Introduction

The aim of this article is not to once again repeat the history of the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT). The project should be rather well known for those who have an interest in the Baltic security affairs. BALTBAT is often mentioned when discussion takes place on successful examples of regional defence co-operation in the post-Cold War Europe and also whenever the major developments in the defence forces of the three Baltic States are presented.

In the simple www.altavista.com query “BALTBAT” received 324 hits. This is a clear illustration to the international prominence that the BALTBAT project has received since its official start in September 1994, when the Governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania concluded a tri-national Agreement on the establishment of a joint peacekeeping unit. Soon after that a number of Western countries led by Denmark have offered support to the undertaking, thereby turning it into a multilateral project.

This article will have a special focus on the role that the Baltic Battalion has played or, in some aspects, was expected to play, in the development of the armed forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In particular, I would like to discuss some of the rather unique features of BALTBAT both as a military unit and as a multinational project and the ways in which BALTBAT has contributed to the establishment of defence structures in the three Baltic States. Also, I will briefly describe the status of the Baltic battalion project (Autumn 1999) and the dilemmas that the Baltic and the Supporting states are facing when trying to define the future direction for the battalion.

This article is based on the personal experience of the author gained during the last several years through the participation in BALTBAT Steering Group meetings and being responsible for the co-ordination of development of Baltic
defence co-operation projects at the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Lithuanian MND.

**Context**

The Baltic Battalion is a unique project in several important aspects. The format in which it was developed and the objectives that were pursued by the Baltic and the Supporting countries can be fully understood only within the broader international context of late 1993 and early 1994. During this period BALTBAT project was developed from a vague concept into a viable project of great visibility and political significance for the three Baltic countries.

In the Baltic States, this was the time when the Soviet troops had completed their withdrawal from Lithuania and were about to complete it from Latvia and Estonia. The armed forces in the three states were at the initial stage of creation. This process was led on the one hand by volunteers, who had little expertise to offer but had plenty of good will and determination, and, on the other, by the former Soviet Army officers who decided to support the establishment of armed forces in their newly independent countries. Even if the latter group were in many cases distrusted by the political leadership, they were the only military experts in the countries. The defence budgets were minuscule in each of the three states, while significant defence assistance could hardly be expected from the Western countries. In their judgement, this could undermine the difficult process of involving Russia into closer defence co-operation with the West. In general, before January 1994, the Baltic States had only very limited and ad hoc external defence co-operation.

For NATO this was a period of finalising its strategies towards its former adversaries in the East, first and foremost - Russia. With respect to the Baltic States, NATO has well understood Russia’s message that they had certain “sensitivities” as well as special interests in the Baltic region. Therefore, in their rhetoric towards the Baltic States, representatives of NATO and its member countries would always choose careful wording and support only those practical co-operation activities that would be non-provocative to Moscow.

Significant and comprehensive change came with the Brussels Ministerial meeting in January 1994 when NATO has launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme - a set of co-operation activities for the new Europe. Training for multinational peacekeeping operations under UN mandates became an objective that all PfP countries, including Russia, found possible to agree. Multinational peacekeeping exercises became the major part of PfP field training activities and were generously sponsored by NATO and the United States.

**Challenges**

The architects of the BALTBAT project fully took into account the context of the PfP world of its early days. The Baltic battalion was a multinational unit trained
for UN peacekeeping purposes and established in the former Eastern Bloc. The combination of these features was making the BALTBAT project more than a politically correct undertaking. BALTBAT has embraced the main concepts of the Partnership for Peace ideology and therefore was a kind of test case for the PfP itself.

The four Nordic countries, led by Denmark, were with the BALTBAT project from its early days. Without their sincere interest and commitment to support the project, the Baltic States would not have been able to start it. The Nordic countries have also done very much in order to promote the BALTBAT project internationally and soon the US, Great Britain, Germany, France and a number of other Western nations decided to join the group of supporters of BALTBAT. This was certainly a very encouraging beginning.

The wide multinational framework in which BALTBAT found itself was helpful not only for wider distribution of the financial burden related to the establishment of the Baltic Battalion. It has turned BALTBAT into internationally known and highly visible project. The Battalion has become a symbolic expression of the determination of the Baltic States to anchor their security in the democratic Europe. At the same time, the political engagement and practical support rendered by the Western countries to BALTBAT was perceived in the Baltics as a clear indication of their earnest commitment to support the Baltic nations in this endeavour.

