missiles as well as Iskander-K cruise missiles. Both can also be equipped with nuclear warheads. There are also submarines of the aforementioned kilo-class and modern corvettes with Kalibr cruise missiles. The Baltic States see themselves particularly threatened by these measures since the Baltic Sea is their lifeline. Experts confirm: With the existing weapon systems, Russia is, in the event of a conflict, in a position to make it difficult, if not impossible, for NATO to have access by land and sea to Poland and to the Baltic States. ...

If Russia would close for instance the so-called Suwalki Corridor, the Baltic States would become a military island like West Berlin once was. This means also that in such a situation because of the long-range-missiles, larger sea transports or amphibious landings of larger troop contingents to support the Baltic Sea countries would only be possible at very high risk.

(Krüger 2019: 11)

There are also different views, Swedish authors write:

Five years after Crimea, it is time to undertake a more sober and realistic assessment of Russia's A2/AD-capabilities and their implications for the region, for NATO, and for Sweden. Do these barriers or bubbles exist? If so, how big are they, how dangerous are they, what weaknesses do they have and how can they be dealt with? ... While Russia has a long pedigree of using long-range missiles to keep airborne or shipborne adversaries out, or hitting targets on land, the recent claims of far- reaching A2/AD-capabilities are mainly based on three fairly new systems: the S-400 anti-aircraft system, the Bastion anti-ship system, and the Iskander ballistic missile system for use against land targets.

A net assessment of the threat from Russian A2/AD-capabilities should also take into account the wide-ranging menu of countermeasures potentially available to NATO. ... (After discussing the capabilities of these systems, which appear to be significantly weaker than specified / assumed, Horst Leps):

All in all, this demonstrates that Russia's "A2/AD bubble" is smaller than often thought, not impenetrable, and probably even burstable.

(Dalsjö / Berglund / Jonsson 2019: 10)

Important: this official text treats Sweden as a state that is fully integrated in NATO.

4. What kind of war can it be?

During the time of the First Cold War, strategic questions were discussed in public in the West: from "massive retaliation" to "flexible response". Even non-military people were able to get an idea of how a war would turn out between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty countries, at least according to the NATO version. But that is not the case at the moment. While you can get a lot of information about how the various weapon systems work, there are no public reports about how they can be used strategically in a war against the enemy. Such plans are said to exist, the "Graduated Response Plans" (Brinkmann 2019: 9). But they are not discussed publicly. Claudia Major, engaged at the "German Institute for International and Security Affairs", about NATO's problems in a war with Russia:

The geographic conditions in Europe, but also the Russian military doctrine, suggest that in the event of a conflict, Russia would try to impose its schedule on NATO. It is relevant that NATO is able to react quickly, meaning that the alliance has sufficient troops rapidly available and deployable. However, after decades of crisis management outside the alliance area, the NATO countries have forgotten how to quickly deploy and move armed forces and equipment in the area of the alliance, i.e. on European territory, and then to cooperate in the region of operation. A key issue since 2014 has therefore been to improve »responsiveness« (ability to react: to be able to make quick decisions and send forces rapidly) and »readiness« (readiness for action: to have enough operational, well-equipped and interoperable forces that can be used quickly and be credible). ...

Problems soon arose in regard to implementation because these reforms required a rethinking by states and by NATO. Thus, in order to increase operational readiness, NATO must (again) create planning, logistical and material conditions for the relocating of larger units to an operation location more quickly and for having them operational more rapidly. While in crisis management primarily smaller contingents operated, nationally predominantly in company and battalion sizes (up to around 3,000 men in multinational contingents), it is now a matter of quick relocating and leading and of joint deployment of complex large units of brigade and division strength with all kinds of combat and operational support troops, which means tens of thousands of soldiers.

The deployment takes time and money - which is difficult given the still poor condition of the European armed forces, which are under heavy strain from other operations. ...

In fact, military mobility, i.e. the rapid transfer of armed forces and material across national borders, has become a key defense policy

issue. The often unsuitable civil infrastructure is problematic, for example bridges that are not (no longer) built for the transport of heavy equipment (such as tanks). ...

Since such power lies mainly in the countries and in the EU, NATO can only play a coordinating role. Thus an Enablement Plan for SACEUR's Area of Responsibility was decided upon in 2018. It encompasses all military and civilian measures that can be taken, in order for NATO forces to be able to move quickly throughout Europe - on land, in the air and over the sea - to eventual operation locations in a crisis or for defence purposes, but also in order to be able to practice this in peacetime. ...

The NATO countries are also again practicing relocating of larger units, as well in NATO as in multinational exercises. One example is the Atlantic Resolve exercise, which since 2017 takes place every nine months and in which the United States is moving a brigade from the United States through Europe for exercises and rotation at the eastern border of NATO.

In this way, various dimensions of deployability can be practiced, from cross-border traffic to the load-bearing capacity of the infrastructure. In spring 2020, the experience gained will be used to a greater extent: In the exercise Defender 2020, the US land forces want to transfer more than 20,000 soldiers from the US to Eastern Europe. Together with allied forces and US soldiers stationed in Europe, a total of around 37,000 will take part in a joint exercise.

(Major 2019)

4.1 About Kaliningrad

A possible war between NATO and Russia would - in addition to the Black Sea region - have its origins in this geographical area, unless Belarus changes sides, as Ukraine did, and becomes a NATO ally. That would of course change the whole situation, because then the Baltic States would have a broad land connection to NATO.

Merle Weber summarizes from a paper from a British "think tank":

The paper outlines the following scenario: In a NATO war against Russia, the Baltic Sea region would be the "main scene", although it can be assumed that the conflict would not be limited to the Baltic Sea. NATO supply troops would have to cross the Atlantic on their way to Europe and could be attacked there by Russian submarines. ...

Combat operations in the Baltic Sea would primarily require smaller ships and amphibious vehicles to support operations on land, for example in order to escort convoys of troops to the region and to help to defend against Russian missiles fired from Kaliningrad. With its missile systems based in Kaliningrad, Russia could bomb large parts of the Baltic Sea as well as the Baltic States and Poland. This would give Russia the ability to cut NATO's supply routes to the Baltic States by sea, air and land. Russia could militarily and economically ban NATO countries from the eastern two-thirds of the Baltic Sea and could fire at land forces troops that would try to cross the small Polish-Lithuanian border between Kaliningrad and Belarus (the so-called Sulwalki Gap).

