THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

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Historical perspective

The rebirth of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Latvia is to be found shortly after the declaration of independence on 4 May 1990 or, phrased more accurately, as the consequence of the declaration of the independence. At the end of May 1990, after the attempted storming of the provisional government headquarters by students of the Russian military academy, volunteer units were formed to ensure uninterrupted functioning of the government. In June of that year, the chairman of the Highest Council’s Defence and Interior commission, Mr. Talavs Jundzis, consults with Latvian officers retired from Soviet forces on the subject of defence and defence forces. The next month, on the initiative of another member of the commission, Mr. Odisejs Kostanda, a joint Baltic States Defence and Interior commission meeting on self defence is held in Ligatne, Latvia to which the former Soviet officers are invited. Over the next four months these meetings continue in Lithuania and Estonia. These same officers, among other, participate in organising barricades and in leading resistance against the OMON forces on 13-23 January 1991.

Due to further Soviet political and military pressure, the Latvian Highest Council on 20 January 91 establishes a Department of Public Security with Mr. Janis Baskers and Mr. Auseklis Plavins as director and deputy director. The Highest Council additionally decrees essential defence tasks, places all territorial defence units under the Public Security Department and starts establishing border guard units. On 2 August 1991, the Cabinet of Ministers directs the Department of Public Security to organise self-defence units and alternative service units throughout Latvia and to establish an NCO training facility. The development of national defence forces gains momentum. On 23, August 1991, the Latvian Home Guard is established as a voluntary self-defence organisation. On 29 August the Cabinet of Ministers asks for volunteers for the formation of Border Guard, in October a Borderguard Training Centre is established in Malpils and a naval forces training centre in Liepaja. On 13 November the High Council establishes a Defence Ministry, on 13 December a department of Border Guard and seven border guard battalions with Mr. T. Jundzis as the Minister of Defence. In January 1992 Defence Forces staff and Naval Forces are established with National Defence Academy and Air Defence departments the next month. That same month, Col. Dainis Turlais, who has extensive combat experience in Afghanistan, is appointed commander of the Defence Forces. Understandably, he places priority on establishing, arming and training the Border Guard, eventually totalling some four thousand men, mostly conscripted.

Defence Forces and National Guard

Early in 1993 Latvia finds itself with two different armies, each subordinate to different institutions and with the Russian forces still occupying portions of Latvia’s territory. The Home Guard, after exposure to US National Guard, renamed also National Guard, is headed by Col. Girts Kritovskis as Chief of Staff subordinate to the Chairman of the Highest Council, and subsequently to the newly elected President. The fledgling Defence Forces (DF), Naval Forces and Air Forces on the other hand, are subordinate to the Minister of Defence with the commander of these forces also being deputy Defence Minister.

It is understandable that the two structures are at odds with each other since National Guard are volunteer citizens, generally with no real prior military experience or training, and the Defence Forces are constituted from former Soviet officers who are slowly drifting back to their national homeland. While unquestionably their military experience is much more extensive than that of the National Guard leadership, most of them come from technical support branches rather than from combat arms. They also arrive with abbreviated, if may, military records to substantiate their expertise and many initial assignments therefore do not correspond to actual skills. Needless to say, many of them, after 20 or more years in the Soviet system, can think only in terms of that system and therefore tend to envision the evolving Latvian defence forces. So to say “in the face and likeness” of the heavy, inflexible, massive Soviet forces they are familiar with. On the other hand, the National Guard leadership although nationalistic and well intentioned lacks the
discipline, experience and managerial skills needed to effectively organise and lead large military units. Nevertheless, the National Guard leadership recognises these shortcomings and when Great Britain offers tactical training to the Defence Forces and they decline, the National Guard takes up the offer with enthusiasm.

The problems encountered by both of the evolving forces are significant; lack of consensus on doctrine, lack of consensus how the defence forces should be organised, armed and equipped. Not the least of the problems is foreign humanitarian assistance – the defence ministry tends to accept anything that is offered for free without a clear understanding how it would be used and soon the warehouses are bulging. We must remember that the Baltic States at that time are considered potential flash points and only non-lethal military assistance is therefore available. As a result of this, the Defence Forces can be seen attired in the uniforms of a dozen donor countries while the National Guard, not being entitled even to these hand me downs, have mostly only civilian clothing. Although there is a mobile infantry brigade, a combat engineer battalion, a chemical company and some other units, these exit mostly on paper.