Stakes were also high on the side of the supporting states. Many of them have invested a significant amount of resources into the BALTBAT project. Some apparently had to go through an intense internal debate before concluding that security of the Baltic States in general and the BALTBAT project in particular was worth spending money on. Furthermore, having become the most visible part of Western security engagement in the Baltic region, the progress in the development of the BALTBAT project became important indicator as to the success of the Western countries in their security co-operation with the Baltic States in general. Therefore, both successes and failures of the BALTBAT project were perceived to have much wider implications.

There was, however, another side to BALTBAT than that widely exposed by the mass media. In reality, the establishment of a modern Western-type multinational battalion from scratch in the countries that basically had no regular armed forces, was a truly Herculean task. Looking back to the early days of the project, one tends to conclude that even those who understood the complexities and difficulties involved in the project tended to underestimate them. Otherwise they probably would not have started the project at all.

Difficulties that were arising in the process of project implementation were multiple and some of the problems have remained there for years. Their analysis is beyond the scope of this article but a few observations should help the reader to understand the nature of the problems faced by those who were responsible for the implementation of the BALTBAT project.
First of all, the militaries in the three Baltic States initially regarded the BALTBAT project as a purely political creature with exclusively political objectives. For them participation in UN peacekeeping operations could hardly be seen a priority task, given the threats, challenges and financial limitations they were facing in the establishment of defence forces in their respective countries. Therefore the BALTBAT project for the military leadership in the Baltic countries primarily associated with a drain of their very scarce financial and human resources. They tended to underestimate the potential of the BALTBAT project to contribute to the development of the national defences. In Lithuania, a separate division of the defence staff was responsible for the coordination of the BALTBAT project, thereby further contributing to the isolation of BALTBAT from the rest of the defence forces.

Secondly, with all political will and determination to ensure success of the BALTBAT project, the Baltic nations could not render adequate support to BALTBAT until national base for such support was established. In other words, the support which the Baltic States were providing to BALTBAT, be it in terms of personnel training or logistic supplies, could not be much better than the general level in the national forces and in most cases was below the level required in BALTBAT. Therefore the development of the project was depending on external assistance in almost every aspect starting with English language training and provision with personal munitions, to deployment and supplies in the mission area.

Thirdly, activities of BALTBAT were exposed to the lack or inadequacy of the legal base and administrative procedures in the three Baltic countries. It was the first multinational unit in the Baltic States. It included outside support with arms transfers as well as frequent border crossings of military vehicles and soldiers with weapons. Many things in the implementation of the BALTBAT project were happening in the Baltic States for the first time and therefore often there were no established procedures, regulations and routines. Those often had to be created and adopted on a very short notice.

These are only the more general sources of the problems faced by both the Baltic and Supporting countries in the process of establishment of the Baltic battalion. The nature of these problems suggests that the start of the project could be somewhat premature and that many of the practical problems could be made less complicated if the Baltic States had more experience of international defence cooperation and international peacekeeping at the start of the project. On the other hand, BALTBAT could also be regarded as a “shock therapy”, which has suddenly exposed the three Baltic defence establishments to all the complexities involved in international defence cooperation, forcing them to address a whole set of problems in a very short period of time.

Looking retrospectively, the question that arises is “was it worth going through all this in order to establish a UN peacekeeping unit, which could hardly be considered as a real priority for the security of the Baltic States?”
Beyond Peacekeeping

Indeed, those arguing that BALTBAT as a military unit has little direct military value for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a point. As argued above, BALTBAT was masterminded as a politically uncontro-versial project and its form was more shaped by the security environment than by the security needs of the Baltic countries. At the same time, and this is extremely important, the BALTBAT project always had a much broader meaning for its designers than merely the establishment of a tri-national peacekeeping unit. Even though an operational peacekeeping battalion had to be the final outcome of the endeavour, the most valuable result of the BALTBAT project had to be its spill over to the national defence forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It was expected that, having received Western type training and having experience of participation in international operations, BALTBAT soldiers would return to the national military units and would introduce Western types of thinking, traditions and attitudes into the national defence forces. In other words, the development of international peacekeeping capabilities was far from being seen an aim in itself. BALTBAT was rather a means to assist the development of the armed forces in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Below is a description of direct and indirect side effects which the BALTBAT project was expected to have on the national defence forces of the three Baltic States.