The task of bursting the Russian bubble around Kaliningrad, however, would not lie primarily with the Navy, but with the land-based air force. In this struggle for access to the Baltic Sea, mine warfare is also of particular importance, because the limited and flat sea routes of the Baltic Sea can be effectively be shut down with mines.

And had this struggle for the Baltic Sea been won, "conventionally-armed cruise missiles fired from surface ships would have the range to reach St. Petersburg and Moscow".

(Weber 2019, cf. Allport 2018: 45ff)

When taking into account such scenarios, one must consider the difference between military-political and military-strategic considerations. Military personnel (and their assigned civilians) have to think about, plan and prepare for war. That is their job. That does not mean, however, that they also want to wage this war. Such planning of a think tank provides proposals to politicians: "If you politicians can imagine that there will be a war with Russia, then these and those measures are necessary. If not, then not." It is therefore not sensible to read such texts as statements of NATO's intentions. They should, however, be taken seriously as development opportunities.

On the other hand: There are many intermediate stages between peace and massive war. A big war, for example, needs small ships because large ships are vulnerable. In a small test of power, large ships may prove to be appropriate. An article from a news agency:

In regard to all military preparations, many experts consider it questionable though whether NATO would be able to defend the Baltic States against a Russian military attack. "In a traditional military scenario, the answer would be no," says security expert Claudia Major.

In the event of a crisis there are still major problems in that region with strengthening the western combat units quickly enough. NATO is now

tackling the problem, and at its summit in July 2019 the alliance decided to massively increase the operational capability of its troops. "You have to prepare for a military attack, but the question is: Is that really the kind of attack we can expect? In my opinion, Russia's goal is not to conquer the Baltic States. Rather, Moscow's goal should be to show that NATO and the EU are incapable of action," says Major. ...

Brinkmann makes a similar statement. "I wouldn't really expect such a big confrontation," explains the admiral. "I can, however, imagine limited provocations to test the cohesion and determination of the alliance. Certain infrastructure could for instance be the target of aggression." In the worst case, regional conflicts may arise, but not global confrontations. "That would then require a decisive reaction, and it has to be organized. We are currently in the process of preparing us for this in terms of national and alliance defense.

(Siebold 2018)

One must therefore draw conclusions about a possible course of war from scattered texts. On the one hand many "small" conflicts with Russia must be prepared for, on the other hand also a "big" war must be kept in mind. Such a „big“ war could come about like this: After a phase during which NATO has suspected local confrontations and cyber attacks, it can be presumed that a war in the Baltic Sea region will first and foremost be a war about Kaliningrad¹¹: Because NATO can only successfully wage land war in the Baltics and beyond if it has its back to the Baltic Sea and can rely on secure supplies. Otherwise, any land war east of the Baltic Sea is impossible.

Seen from the other (Russian) side: Kaliningrad is Russia's security against NATO combat missions in the Baltic Sea, the Baltic States and eastwards. The Russian army will therefore defend its bases there with maximum effort in order to make maximum use of them in the Baltic Sea and in the surrounding mainland areas. A battle about Kaliningrad, on water, on land and in the air, would in no time maximise the escalation.

Taking into account the importance of this place for the warfare of both sides, the use of nuclear weapons must be considered possible: The one who has Kaliningrad determines what is allowed to happen on the Baltic Sea and in the area eastwards. The demands of an American author for US warfare:

¹¹ This is also how the completely non-neutral Sweden sees it (Dalsjö / Berglund / Jonsson 2019).

Washington's task is clear. It must demonstrate to Moscow and Beijing that any attempt to use force against U.S. friends and allies would likely fail and would certainly result in costs and risks well out of proportion to whatever they might gain. This requires conventional military power, but it also means having the right strategy and weapons to fight a limited nuclear war and come out on top.

(Colby 2018)

It looks like the United States is preparing a “small” nuclear war to take place on European territory.

The US conducted a military exercise last week which simulated a “limited” nuclear exchange with Russia, a senior Pentagon official has confirmed. ...

The exercise comes just weeks after the US deployed a new low-yield submarine-launched warhead commissioned by Donald Trump, as a counter to Russian tactical weapons and intended to deter their use.

According to a transcript of a background briefing by senior Pentagon officials, the defence secretary, Mark Esper, took part in what was described as a “mini-exercise” at US Strategic Command in Nebraska. Esper played himself in the simulated crisis, in which Russia launched an attack on a US target in Europe.

“The scenario included a European contingency where you are conducting a war with Russia, and Russia decides to use a low-yield limited nuclear weapon against a site on Nato territory,” a senior official said. ...

Advocates of the new US weapons say they represent a deterrent against Moscow believing it can use a tactical nuclear weapon without a US response, as Washington would have to choose between not responding, or dramatically escalating through the use of a much more powerful strategic nuclear warhead.

(The Guardian 2020)

Models exist for such planning:

U.S. Cold War Nuclear Target Lists Declassified for First Time

Washington, D.C., December 22, 2015 - The SAC [Strategic Air Command]

Atomic Weapons Requirements Study for 1959, produced in June 1956 and published today for the first time by the National Security Archive

www.nsarchive.org, provides the most comprehensive and detailed list of nuclear targets and target systems that has ever been declassified.

...

East Germany was the site of major Soviet airbases and East Berlin itself was a target for "systematic destruction." ...

The atomic bombing of East Berlin and its suburbs would very likely have produced fire storms, among other effects, with disastrous implications for West Berlin. Whether SAC conducted studies on the vulnerability of West Berlin to the effects of nuclear attacks on East Berlin or in other East German targets is unknown.

(Burr 2016)

The plan was to strike, regardless of the consequences. It is totally incomprehensible how the Ambassador of Lithuania in a tweet from February 9th, 2020 welcomes a text about the modernization of German aircrafts for "nuclear sharing"¹²:

Proposals that offer a credible answer to the Russian A2 / AD in the Baltic Sea region. Thank you @Ce_Moll, Heinrich Brauß & @dgapev

(Semaska 2020)

If the west wind blows, Lithuania may, after a nuclear war around Kaliningrad, be uninhabitable for eternal times - but Russia has learned its lesson!

