



The Canadian Army and the Baltic

On 14 May 2015, the Ottawa Citizen published an article titled “NATO asked to keep permanent military force in Baltic countries” (<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/nato-asked-to-keep-permanent-military-force-in-baltic-countries>). This paper offers comments on the article’s report that “The three Baltic countries are asking NATO to permanently deploy an army brigade to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as a deterrent against an increasingly assertive Russia.”

The situation in the Baltic is very fluid at the moment. Russia has been accused of using mini-submarines to enter the national waters of Sweden and Finland in 2014 and earlier this year. Russian ships have hampered the laying of fibre optic cable between the Sweden and the three main Baltic countries in the fall of 2014. Aircraft of the Russian Federation have also passed close to the air space of these countries and of others as well including Canada. It is also alleged that Russian security forces captured an Estonian Counter-drug agent inside Estonia. This agent is being charged with espionage by Russia. Russia denies that the agent was captured inside Estonia. This particular issue is ongoing.

The reaction of the Russian Government to protests and the forced removal of Ukrainian President Yanukovich in 2014, followed by the occupation of the Crimea and the declaration of that area as sovereign Russian territory and alleged support of insurgents in Eastern Ukraine that continues to this day, have given everyone pause for thought. This is especially in light of President Putin’s confession in late January 2015 that he in fact ordered the occupation of Crimea, four days before the removal of president Yanukovich contrary to his earlier excuses that no Russian soldiers were involved in that event. Recent media articles from Russia indicate that extensive numbers of Russia contract troops have been employed in Eastern Ukraine. Boris Nemtsov worked on a major report on Russian fatalities in Eastern Ukraine prior to his death by alleged Chechen assassins on 27 February 2015. The report, released by his supporters on 12 May 2015, found that 226 Russian soldiers have been positively identified as killed in these Eastern Ukrainian operations. Very recently, Russian military personnel were captured well inside Ukraine and have admitted their participation in ongoing operations. The leadership has by their words lied about their operations inside Eastern Ukraine; is it any wonder that former members of the USSR are more than a little concerned about Russian aggressiveness?

NATO has the responsibility to protect all its members. Agreements with the Russians regarding the permanent stationing of NATO troops in the Baltic countries is virtually null and void given Russia’s actions and noted untruths about their participation in Ukraine. Their ongoing psychological campaign of intimidation using aircraft and ships requires NATO to respond in a more forceful way. Stationing troops in the Baltics is one way to show that further offensive action will be met by a more forceful NATO response.

The total abandonment of the agreement on stationing troops is dangerous; it may be best served by rotating troops regularly such that although there are always NATO troops they cannot be thought of as “stationed” in the Baltics. This will allow for a more measured response and saving of face for all parties. Direct confrontation should be avoided but not at all costs.

Canada's ability to participate is somewhat limited due to budget and resource issues. Canada does have the capacity to provide trainers and personnel for exercises. Stationing of Canadian troops permanently would raise a number of issues including a permanent base of operations in Europe. This is an expensive proposition at best and a long term basing of troops would likely be politically unacceptable to many Canadians at this time.

This paper was prepared by the Security Affairs Committee of the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. This work is the sole opinion of the committee and does not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Department of National Defence or the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. The committee may be contacted by email at: RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com.

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