1. “Westernization” of the fledgling defence forces of the Baltic countries. This concept encompasses a wide range of issues such as introduction of tactical manuals and operating procedures of defence forces of the Western countries in the daily training, spread of English language knowledge, replacing Soviet traditions with Western military culture in its broadest sense, etc. It was expected that BALTBAT soldiers, after a period in the Baltic Battalion, would return to key positions in the national military systems and start changing the old habits and traditions mostly coming from the Soviet army. Thereby BALTBAT would become an important factor in the process of building Western type, NATO interoperable armed forces in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

2. Provision of military support to the Baltic States in a manner non-provocative to other countries. Western countries have different national policies, priorities and different sensitivities when rendering defence related support of the Baltic States. However, most of them find it politically easier and more attractive to support joint projects like BALTBAT than to render direct military assistance to the national armed forces of the Baltic countries. This can be easily explained. Support rendered to the development of peacekeeping capabilities for UN missions and other operations in the “spirit of PfP” could hardly be considered a controversial issue by anyone. On the other hand direct transfers of military hardware and provision of combat training of Baltic military units were likely to raise eyebrows in the East. It seems that this consideration
and initial success of the BALTBAT project were the major incentives for the Baltic countries to launch the other Baltic projects: the Baltic Naval Squadron - BALTRON, the Baltic Air Surveillance Network - BALTNET, the Baltic Defence College - BALTDEFCOL.

3. Development of Baltic defence co-operation. With their important differences notwithstanding, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians would admit that their countries are of comparable size, have similar recent history, and share the same threats to their security. Looking from outside, the differences become even less visible, while the similarities prompt the Western states to regard and treat the three Baltic countries as a single geopolitical unit. Close Baltic defence co-operation is therefore a priori considered in the West as a highly positive and even natural state of affairs. On the other hand disagreements, which unavoidably occur in the process, are regarded as irresponsible behaviour on the part of the Balts and therefore usually come under sharp criticism from the Supporting States. Because of this image in the West and also because this makes matters so much more simple, the Western states are readier to deal with all three Baltic countries simultaneously rather than on the individual basis. Therefore one could easily make a claim that it was the attitude of the Supporting countries rather than anything else that promoted defence co-operation Baltic States to the present level.

The BALTBAT project also has a remarkable multinational management structure, which was later copied by the other Baltic initiatives. The co-ordination of the assistance and general management of the project takes place through the regular meetings of multinational BALTBAT Steering and BALTBAT Military Working Groups, chaired by Denmark. A majority of the participants are signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding concerning support to BALTBAT. Such a formal commitment made by a group of Western countries, which includes both NATO and non-aligned states, to support a specific project in the Baltics, is important not so much for the potential it brought to the project as for making a strong political signal. It is certainly an important factor, contributing to self-confidence of the Baltic countries vis-à-vis potential threats in the East.

Deploying BALTBAT

Though the BALTBAT project was highly visible, its political benefits were undeniable, some other expectations related to the project have not materialised to a full extent. In particular, BALTBAT’s influence on the national forces was rather limited. Apart from the fact that the project was developed in relative isolation from the rest of the armed forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, many officers in the Baltic States judged BALTBAT training and experience being irrelevant to the defence needs of the Baltic countries. In its worst, BALTBAT was seen as an artificial elite unit where the main motivation of the soldiers was financial benefit related to service abroad and therefore they could hardly have any positive influence on the national forces.
These allegations had at least some ground. Soldiers and officers serving in BALTBAT Headquarters in Adaži, Latvia, and especially when deployed to an international peacekeeping mission, were considerably better than their colleagues in the military units in the home countries were. Also, at some point in 1995-1996, the original idea of the BALTBAT as a project that in many ways could contribute to the development of the national defence forces appeared to become subordinated at the project steering level to a need to find a suitable deployment. A primary objective of the project was to send the Battalion out for a mission soon after the end of the training programme in 1997. Some of the Supporting States saw BALTBAT’s deployment to a mission as being necessary in order to substantiate the success of the project and as a justification to the resources contributed to its development. The consolidation of training and the development of mission experience, which could then be fed back into the Battalion (and into the national forces) was a further motivation.