There are many issues that are not resolved, and even more not even addressed. There is no military threat analysis, no defence concept, no defence plan and therefore obviously no justified armed forces end strength or development plan. The Defence Ministry and Defence Forces lack experience with cost estimates, budgetary process, and force planning – consequently the realm of what is possible for a small country’s defence forces financially has not been determined. The former armour officers dream of tank battalions, the artillery officers of field artillery battalions, the air forces of jet fighter squadrons and antiaircraft missiles and the naval forces of real warship. The organisational charts (TO & E) of combat battalions, of course are based on the Soviet model with overabundance of officers in battalion staff with a tailor, cobbler and tinner thrown in for good measure.

In May of 93, under the MIL to MIL Program, a military liaison team led by Colonel Ower Moon, Michigan National Guard is established in Latvia. This not only demonstrates tangible western support for the fledgling Latvian Defence Forces, but also sends a clear international political signal. We must remember that at this time the Russian army occupies parts of Latvian territory and their departure is still uncertain. Through the MLT program a partnership is established not only between US Department of Defence and the Latvian Ministry of Defence but also between the entities of Michigan and Latvia as well. Although the program was originally intended only for about a year, it proves so beneficial in exposing Latvian Defence Forces and National Guard to the US military way of doing thing, that Colonel Koppa, Colonel Emery, Colonel Allen and now Colonel Jajick follow Colonel Moon. The Adjutant General of Michigan, General Gordon Stump, is personally involved in this project and has established a wide range of contacts not only among the Defence Forces and the National Guard but among Latvian politicians and businessmen as well. The arrival of the team is significant because it introduces an alternative, western way of looking at military planning, force structures and leadership. Appointment of Mr. Valdis Pavlovskis, a former US marine, as defence minister, reinforces this trend. Above all, it becomes clear that to ensure democratic control over the military, the Defence Forces and National Guard need to be brought under single command in the Ministry of Defence. Col Juris Eihmanis, who at that time is the Chief of Staff of the National Guard, realises this to be inevitable. From this point on, I can speak from personal experience – in the true tradition of shuttle diplomacy on one day I remember conducting close to 10 trips between the two parties before both Defence Forces and the National Guard consented to sign the agreement.

**National Armed Forces**

The next problem to be solved is that of a joint commander for the newly established National Armed Forces. In view of the incompatibility of the two existing structures, a consensus is reached in the government that the commander should be neither the Defence Forces commander nor the Chief of Staff of National Guard, but an officer with western military experience. The choice falls on Janis Kazocins, British army lieutenant colonel of Latvia descent at that time serving as Great Britain’s military attaché in Latvia. However, the British government, obviously for political reason, can agree only in seconding him to the National Defence Forces as deputy commander and LTC Juris Dalbins, from the National Guard staff, is therefore nominated and appointed Commander of National Armed Forces on 5 October 1994. At this point several National Guard officers assume key staff positions in the NAF staff but the National Guard itself remains somewhat in limbo since it has both military and police functions and its exact status could not be agreed upon and as a matter of fact it still remain unresolved.
Meanwhile, work begins on an orderly defence forces planning process – with the help of western experts, a National Risk Analysis and an Military Threat Analysis is conducted, followed by the National Security Concept and a Defence concept approved by the National Security Council and Cabinet in the spring of 95. Meanwhile Mr. Trapans, another western Latvian, had replaced Mr. Pavlovskis as Defence Minister. Unfortunately, in less than a year, because of policy disagreement with the Prime Minister, he is asked to resign, and the Prime Minister retains the defence portfolio for the rest of his term. The preparation of a Force Development Plan was required by the approved Defence Concept and this would have been the obvious domain of Col. Kazocins who eventually assumes the position of Deputy Chief of Staff. Unfortunately at this very time, Partnership for Peace Program come into being and for the duration of his tour Col. Kazocius time is taken up almost entirely with BALTBAT, NATO and PfP issues, with considerable success. This, however, leaves the inexperienced staff to struggle with the force development plan. The problem essentially narrows down to what we want versus what we need versus what we can afford. The problem is further aggravated by the retention by the Defence Ministry and National Armed Forces of far too many military objects taken over from the departing Russian forces. It is obvious the objects that will be required in the future can only be determined when we know what the defence forces structure will be in that future and that still, even today, remains to be settled.