There are, however, German authors too who are demanding regional nuclear weapons for the Suwalki-Kaliningrad problem:

If the Russian leadership would come to the conclusion that the overall strategic situation permits or even favors a military attack with a limited target but far-reaching political and strategic effects and the associated risk could be manageable, it could quickly advance with conventional armed forces into the Baltic States and a part of Poland.

¹² „Nuclear sharing is a concept in NATO's policy of nuclear deterrence, which involves member countries without nuclear weapons of their own in the planning for the use of nuclear weapons by NATO. In particular, it provides for the armed forces of those countries to be involved in delivering nuclear weapons in the event of their use. As part of nuclear sharing, the participating countries carry out consultations and make common decisions on nuclear weapons policy, maintain technical equipment (notably nuclear-capable airplanes) required for the use of nuclear weapons and store nuclear weapons on their territory.“ (Wikipedia Nuclear – sharing) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_sharing

The aim would be to separate the Baltic states from the rest of NATO by attacking from Kaliningrad. ... The greater the uncertainty among European countries would be about the credibility of the American nuclear safety guarantee for the allies, the more credible could this threat be.

(Bauß / Krause 2019: 161)

In the further course of the text, these authors are, however, disregarding the practical consequences of their demand: Namely that nuclear weapons would also be used in the eastern Baltic Sea and in the Baltics, in case a war otherwise could not to be won.

Of course, only threats are mentioned. The seriousness has, however, to be demonstrated somehow/at some point. The use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic consequences far beyond the target area (Röhrlich 2019), especially since it could not be expected that the use of nuclear weapons against Kaliningrad would remain regionally limited.

Of course, the war begins with a Russian attack. (Those who have had an eye on the involvement of NATO countries in recent wars do not necessarily have to believe this.) The NATO-based rotating troops in the Baltic States have in regard to their strength no chance against the Russian army. Certainly they are also by NATO classified as "tripwire":

Ultimately, a quick deployability of the 'spearhead' would mean that Russia would be attacking not only an Eastern partner, but also forces of the allies.

(Varwick 2017: 81)

In this situation two things are necessary:

1. To destroy the possibility for the Russian army to from Kaliningrad hinder NATO and its allies in the Baltic Sea, and at the same time in this way close the "Suwalki gap". This can only be achieved by completely destroying all Russian military facilities in the Kaliningrad exclave. That would not happen without resistance: From Kaliningrad, Berlin and Warsaw will be reachable by rockets. There would be an immediate risk of escalation to Central Europe and to the Scandinavian countries.
2. Now recapturing/liberating is necessary. It is unlikely that Normandy-style landing operations from 1944 are planned. They would fail on the shore in a hail of bullets (aircrafts, drones, artillery, rockets). Russia acknowledges from space every ship, every aircraft, every tank, every piece of artillery and has the appropriate means not only to fight them, but to destroy them. All that remains

is the land route, which cannot be made uncontrollable for Russia: over the destroyed Kaliningrad exclave and the “Suwalki Gap” into the Baltic States and into Belarus.

It remains unclear to which extent St. Petersburg, from which the air and sea connections in peace time run across the Baltic Sea to Kaliningrad, the exclave through which NATO is getting involved in the fighting, will get involved. That would mean an extension of the fighting to Russia itself.

In which way Kaliningrad will be eliminated can not be found in published texts, although one can of course assume, that this has not only been considered in NATO but also in the German armed forces. Complete destruction, below the threshold for use of nuclear weapons, must be sought. An US-American text:

“If we have to go in there to take down, for instance, the Kaliningrad IADS [Integrated Air Defense System], let there be no doubt we have a plan to go after that,” the commander of US Air Forces in Europe assured reporters here today. “We train to that. We think through those plans all the time, and... if that would ever come to fruition, we’d be ready to execute.”

If Russian aggression out of the strategically located Kaliningrad enclave required a US response, Gen. Jeff Harrigan continued, “it would be a multi-domain, very timely and effective capability that we would bring to ensure we have the access we need in that environment.”

Unsurprisingly, the general didn’t give details on what that plan of attack would be. But the unique position of Kaliningrad, nestled between Poland and Lithuania, well away from the rest of Russia, makes it both an excellent advance base and a highly exposed target. Russian anti-aircraft, anti-ship, and surface-to-surface missiles based there can threaten much of NATO, which is forcing the Air Force in particular to figure out how to better defend its hard-to-miss mega-bases and disperse its aircraft to multiple sites.

Conversely, the Russian launchers are also well within range of NATO warships in the Baltic Sea and NATO artillery ashore — and, for that matter, a relatively short drive for NATO tanks.

The geography creates new options for what was traditionally a pure airpower mission, if the US and its allies can coordinate all those disparate forces operating in different domains. That is a tremendous challenge.

(Freedberg Jr. 2019)

Russian comments do not give the impression that Russian politicians have understood the problem in all its harshness. Rather, it is a matter of avoidance.

The Russian Defence Ministry has said Kaliningrad is fully protected "against any aggressive 'plans' developed by US generals".