This shift in priorities required the Baltic States to further concentrate on the quality of personnel and resources for a possible deployment of BALTBAT rather than to think about spreading the BALTBAT experience into their national units. As a result, the national defence systems were continuously working for the BALTBAT purposes rather than vice versa. Deployment to a mission became the main criterion of success of the project and finding a mission for BALTBAT was a major task of the BALTBAT Steering Group throughout 1997 and first half of 1998.

Finding a deployment area for BALTBAT was not an easy task considering several important factors that had to be taken into account and this limited the number of possibilities. Firstly, BALTBAT was trained, equipped and structured to perform classical UN operations. Therefore independent deployment of BALTBAT to SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was rather peace enforcement than peacekeeping operation, was not acceptable due to the insufficient armour, fire support and logistical capabilities of the Battalion. Also, nobody wanted to take greater risks than necessary. BALTBAT’s deployment had to be a success and SFOR seemed to be more risky than most of the UN operations.

Secondly, the size of BALTBAT at the time was about 700 military (authorised strength 724), which also limited the number of options among the existing UN peacekeeping operations. In most of them smaller size battalions were used, and therefore it would be difficult to find a unit that the BALTBAT could replace. But even if a place for BALTBAT deployment was found, the UN would have to approve BALTBAT participation while another nation would have to agree to withdraw its forces to provide space for BALTBAT. All this suggested a rather lengthy and cumbersome procedure.

Last but not least, the UN had to agree to deploy BALTBAT only for six months, as there was no other unit in the Baltic States that could replace BALTBAT after its six-month turn. This meant that the Baltic States were not in a position to
provide for a sustained deployment, which was one of important preconditions set by the UN.

On the top of that, preliminary financial estimates of what would take for the Baltic States to deploy full BALTBAT and to supply it with necessary logistics were rather speaking against this option.

A detailed study prepared by the BALTBAT Military Working Group in summer 1998 on the possible deployment of BALTBAT to UNIFIL in Lebanon has highlighted those concerns. The solution that was found was probably optimal in this situation. It was decided to rotate BALTBAT contingents (national company plus staff element) within the Danish Battalion (DANBAT) in the SFOR operation in Bosnia. This option took care of all the major problems mentioned above. Besides, co-operation with the Danes in peace operations had a relatively long history (starting in 1994 for the Lithuanians and 1995 for the Estonians and Latvians and including a tour of duty for the Lithuanian BALTBAT infantry company in IFOR). SFOR was also politically more attractive to the Baltic States than the UNIFIL as this was a NATO-led operation.

**Current Developments**

Where are we now with the BALTBAT project 5 years after its beginning? Several developments have to be discussed in this chapter.

First of all, since the end of 1997, BALTBAT is no longer trained for the classical UN peacekeeping operations but is under development into a light infantry battalion, ready for all types of peace operations. This stage of development has to be completed by the end of 2000. By that time BALTBAT will acquire anti-tank and fire support capabilities, while NATO rules and procedures will be used whenever applicable in the daily work of the battalion.

The Baltic States welcomed this step from the UN peacekeeping to more robust capabilities. Both for political and practical reasons, the priority in the Baltic States is given to participation in NATO-led operations. This development was also due to the UNPROFOR/IFOR/SFOR lessons, which clearly showed that modern peacekeeping requires more mobile and better armed forces. Also, since 1994 there has been clear development in the attitudes of the Supporting countries towards the Baltic States, making it politically easier for many of them to support the development of defence capabilities beyond UN peacekeeping.