The situation is further aggravated with the transfer of the border guard, with its full equipment and weapons to the National Armed Forces and the lure of commercial structures which pay considerably more for the skills possessed by some of the middle grade officers. The worst part is the fact that many of these officers have recently acquired these skills at overseas training centres as part of foreign military assistance. As enthusiasm is beginning to evaporate, especially after a series of conscript beatings, notwithstanding the fact that sociologists agree these were not problems created by the military but pre-existing conditions inherited by the military, retention of qualified officers becomes a problem. As a consequence of all this there existed and still exists some scepticism in the government how well increased defence revenues would be spent. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the classified National Armed Forces 5-year development plan submitted to the Cabinet and accepted “for information” is not based on realistic or even possible budget allocations. Especially, since the first year (97) anticipated budget fell far short of that projected therefore rendering the entire document irrelevant. At the present time, by direction of the new minister, Mr. Girts Kristovskis, the military threat is being re-evaluated, the defence concept is under review and hopefully a defence plan and a more realistic and sustainable force development plan will be produced. Lack of an approved and funded long range force development plan impacts not only on selection of military objects to be retained, but also on weapons acquisition, training requirement forecast and supply base. No doctrinal publication on tactics, operations, training or logistics have been developed and approved although traditionally that should be the responsibility of National Defence Academy. Obviously, if NATO compatible doctrinal documents are developed and approved, they will be put in practice, taught to conscripts, NCOS and cadets and thus institutionalised to drive and compel interoperability not only with NATO forces but among the military forces of the Baltic States as well.

With almost non-stop foreign visits to the National Forces staff and return visits to foreign countries, force development and other planning becomes near to impossible and by 1997 it became obvious there needs to be a subdivision of international and national political responsibilities from tactical planning responsibilities. Since the Defence Concept specifies National Guard based territorial defence and National Guard constitutes about 90% of the ground forces. In February of 1998 a reorganisation was promulgated essentially (as shown on illustration NR 1.), placing all ground forces, including LATBAT and appropriate training centres, under National Guard – Territorial Defence Forces command.
Special Mission Unit, Military Police Battalion and Security Service remain directly under the commander, as indicated in the illustration. Currently, in the Defence and Interior Commission of the Saeima, the appropriateness of having the Presidential and Parliamentary Security Service directly subordinate to the NAF commander is being evaluated, since Interior Ministry is already responsible for the security of foreign embassies and the Cabinet of Ministers. Quite possibly it could revert to Defence or even Interior ministry’s subordination with a wartime TO&E mission with the NAF.

The SUV’s military mission still needs to be defined which then will determine its numerical strength. Over the last years it has been constantly at only about 50% of required strength and under current law it can perform any anti terrorist missions only as backup, upon request, to Interior Ministry’s anti terrorist unit. A logical military mission for this unit would be perhaps waterborne operations, similar to the US SEALS. The Military Police Battalion was formed for two purposes – guarding MoD and NAF facilities and providing provost Marshall type services to NAF training centres, to include criminal investigation services. The Military Counterintelligence Service is being downsized and reorganised since some of the investigations conducted by it previously are finally being transferred to the MoD Inspector General and military police.

National Armed Forces Missions

I believe the defence forces of Latvia, as well as those of Lithuania and Estonia, have four basic missions, further subdivided in specific tasks, for the accomplishment of which they must develop appropriate structures. These missions are:

- Ensuring compliance with applicable international conventions
- Attainment of political goal – NATO membership
- Real defence capability attainment
- National administrative and disaster relief missions

Budgetary consideration

Within realistic defence budget constrains the Latvian defence forces must accomplish all these missions simultaneously or in some order of priority. At this time, as previously indicated, there is no
approved force development plan; because cost of proposals submitted to the government far exceeded resources that could be made available for defence. The situation is hampered by absence of accurate base line cost data - obviously we must first know how much things cost, before we can determine what we can afford. Clearly as well, we cannot create military structures, which we cannot subsequently maintain within a 1-15% GNP budget. A further complication is the fact that defence allocations have not been broken down in an acquisition budget and maintenance budget. We have so far tended to maintain forces too large to permit acquisition of weapons and equipment – in affect we have been paying conscript salaries for performing duties for the performance of which we have neither equipped nor trained them. Additionally, previously mentioned excessive military objects have proven to be a drain not only on resources, but on manpower to guard them from vandalism as well. This problem has been considerably alleviated, by Mr. Jundzis, the previous Defence Minister and the current defence minister is continuing this process of devastation.