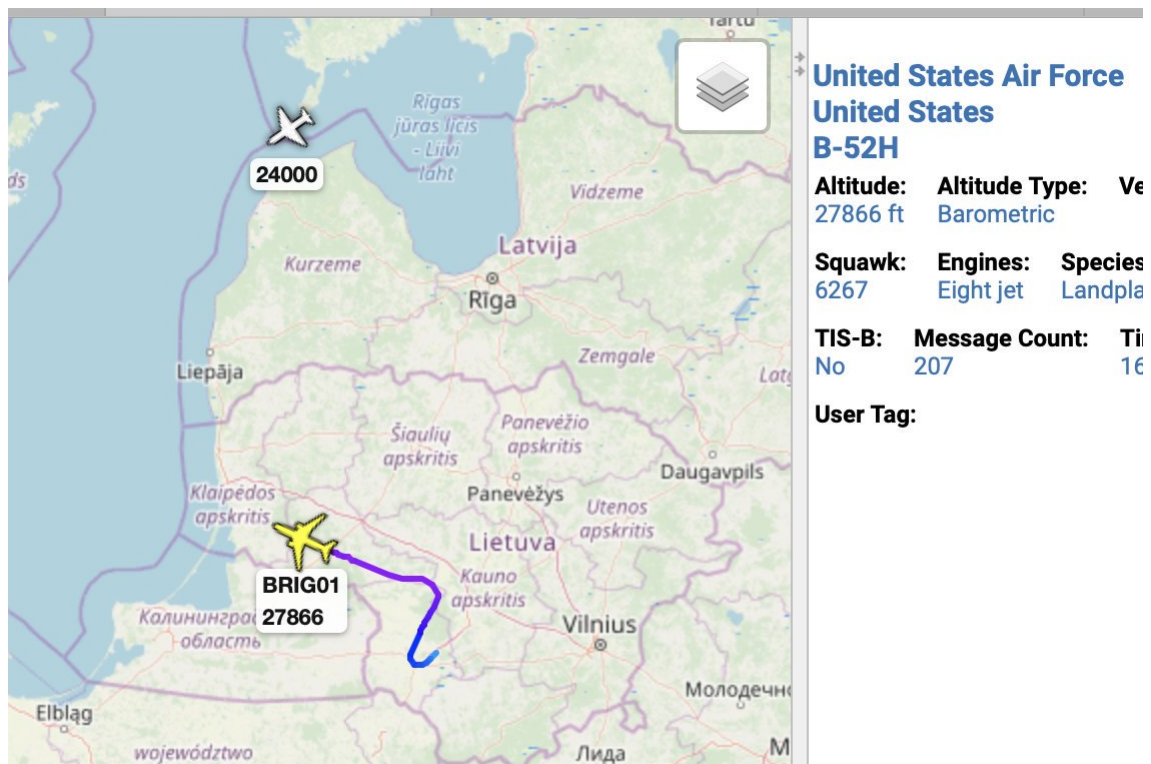
"The capabilities of the air defence in the Kaliningrad Region on detecting, escorting and, if needed, guaranteed neutralisation of any airborne targets in its coverage zone, are well known to all NATO pilots that have ever approached Russia's borders in the Baltics", the ministry's statement read.

(Sputnik-News (3) 2019)

But also the use of nuclear weapons seems to be practiced. A Dutch journalist is asking in Twitter and adds a map.

I'm not exactly sure what the message is of flying a B-52 nuclear bomber along the border of Kaliningrad (Russia). Show of presence? Intimidation? Provocation? Who knows...

(Vrej 2019)



A Lithuanian journalist considers this to be a completely normal process:

There's a training area in Lithuania, near Kaliningrad, where B52s have been dropping inert bombs for quite a few years now, good for JTAC training, Russians have been flying Tu160s over the Baltic sea, not to mention Zapad nuclear electronic launches so it's not for 'em to complain.

(Saldziunas 2019)

He is probably right. Newspapers report repeatedly such incidents.

The Kremlin on Thursday complained that flights by U.S. nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers across the Baltic Sea near Russia's borders were creating tensions in the region, but Washington said they were needed to deter potential adversaries.

(Osborn/Balmforth 2019)

It seems certain that the use of nuclear weapons is being practiced for a conflict in this region.

NATO has quietly begun an annual exercise to practice how it might launch a nuclear attack during a crisis. The drills follow massive Russian war games along its borders with the alliance, including a test of new nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile, as well as increasing reports of electronic and cyber attacks likely originating in Russia.

On Oct. 16, 2017, NATO personnel in Belgium and Germany kicked off this latest iteration of the alliance's main nuclear deterrence exercise, nicknamed Steadfast Noon. Publicly available U.S. military documents describe its main goal simply as "operations plan validation." This year's iteration involves operations at Kleine Brogel Air Base in Belgium and Büchel Air Base in Germany, where the United States maintains stores of B61 nuclear bombs.

(Trevithick 2017)

This is how the course of a war between the West and Russia could turn out in the Baltic Sea:

It does not matter how the war begins, it will very quickly become an air and bomb war over the military facilities in Kaliningrad. Also Russia is preparing for exactly this kind of war with its various missiles in the Kaliningrad region: anti-aircraft missiles, but also missiles that are launched into the Baltic Sea and into the adjacent land areas in the north (Latvia), in the east (Latvia and Poland) and in the

south (Poland and Germany) can disrupt the movements of the West and, above all, destroy the Western potential.

An incredibly rapid escalation of operations might occur in both the West and in Russia: Because the elimination of Russian possibilities from Kaliningrad to disrupt the movements of western navies in the Baltic Sea, and the land troops in Poland and the Baltic States is elementary. And vice versa: Only the rapid and complete elimination of all military potential of the West in the Baltic Sea area will ensure the survival of the Russian Kaliningrad exclave. The military geographical circumstances call for acceleration and weaken the chances for a political settlement. Rather, there is a threat of a blitzkrieg focused on the air forces. Nuclear weapons might be used.

This war, like any war of this kind since World War II, would initially be an Air Force war, especially that of the United States Air Force, now supplemented by missile forces. In a first phase, they would have to fight for superiority in the air and eliminate the enemy's weaponry, means of communication and command centers in order to deprive it of its essential capabilities.

The task of bursting the Russian bubble around Kaliningrad would, however, not lie primarily with the navy, but with the land-based air force.

(Weber 2019)

At the beginning, the various navies of the western Baltic Sea countries would have to hold back due to the presumably correct assumption that the enemy sees everything from space anyway and is able, with various air devices, to destroy every object even if it is only a few meters long.

In a second phase, if Kaliningrad would be switched off, it would be a matter of "taking possession" of the Baltic Sea, i.e. to make the Russian fleet near St. Petersburg immovable by locking it in.