Furthermore, in early 1999, the Baltic States agreed to assign Initial Partnership Goals (IPG’s) to their national subunits in the BALTBAT as a part of their national contributions to the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP). This commitment requires that those subunits be developed in accordance with the requirements set by NATO and become fully NATO interoperable. Thereby BALTBAT is entering the mainstream of national efforts towards achieving NATO interoperability of the national armed forces of the three Baltic States.
A second important aspect is a gradual decentralisation of the project and its anchoring within the national defence structures. This development indicates a return to the original ideas about the role of the BALTBAT project, i.e. BALTBAT and support that is rendered to it by Western countries should be used for the development of the national defence forces in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In accordance with the Political Guidance issued by the Baltic Defence Ministers in April 1999, in each of the three states national battalion size units will be established and will be responsible for military training up to the company level in accordance with BALTBAT standards. They will also take over English language training and specialist training. The BALTBAT staff will remain in Adazi and will be responsible for training at the battalion level and also for ensuring the co-ordination and compatibility of training in the national centres. Thus, along with the implementation of the plan of reorganisation of BALTBAT into a light infantry battalion the Baltic States are working on the establishment of the national battalions, which will act as feeder units for BALTBAT. Those national BALTBAT units will establish a clear relationship between the BALTBAT project and the development of the national forces, changing the image of the Baltic Battalion as an isolated elitist unit. They will also allow the Baltic States to ensure sustainability of BALTBAT in a deployment. Therefore the outside support to the project should also gradually become decentralised with focus to the national battalions.

The third tendency, which is important not only in the BALTBAT but also in the other Baltic projects, is the so-called baltification process. In its essence, baltification means gradual reduction of external support and eventual transfer of full responsibility for running the projects for the Baltic States themselves. It is natural that the Supporting countries would like to establish some kind of timeline after which the Baltic States could continue the projects without outside support. This interest of the supporting countries is especially relevant in the case of BALTBAT, which has already celebrated its fifth anniversary and is perhaps the largest consumer of outside assistance. There is a general view among the Supporting States that the Baltic States should by now have suitable structures to manage and support the Battalion. Besides releasing available funding for other assistance projects, a fully nationally supported, effective and deployable BALTBAT is also seen by them as a valuable political and military signal of Baltic development and co-operation to send to the wider international community.

**Way Ahead**

Where are these tendencies leading the BALTBAT project? What kind of BALTBAT will we have in another five or ten years? These are the questions that will be addressed in the final section of this article.

The topic “Way ahead for BALTBAT” has become almost a permanent agenda item in BALTBAT Steering Group meet-
ings in recent years. The ultimate answer of what BALTBAT should look like in the future should be coming from the Baltic States themselves. There have been numerous discussions held on the subject, a number of agreements have been achieved and several important documents have been signed. However, there is still (Dec. 1999) no single coherent plan, which would show how the political agreements and objectives set for the Baltic battalion could be implemented after the expiry of the present Memorandum of Understanding (end of 2000). The Supporting states that are willing to continue rendering assistance to the BALTBAT project would also like to know in advance what kind BALTBAT they are being asked to support. Therefore the urgent task for the Baltic States is to prepare a BALTBAT development plan giving a clear indication as to the expected end-result of the project.

For the sake of having a more structural debate on the future of the BALTBAT, this article will elaborate on two possible models of the Baltic battalion in the future - BALTBAT as a peace operations unit and BALTBAT as a training unit. The first option indicates the focus of BALTBAT activities on deployment of the battalion or its subunits to international operations, while the second on the anchoring of the BALTBAT training standards into the national defence forces.

This separation hinges on the argument that if a decision is taken to sustain BALTBAT in an international mission or to keep BALTBAT as a high readiness battalion, this will shape the BALTBAT development plan in all areas. This includes assignment and rotation of personnel, development of logistic capabilities, and requirements for outside support. Conversely, if training of Baltic military personnel is chosen as a primary objective, the approaches in those areas will have to be different. The two concepts can be combined only to a limited extent as each suggests different focus of efforts and different success criteria. Some of the specific implications of each choice are summarised in Table 1 and commented on below.

Those two approaches are more theoretical in their character. None of them could be implemented to the full extent as certain ramifications are imposed by the already existing agreements between the three Baltic countries and also between each of them and NATO in the form of IPGs agreed for BALTBAT subunits. Therefore the final outcome of the BALTBAT development plan will have to be somewhere in between those two extremes. Some explanations may be useful for better understanding of the nature of the choice.

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**BALTBAT as a Peace Operations Unit**

The argument of this article is that if permanent participation in peace operations becomes one of the objectives of BALTBAT, it is very likely to become the main one (especially if such participation is not supported by adequate training structures at home). There are several reasons for other objectives being subordinated to it:
## IMPLICATIONS OF BALTBAT DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS CRITERIA</th>
<th>BALTBAT as a Peace Operations Unit</th>
<th>BALTBAT as a Training Unit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit coherence;</td>
<td>Professional growth of officers, NCOs and soldiers; Maximum number of officers, NCOs and soldiers having completed BALTBAT training programme; Widest and deepest possible spread of BALTBAT standards into the national forces;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deployment readiness;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Successful participation in peace operations; Implementation of PARP IPGs; Independent deployment of battalion size unit;</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENT</td>
<td>Normal assignment 4-5 years; Unification of the national personnel policies with respect to BALTBAT; Entry level requirements: high (ready for deployment after relatively short period of pre-mission training);</td>
<td>Normal assignment 2 years; Allows for better integration of the national differences within national and specialist COYs (but not in BALTBAT HQ); Entry level requirements: low (ready for deployment after completion of BALTBAT training programme plus pre-mission training);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAINING</td>
<td>Mission oriented, no standard annual routine; BALTBAT HQ focus: training of national contingents, mission planning; Pre-deployment training requirements: low;</td>
<td>Standard annual infantry training programme in accordance with BALTBAT standards; BALTBAT HQ focus: training of staff officers in HQ, assistance to the training activities national BALTBAT units; Pre-deployment training requirements: standard;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGISTICS</td>
<td>Priority: development of deployment oriented logistics;</td>
<td>Priority: improvement of the national logistic support systems;</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUTSIDE SUPPORT</td>
<td>Requirement: high Priorities: ELT; Pre-mission training; Equipment for training and independent deployment; Development of sustainability in a mission, including logistical support;</td>
<td>Requirement: lower Priorities: National battalions and training programmes, including provision of equipment for training purposes; Development of national logistics system and sustainability at home; Further development of in-country ELT capabilities;</td>
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• Firstly, in each of the Baltic States, financial rewards for participation in an international peace operation are still considerably higher than for service in home-based units. This difference is likely to turn participation in a mission and financial benefits related to it into the main motive for joining BALTBAT (as it often was until now).

• Secondly, sending a unit into an international operation is a highly demanding task, which involves considerable risks and has high international exposure. For NATO aspirants like the three Baltic nations, failures in this area would be least wanted. Therefore, priority in the BALTBAT project would always be given to ensuring successful participation, even if this requires taking resources (be it human or financial) from other areas. Remarkable in this respect is the fact that inadequate performance of BALTBAT soldiers is likely to have a much greater negative resonance than that of a standard national unit, because the project is widely known and praised.

• Thirdly, in a development plan for BALTBAT as a peace operations unit, one would see an increase of the level and quality of participation in such operations as its paramount objective. A (largely) self-supported deployment for the whole BALTBAT seems to be a natural objective to aspire to. However, this can realistically be implemented only in a very long term. The ambition to do that in the shortest possible time (which would be natural if BALTBAT is primarily a peace operations unit) will require that the three Baltic countries concentrate their efforts on the achievement of this task. It would have to happen, even if that has to be done at the expense of other objectives of the project.

As was mentioned above, the decision as to whether to have BALTBAT as a peace operations or training unit will have implications on all key areas of the development of the project. Most importantly, it will automatically establish the criteria for evaluating success of the project. In the first case, those will be the readiness of the battalion for being sent out to an international mission, performance of BALTBAT subunits in a mission and, ultimately, sustained deployment of the entire battalion.

In order to be successful in this endeavour, BALTBAT’s training programme should be shaped in such a manner that the personnel and national subunits assigned to BALTBAT already have sufficient skills to be deployed right after a short period of pre-mission training. As the number of such trained officers and NCOs is very limited, it will be wise to keep the trained personnel for longer periods in order to sustain the high level of preparedness of the battalion and its subunits. In that case, personnel for the main positions in BALTBAT should be assigned for approximately 4-5 years. Longer assignments coupled with better quality of training and several turns in a mission may match well with the motivation of the soldiers joining BALTBAT.