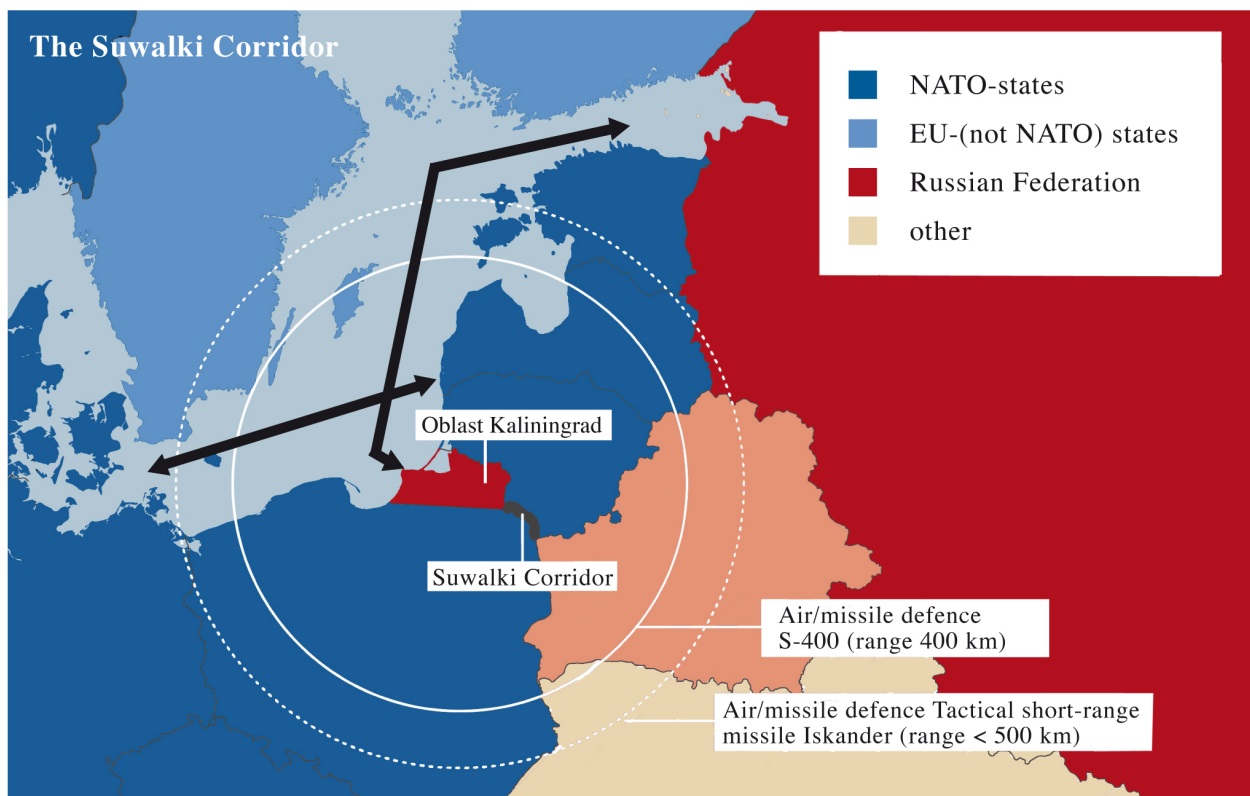
It means laying mines, clearing mines, coming close to land, shooting towards land, also to make an attack towards land, all with the intention of creating a safe sea transport connection to the Baltics.

4.2 The „Suwałki Gap“

The "Hodges Report" (Hodges / Bugajski / Doran 2018), based on a RAND study (Shlapak / Johnson 2017), determines the endurance of the NATO troops in the Baltics in the event of a Russian attack, the further development in politics in regard to the military and to various NATO-related military ideologists. It's about the "Suwalki gap":

In the terminology of NATO, the Suwalki Gap (also Suwalki Corridor, English Suwalki Gap, Polish Przesmyk suwalski) describes the Polish and Lithuanian border area, which connects the Baltic States with the Polish NATO partner and the territory that separates the Russian exclave Kaliningrad from Belarus. It consists of the areas around Suwałki, Augustów and Sejny. The border section runs between two triangle corners, flight distance 65.4 km and 100 km overland, from the triangle corner Lithuania-Poland-Belarus in the southeast to the border triangle Lithuania-Poland-Russia (Kaliningrad) in the northwest.

(Wikipedia – Suwalki-Lücke)



The Suwalki Corridor

A new concept recently appeared in the language of the US military: „Suwalki Gap“ (przesmyk Suwalski in Polish) - the land corridor between Poland and Lithuania, or rather between Belarus and Kaliningrad. This sliver of the Polish border with Lithuania is wedged between Russian ally Belarus and the Russian Kaliningrad oblast. The „Suwalki Gap“ is the stretch of land between the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad to the northwest and Moscow-friendly nation of Belarus to the southeast, is a

key point, on the one hand due to potential threats, and on the other hand due to the possibility of providing assistance to the Baltic States.

The 60 mile / 100 km [the border is sinuous so estimates vary] land strip in the Sejny district is also called the Suwalki corridor or, by the Lithuanians, referred to as the Suwalki triangle (based on the three towns of Punske, Sejny and Suwalki).

(GlobalSecurity.org, 2020)

The question is being discussed whether, and how, this only available land connection can be held by NATO in the event of a war with Russia.

While the overall Baltic land border with Russia and Belarus stretches nearly 1,400 kilometers, this strategically vital region of NATO is physically connected to the rest of the Alliance by a single overland link: the Suwałki Corridor. It is a relatively small strip of land that contains only two narrow highways and one railway line, and presents significant impediments to maneuver. If Russian forces ever established control over the Suwałki region, or even threatened the free movement of NATO personnel and equipment through it, they would effectively cut the Baltic States off from the rest of the Alliance. Such an outcome could make reinforcing the Baltic States by land exceptionally difficult. Deterring any potential action—or even the threat of action—against Suwałki is therefore essential for NATO's credibility and Western cohesion. And in learning how to deter potential Russian aggression, the applicable lessons from Suwałki can and should be applied throughout NATO's Eastern Flank. ...

Despite NATO's commitments, questions have been raised since the 2016 Warsaw Summit about the overall effectiveness of current tripwire deployments in Poland and the Baltic States. If an opponent knows the location of a tripwire it might simply avoid it. The positioning of military hardware without the permanent presence of U.S. and other allied troops is therefore premised on a two-part assumption:

Assumption 1: In event of attack, national armed forces and civilian reserve corps, together with limited contingents from NATO tripwire forces, will be able to impede or delay an aggressor long enough for;

Assumption 2: The timely reinforcement by distant NATO units who will prevent a territorial fait accompli at the peace table.

Recognizing these assumptions, however, Moscow is in a position to exploit the predictable doubts, uncertainties, and political cleavages which could emerge inside the Alliance during a crisis. Consequently, Russia could decide to test NATO's response in several possible

scenarios, whether through a low-threshold “hybrid” probe, a limited or temporary incursion, a rapid thrust to capture territory, or by threatening a wider war if NATO responds forcefully. Some or all of the above operations could be conducted consecutively or simultaneously. ...