The greatest challenge if this option is exercised is to set tasks for BALTBAT HQ. For as long as the Baltic States are not in a position to sustain battalion-level deployment, BALTBAT HQ will have little
role to play, since training of the infantry companies and specialist subunits will be done nationally and in cooperation with the nation providing foster unit in the mission area. Moreover, the HQ may become the only part of the battalion, which will not be deployed and this can make the service in the HQ less attractive. Alternatively, the HQ will be preoccupied with other tasks than the rest of BALTBAT.

Another important implication of this choice is in the field of international support. The highest priority will be support in one or another way related to deployment. Since the ultimate objective of this option is identified as sustainability of a battalion level deployment in a mission, the BALTBAT development plan should concentrate on the achievement of this objective. Naturally, outside support will be most required to ensure sustainability in a mission and therefore may prove to be rather significant. Some indications of the areas where external support will be most required are identified within the Table 1.

The last point to be made here is that, deploying BALTBAT as a permanent participant of an international peace operation, makes it almost impossible for the Baltic countries to give mission experience to the other national units. Even in a longer perspective, none of the Baltic States could realistically sustain more than one deployment of this size.

**BALTBAT as a Training Unit**

An alternative model to BATBAT as a peace operations unit could be to have BALTBAT as a training unit. Whereas for deployment to a mission area multinationality at the battalion or lower level may inhibit its efficiency and even become a risk factor, it is an asset for the purposes of cadre training, in particular, for the officers working in BALTBAT HQ. Indeed, the main difference of the two options is that BALTBAT as a training unit has its main emphasis on a unit and its ability to act as a unit in a hostile environment. BALTBAT as a training unit focuses on people - soldiers, NCOs and officers - who are working in it. The success of the project in this case is measured not by the level of readiness of the unit but by the number of officers and NCOs trained in accordance with the BALTBAT standards and rotated back to the national forces.

In this model Baltic personnel from the other national military units would be assigned to BALTBAT for a relatively short, one-two year, period. With the help of BALTBAT Training Team (BTT), they would undergo there an intense training programme within the multinational environment in BALTBAT HQ and would return to continue service in the same, or higher, position in their national units. The main task of the BTT in this case would be to assist the professional development of officers and NCOs assigned to BALTBAT.

In this way BALTBAT could make a direct and very significant contribution to the defence forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as it would set the training standards. Every year it would deliver a large number of well trained military and would involve significant parts of the ar-
Finding a Right Balance

As was indicated above, the development plan for the BALTBAT project will have to combine the two options. It is clear that the Baltic States will be careful not to put too much emphasis on participation in international operations, which could make BALTBAT too different and too isolated from the rest of the national armed forces. On the other, they will seek to maximise the benefits of the strenuous national efforts and the generous outside support, which has made BALTBAT the most capable unit in the Baltic States for participation in international missions.

The critical issues that BALTBAT development plan has to address are the following:

- level of centralisation of the project;
- the role of BALTBAT HQ and BSG;
- level and mode of participation in peace operations (in the mid-term period);

Below there is the author’s perception of how these crucial issues can be managed to the advantage of each of the countries and participants involved in the project.

First of all, there are good arguments in favour of making the project much more decentralised. One of the imperatives for greater degree of decentralisation is different national approaches to the development of the national forces in each of the Baltic States and the role which BALTBAT is expected to play in this process. For example, Latvia plans to have its national BALTBAT unit consisting of professional soldiers, enlisted for a relatively long period; Lithuania would like this battalion to be just like other national battalions i.e. with significant portion of conscripts in it; Estonia seems have taken yet another approach. This indicates that the level of preparedness and the needs for training may vary significantly between the participating nations. An exercise programme that is very challenging for conscripts may be of little additional value for experienced professionals. For this reason, tri-national field training activities of the BALTBAT will require great efforts to make them reasonably useful for all the participants. But even if certain joint activities are agreed, most of the training will have to done nationally. The multinational dimension of the project will first and foremost be ensured through BALTBAT Headquarters and Baltic Support Group located in Adaži as well as through the project co-ordination and management mechanisms established by the three Baltic States.