Although NATO does not have comparable military capabilities in the Baltic zone, it does possess significant assets in Germany and other parts of Europe that can be deployed in the event of a crisis. The question is how rapidly these forces can be mobilized to enter a contested theater. In theory, the speed and strength of NATO’s military response should serve as a deterrent to Russia’s initial aggression, with its effectiveness increased by accelerating recognition, decision, and reinforcement. But how might this work in practice?

This report includes actionable recommendations for maximizing the Alliance’s effectiveness in terms of deterrence, defense, and counter-attack (noted earlier). In addition to a guaranteed NATO surge of reinforcements, each state bordering Russia requires three fundamental elements for its defense:

- Early warning of Moscow’s covert subversion of a targeted area, so that it can be thwarted or contained;
- Capable local forces that can respond quickly to an assault on national territorial integrity; and
- Adequate infrastructure and equipment that is prepositioned to allow for speedy deployment of NATO troops.

(Hodges / Bugajski / Doran 2018: 12ff)

This text should primarily be read from a military point of view: What to do if the Russians come? That would be the job of the military. On the other hand, however, the author seems virtually unquestioned to enter politics: the Russians want to come, thus we have to rearm and act in this or that way. The proposals add up to a complete reconstruction of the NATO disposition in Germany, Poland and the Baltic States. The Suwalki gap becomes the focus of military and political strategy formulation.

Much as the challenge presented by the Fulda Gap once drove NATO to redefine its strategy, statecraft, deterrence, and defense during the Cold War, Suwałki now demands the same attention—perhaps, even more.

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Hodges / Bugajski / Doran 2018: 1)

The Multinational Joint Headquarters Ulm (Wikipedia, Das Multinationale Kommando Operative Führung) set up in 2013 (!) and the maneuvers "Operation Atlantic Resolve" (Wikipedia Operation Atlantic Resolve) and "Defender 2020" belong to this context:

The United States is sending more soldiers to Europe next year than it has done in a quarter of a century.

Next year, 19 NATO member countries will organize the military exercise "Defender 2020", abbreviated: DEF 20. The US is leading this maneuver, which plans to deploy a total of 37,000 soldiers. 17,000 of these are already based in Europe. The rest will be flown and shipped in from North America along with additional tanks and other equipment, as the U.S. Armed Forces announced in Europe yesterday (7.10.2019). With 20,000 men, it will be as many as has not been brought across the Atlantic for one single military exercise in a quarter of a century.

Germany will act as a "hub" in this maneuver in April and May: In this state, which in January (2019) took over the leadership of NATO's "Very High Readiness Joint Task Force" (VJTF) launched in 2014, soldiers and materials arrive from USA to be redistributed to Poland and the three Baltic countries Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In addition to Bundeswehr support "in the areas of combat, combat support and leadership", also the establishment of three "convoy support centers" and a large refueling plant are planned. The latter is to be built on the Bergen military training area in the Lüneburg Heath.

Roads, bridges, railways and the two percent goal

According to the German Federal Ministry of Defence, the aim of DEF 20 is to practice "a rapid deployment of larger amounts of troops across the Atlantic and across Europe, in order to ensure that the corresponding procedures work in crisis".

Thus Germany can demonstrate the contribution to the "common European and Euro-Atlantic security". In addition, with the transportation of over 130 tons of heavy combat tanks on low loader trucks, also the load bearing capacity ability of the German infrastructure is tested.

For other users of German roads and bridges, this could mean two things: on the one hand, impediments and damage to the infrastructure in question - on the other hand, perhaps also a faster addressing long-due repairs, renovations and construction tasks. If a German government would use the defence budget for this, it could quickly

approach NATO's two percent target, which the US government is pushing the allies to achieve ...

In addition to transporting material and soldiers in the air and on roads, these are also to be transported on inland vessels and railways. The latter could lead to additional delays in the already very disruptive railway operations.

(Mühlbauer 2019)

Thus the “Suwalki Gap” is not a matter somewhere back there in the east, but a focal point around which many other military questions are concentrated, including naval matters in the Baltic Sea. These issues should be critically discussed also from a military perspective.

A closer look at the situation on the ground should reveal, first and foremost, that Russia does not need to close the Suwalki Gap because it is already closed. ... Terrain is difficult and there are only two roads that allow fast reinforcement. The bottom line—Russia does not have to send tanks, as everyone fears, to prevent NATO reinforcements: it can use artillery or other strike assets to destroy the roads and keep them closed for a fairly extended period of time. ...

There are four possible solutions to the Suwalki dilemma, all of which are absent from the ongoing discourse—probably because they are too controversial or too uncomfortable for public discussion. Yet, no policy debate can be sufficiently comprehensive without facing the entire range of options, no matter how unpleasant they might be.

The first option is learning to live with it. This is called mutual vulnerability. ... The vulnerability of the Baltic states is balanced by the vulnerability of the Kaliningrad oblast—an isolated exclave of Russian territory, which, no matter how heavily armed, could be overtaken by NATO in case of war. ...

The second option is enhanced NATO presence in the vicinity of the gap. It would take deployment of relatively large and mobile NATO force in the immediate vicinity of the Suwalki Gap capable of silencing Russian artillery, intercepting short-range missiles, shooting down aircraft, and entering the corridor with heavy armor to protect both sides of it enabling reinforcements to arrive to Baltic states. The force has to be near the battlefield because we are talking very tight timelines. ...

Obviously, this option risks creating a security dilemma. Maximum security for the Suwalki Gap will unavoidably mean maximum insecurity for Kaliningrad Oblast. This will lead Russia to further

strengthen its forces in the exclave and beyond triggering renewed concerns about Suwalki and additional reinforcements, etc. The end result is a spiral of a regional arms race until the growing tension snaps and explodes in a direct NATO-Russia military conflict. ...

The third option is regime change in Belarus. A “Belorussian Spring” or a “Minsk Maidan” could help break the alliance with Russia and secure the corridor on one side. Under the best of circumstances, the Suwalki dilemma will disappear altogether if additional reinforcement routes open the gap. The obvious drawback of that option is timing—no one knows when and whether such a change may take place and if it does, which policy the new government might choose and what the Russian reaction might be.

The fourth and final option is to quickly take out Kaliningrad in case of conflict. The Suwalki corridor can be secured on very short notice—literally within the first hours of conflict—if the Russian forces deployed in the exclave are incapacitated. In that case, there would emerge a realistic chance of moving reinforcements through.

A closer look at the situation on the ground should reveal, first and foremost, that Russia does not need to close the Suwalki Gap because it is already closed. ... The bottom line—Russia does not have to send tanks, as everyone fears, to prevent NATO reinforcements: it can use artillery or other strike assets to destroy the roads and keep them closed for a fairly extended period of time. ...

(Sokov 2019)

Conclusions:

Thus, a close look at the Suwalki dilemma leads to three conclusions, all of them uncomfortable.

First, the commonly discussed recommendations (such as those in the CEPA report, whose author’s name makes them particularly significant) do not meet the timelines criteria. They are relevant for the overall strengthening of NATO posture, but not for resolving this particular challenge.

Second, options that involve proactive approach by NATO involve increased tensions and arms races. These consequences can be tolerable, but not desirable.

Third, the only option that does not involve an arms race and increased tension—learning to live with mutual vulnerability—runs against the predominant mood in NATO and in the countries immediately involved in the Suwalki dilemma, Poland and the Baltic states. Yet, this is the only option (especially if coupled with confidence-building measures

and negotiations to reduce concentration of forces) that holds any hope of avoiding conflict.

(Sokov 2019)

To put it simply, for NATO there is no military solution to the problem unless the Belarus alliance with Russia is destroyed, thereby shifting the options for action of the Russian army far to the east. Concurrently, the NATO-Russia Treaty must be officially terminated so that an in principle unlimited number of NATO military forces can be stationed in the Baltic States, Poland and Belarus.

But if - as Defender 2020 shows - NATO in Central and Eastern Europe (plus the transport infrastructure in Germany and Poland), under current political conditions, must focus on the Suwalki gap, the question remains, what is all this about. Runways to the east, no matter what may come?

Political peace negotiations are the only possibility - arms control, disarmament, disengagement.

It is noteworthy that in the discussions about the “Suwalki gap”, the Baltic Sea and the western navies hardly appear. The fact that they cannot provide substantial support for military operations, as in Normandy, is unspokenly assumed.

5. Political Alternatives

Disengagement – Arms Control – Inspections

The current situation in the eastern Baltic Sea and the neighboring areas is not only unsatisfactory, it is also highly dangerous. It looks, however, as if politics has **said goodbye** to this geographical zone. I do not know of any political discussions on this issue¹³. What the military is planning is accomplished, politics does not control the military, but follows it¹⁴. The public does not notice anything. **On the other hand**, it can be said:

A look at the Cold War shows that there are other ways. Compared to today, explicitly that time seems like a treasure chamber of political imagination.

Demilitarized zones, common security, change through rapprochement: the key words are known, as are their protagonists. Sometimes peace and future researchers pushed forward, sometimes diplomats and top politicians, occasionally also military representatives.

¹³ For example, the paper „DIALOG – VERTRAUEN – SICHERHEIT – Voraussetzungen und Impulse für eine zeitgemäße sozialdemokratische Entspannungspolitik – Positionen der SPD-Bundesfraktion vom Oktober 2018 (DIALOGUE - CONFIDENCE - SECURITY - Prerequisites and impulses for a modern social democratic détente policy - Positions of the SPD group in the Bundestag at Berlin, October 2018) does not, despite statements basically to be welcomed, touch the issue. „Even if the geostrategic situation changed completely compared to the 1970s and 1980s of the previous century, the basic principle of social democratic eastern politics, i.e. to get closer to the goal of a European peace order through a policy of ‘small steps’, remain up to date. This also includes, despite fundamental differences of opinion, to strive for an as cooperative form of conflict management as possible and to always ensure that adequate defence capability is combined with efforts to control arms and to build military confidence. The point is to come up with viable compromises despite differing views on fundamental questions.“ The eastern Baltic Sea and the Baltic States region would provide adequate reason to concretize this social democratic policy. Nothing has, however, happened.

¹⁴ “For years there has been a dispute, especially in Germany, about foreign policy responsibility and mainly about the same question: whether an increase in military expenditure by one, one and a half or two percent is appropriate. Or who may or may not be supplied with tanks, rapid fire arms and submarines. Or how to reform NATO if the US fails as a reliable partner. Creating peace with more weapons is the advisory jargon of today: ‘Clear the way for realism’. You have to be prepared, if you neglect it, sooner or later you will get the bill. If, on the other hand, diplomatic ‘soft power’ is at all mentioned, it appears as ashamed silence - as if you were entering a playground for idealists from forgotten days.“ - (Greiner / Rother 2019)

In Germany, Sweden and Austria, and finally also in the USSR, Willy Brandt, Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Michail Gorbatschow certified a maxim that is simple as well as consequential: Realpolitik is carried out by those who do not submit to the realities of their time, but rather explore the breaking points in a matter that is supposed to have no alternatives and who see the risk of failure not as a threat but as a challenge. Without their appearance, as well as the inspiration for numerous successors, the Cold War would probably have turned out differently and ended less mildly. ...

In the intellectual evidence chamber of the Cold War, there are two very up-to-date key topics worth considering: "common security" and "permanent diplomatic talks".

Initiated by the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and the "Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues", which he headed, the security policy debate began to move in the early 1980s. In particular, a careful move away from NATO's catechism was initiated. Namely, from the dogma that stability can only be achieved by connecting political detente and military deterrence. Palme opposed this with a historically, countless times confirmed fact that armament is a permanent source of instability, it undermines the work of diplomats because it is based on mistrust and sows even more mistrust.

Conversely this means: Trust only arises if the diplomatic settlement of conflicts is given greater importance than investments in the military – that is if security is primarily understood as a political problem. ...

That alone is a good reason for picking up the Olof Palme impulse again, quite apart from the fact that no one else has yet given a more conclusive answer to the question of how politics in the race with weapon technology should come out of the hedgehog's role.

Confidence-building requires a stable basis, also and especially in periods of bad weather. Summits and other contacts between heads of states and governments, however indispensable they are, only make a modest contribution - since symbolism is often more important than substance or since the agenda changes as often as the top staff. The real challenge is to keep up a continuous dialogue and to institutionalize it regardless of the dictates of day-to-day matters.