In the view of decentralisation of the project, BALTBAT HQ will have to place more emphasis of the individual training and development of staff officers appointed to the HQ. Another major task of the HQ will be issuing of training standards to the national companies and specialist units and supervise their implementation. Also, BALTBAT HQ could usefully assist the preparation of various staff and field training activities in the national BALTBAT units. BALTBAT HQ,
being relatively small and mobile unit, could easily travel between the three nations assisting the national BALTBAT unit commanders in accordance with their needs and could get direct impression of the quality of the training activities. Quite importantly, the national differences in the approach towards the establishment of the “feeder” battalions may be an advantage in terms of providing different type of experience to the personnel in BALTBAT HQ and thereby contributing to the development of officers serving in the HQ. Provided that each nation develops some kind of standard training routine for its national BALTBAT units, BALTBAT HQ could also work in accordance with a standard annual training programme. This programme could be tailored in such a way that upon completion it would provide the officers serving in BALTBAT HQ with a certain range of experience and skills, first of all in terms of mastering operational English language and learning to work in accordance with NATO staff procedures. Thereby, in a relatively short period of time, the officers from BALTBAT HQ would become the most valuable assets for national forces.

What is said above on the role of BALTBAT HQ is based on the assumption that in the mid-term period BALTBAT will not participate in a mission on the battalion level. The experience of recent deployments suggests that at the moment the Baltic States should be able to send in turn their national companies to an international mission without pressing too much the national defence establishments. This level of participation in a mission should not be increased until the Baltic States are fully prepared for a long-term deployment of the whole battalion, unless NATO calls for a Baltic contribution in accordance with the agreed NATO IPGs. Instead the focus should be on the establishment of the three national BALTBAT units. The readiness requirements set within the IPGs should not be a real problem to meet provided that the national BALTBAT units established in each state. If needed those could also be reinforced with officers, NCOs and soldiers trained in accordance with BALTBAT standards and serving in other national units.

To summarise the above, BALTBAT should best meet the expectations related to the project if:

- the main focus of the project in the mid-term is on the establishment of one BALTBAT standard infantry battalion in each of the Baltic States;
- BALTBAT HQ concentrates on training and professional development of staff officers assigned to serve in the HQ and assists in the implementation of the training programmes in the three national units;
- the Baltic nations rotate one infantry company and a few staff officers in an international mission.

This option calls for outside support to BALTBAT being centred on such areas as introduction of BALTBAT standard training in the three national battalions; provision of equipment to the national feeder units of the same or similar type as currently in BALTBAT and support to the establishment of a maintenance base; long-term deployment of a company size
unit from the Baltic States to an international mission. Baltification of the project should be carried out gradually, starting with taking over all the training activities, establishment for a maintenance base for the donated equipment, later taking full responsibility for project sustainability at home, including procurement of the necessary equipment and weapons. This should be possible to achieve in a four-five year period. Participation in international operations and, in particular, logistic support in a mission area seems to be the only area where the Baltic States may have to look for additional support also in a longer perspective.

**Conclusion**

This article reflects the author’s perception of the role BALTBAT project has played in the development of the armed forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania since the project was launched in September 1994. The current stage of the project should be completed by the end of the year 2000, when BALTBAT will become reorganised from a classical peacekeeping unit to an infantry battalion. Current debate in the Baltic States is about the future of the project, i.e. its development beyond the year 2000. This article seeks to make a contribution to this debate by highlighting some of the main issues that have to be addressed or taken into consideration in the discussion on the future of the BALTBAT project.

This article argues that the project has a great potential to contribute to the development of the defence forces in the Baltic States in accordance with the Western standards. The precondition for that is, and therefore the most important task after the year 2000 should be, the anchoring of the BALTBAT project in the national defence forces of the Baltic States. At the same time, BALTBAT is probably the most capable unit in the Baltic States for participation in peace operations. Therefore in its development plan after the year 2000 BALTBAT should reflect the determination of the Baltic States to participate in international peace operations.

As a result, some kind balance should be found between the two objectives, which as the article argues, are not entirely compatible. This author suggests one of the possible options for such a balance. The option requires that the main objective of the next stage of the BALTBAT development plan is establishment of an infantry battalion (national BALTBAT unit) in each of the Baltic States. The role of BALTBAT HQ should be redefined, tasking it to concentrate on training of officers assigned to HQ and assistance to training of the national BALTBAT units. Participation in international operations should be kept at the present - i.e. company level.

1 The author is most familiar with the situation in the Lithuanian armed forces, but many of the concerns expressed in this article were shared by the militaries in Estonia and Latvia.