(Greiner / Rother 2019)

We are not only miles away from such a policy at the moment, it does not even exist in the marginal areas of politics, and almost not at all in science and journalism. Also the peace movement seems to have completely lost sight of such per-

spectives; it is exhausted from resisting armament, alternative solutions are missing.

There is no cooperation between the Western and Russian military in order to avoid dangerous situations in advance. For example, they could - such a minimal matter - inform each other about military flights and warship activities. Even better would be to have a regional security cooperation, which is agreed upon at high level regardless of all political contradictions and differences of opinion. Proposals from the field of political science:

Professor Johannes Varwick and General ret. Reiner Schwalb

For a new start

We need a two pronged approach to security.

A high-level conference, sponsored by the Heads of States or Governments, within the OSCE framework, should be considered, a conference, that without preconditions and in different formats and at different levels, gives advice in regard to the aim of revitalizing the European security architecture, deliberately giving advice about these topics separately, but keeping an eye on it all.

As long as this conference continues - and this would realistically require a period of at least two years - complete mutual transparency should be agreed upon, at least in regard to military maneuvers, and specialist dialogues at the military level should be revitalized in order to minimize risks.

(Varwick / Schwalb 2019)

Wolfgang Zellner (Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, University of Hamburg):

There is no longer any relevant strategic dialogue between the EU/NATO and Russia, even if the NATO-Russia Council occasionally meets at the ambassadorial level. ...

Thus, a strategy of pragmatic cooperation appears to be the most promising. It tries to de-escalate and stabilize the security situation through practical cooperation in common areas of interest.

(Zellner 2019)

Colonel ret. Wolfgang Richter:

It should, however, be in the interest of NATO and Russia to reduce tensions in the Baltic region. Suitable for this task would be a sub-regional stability regime based on lasting political restraint declarations and proven core elements of arms control. ...

Unlike the situation in the Black Sea region, the Baltic region is not about settling territorial conflicts. Rather, the mutual perceptions of threats are nurtured by the military activities of the other side respectively A sub-regional stability regime for the Baltic region should act to limit military capabilities for a surprise attack or for a large-scale aggression after a comprehensive deployment has taken place, and to make military activities predictable. ...

A stability regime in the Baltic region could consequently build on these declarations without undermining the status quo. For this two steps need to be taken:

Firstly, joint or parallel declarations that have been agreed upon would have to be made in order for both sides to feel bound by the restraint obligation. Secondly, it would be necessary to agree upon an allowable amount of "substantial combat troops".

A sub-regional arms control regime must not isolate the Baltic States and Poland politically, and the connection with the defence of the alliance must be preserved. For this reason, a larger field of application must be defined, which in addition to potential Russian deployment areas also includes other allied countries. ... Furthermore, a subregional regime must also maintain connection with the political framework of the OSCE, which bears responsibility for security cooperation and arms control in Europe.

(Richter 2019)

An area must be created in which both sides must de-escalate. In general terms it is difficult to say which regions could be affected. Perhaps it should be an ellipse that focuses on Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg, encompassing the eastern Baltic Sea, the Baltic States as well as parts of Russia and Belarus. Rules must be created for this area:

- The behavior in this zone must be regulated, especially in regard to military aircrafts and warships, in order to prevent incidents.
- Limits for, including bans on certain weapon systems and types of armed non-aggression forces must be agreed upon.
- Inspections, to be made by both sides, of all military installations, armed forces and maneuvers in the area must be provided.

These suggestions have been clarified by Wolfgang Richter. The NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk) radio series „Streitkräfte und Strategien“ (Armed Forces and Strategies) reports about them, unfortunately without referring to the exact source.

Richter proposes limiting the military potential in the region at the external borders of Russia and the NATO countries in a area 300 to 600 kilometers deep. The western part of this zone would include the Baltic States, Poland and also the new federal states of Germany. The eastern part would include Belarus, Kaliningrad and the Russian military districts of Pskov and St. Petersburg bordering the Baltic States.

Weapon systems that are particularly qualified for a surprise attack are to be limited in this area: battle tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, combat aircrafts and attack helicopters. ...

Original sound (NDR) Richter

"It's about including long-range air defence systems that can capture a large number of aircraft targets at the same time, in this subregional limitation regime."

Richter believes it is particularly important that NATO and Russia finally agree upon a definition of what exactly is meant by "substantial combat forces" ...

According to Wolfgang Richter's proposal, also the number and size of military exercises on both sides should be limited in the 300 to 600 km core zone.

In addition to the 300 to 600 km limitation core zone, the second element in Wolfgang Richter's proposal is a so-called "transparency zone". In this much larger area, extensive information obligations and inspection options for weapon systems should be agreed upon which from the outside can affect the core zone - for example, naval and air forces, but also long-range missiles and cruise missiles.

(NDR-Info 2019: 13f)

5.1 Tasks/goals of the german peace movement

First of all, the peace movement itself must comprehend the danger of this situation in the Baltic Sea. So far, it has, at best, played a secondary role in the discussions, mostly it is completely neglected.

Yet, in the event of a conflict, it could in this limitation region happen that quarrels quickly escalate into massive armed conflicts in which both sides make use of everything they have. Then the conflict could not be limited to this region.

Therefore this region must play a stronger role in the argumentation and campaigns of the peace movement. The aim should be raising public awareness until the public understands the problems in this region and thus calls for de-escalation and regulation. The "Baltic Sea, a Sea of Peace" could be a starting point, but more important is the disarming/demilitarization of the whole region of the eastern Baltic Sea, the Baltic States, and Kaliningrad.

However, the peace movement can neither formulate nor propose the precise definition and rules of such a zone. That would be a matter for governments and their security and military experts. The peace movement must concentrate on formulating political demands to those responsible, demands that are aiming at a disengagement zone in the Baltic Sea, the Baltic States and the neighboring Finnish, Polish, German, Russian and Belarusian areas.

For the German Bundeswehr units in this area - army, navy, air force - the minimum requirements would be:

1. They are no longer reinforced.
2. They act openly, they report all their movements to the potential enemy side.
3. They invite Russian and Belarusian observers to their facilities and to their maneuvers and exercises and are in their turn invited go to the other side and also follow the invitation.

The troops should be distanced from each other. Of course, one can imagine further and deeper developments. But this would be a start.

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