Unfortunately, politicians and even some military planners have so far not succeeded in making the government and parliamentary decision-makers aware of the fact that NATO forces already have all their equipment. Therefore the 1% comparison with NATO 3% average is totally misleading – if NATO, like the Baltic States, had to simultaneously acquire their equipment and weapons then individual country budgets for several years would have to be at least 25% of GNP until the accusation bell curve levels out. In short, the dilemma of Latvian armed forces development is lack of knowledge what they can realistically afford.

• **Attainment of NATO membership**

  The second mission is political attainment of NATO membership through participation to the maximum extent possible, in PfP and peacekeeping activities. To this end, the organisational structure of a Latvian peace keeping battalion (LATBAT) has been approved on the existing base of the so-called Suýi battalion. The structure and authorised strength of this battalion is indicated in illustration NR 1. Individual weapons (M-16’s, 15’s) for this battalion have already been provided by USA as well as individual equipment and some EDA vehicles. A full battalions communications set is on order through Warsaw Initiative funding as well as additional organisational equipment. The additional funding available through the IMET Program has been used for specialised unit officer training in USA training centres. While I feel the establishment of BALTBAT was at that time politically important and useful; its current status must be re-evaluated since without a defence agreement among the Baltic States, within any Baltic state it will never be used in its entirety for real defence purposes. That is a political reality. There also appears to be a problem with its employment when it is not required to be on mission. Perhaps it could be transformed into a Baltic States basic training centre as an extension of BATDEFCOL. Since the battalion, as such, can be used only outside the Baltic States, it would appear to make sense to retain a small BALTBAT command element thus ensuring its political continuity. But to disperse its companies to national battalions where during non-mission times they would train with the parent unit and perform national missions. Should a mission be offered, then each country would provide, in rotational order, one company out of their battalions thus eventually ensuring thus entire battalions interoperability and combat readiness. A country then could provide the whole battalion independently or, if required or so desired, each country could provide a battalion to participate with a Baltic Peace Keeping Brigade or BALTBDE.

  In short, to ensure the attainment of the political goals, Latvia needs one fully NATO interoperable battalion which in a national emergency also serves as a rapid deployment military reserve force or participate, with other government agencies in national disaster resolution. Latvia can afford only one such battalion but it also needs deployment of military reserve force or participate, with other government agencies in national disaster resolution. Latvia can afford only one such battalion but it also needs only one such battalion. Its real defence must rest on mobilizable reserves and the National Guard.

• **International conventions**

  The first of the four missions in ensuring as a minimum, sea border security, land border security, air space and rescue. If the accomplishment of these missions contribute to national defence all the better. We already have the BALTRON and regional Air Space projects and are, therefore,
committed to a Regional Airspace Centre a National Centre and a joint naval squadron structure. Three previous governments have discussed the search and rescue project but no decision has been reached primarily because of uncertainty about the most suitable helicopter. It would appear the aircraft could be bought for money that foreign shopping pay to the communication ministry for search and rescue service while in Latvian territorial waters. A 3-6 helicopter detachment was envisioned which would be operated by the air force in support of search and rescue, natural disaster, border control and national defence. I believe the new government will again take up this issue.

**Development of self defence capability**

This is the third and perhaps the most important mission. The five-year-old military threat analysis is currently being re-evaluated and should provide adjusted end strength for the accomplishment of this mission. The defence concept is also being re-evaluated – the planning process is depicted in the figure.

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**NATIONAL ARMED FORCES PLANNING PROCESS**

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<th>MILITARY TREATY ANALYSIS</th>
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<th>DEFENCE PLAN</th>
<th>ARMED FORCES DEVELOPMENT PLAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluates and identifies potential aggressor, his goals and numerical strength.</td>
<td>On the basis of MILITARY TREATY ANALYSIS principles, doctrine and tactics.</td>
<td>On the basis of DEFENCE CONCEPT principles, doctrine and tactics.</td>
<td>Identifies Armed Forces numerical strength, weapons and equipment: that's necessary for the execution of the DEFENCE PLAN and within available budget, in how many years it is to be attained.</td>
<td>Budget consist of maintenance budget and acquisition budget. Maintenance budget is cost of maintaining the ARMED FORCES DEVELOPMENT PLAN presented annual strength. Acquisition budget is on ARMED FORCES DEVELOPMENT PLAN.</td>
<td>Arm Exporters, Commanders, Operational Plan, which upon implementation becomes an order. Plan identifies SITUATION EXECUTION LOGISTICS SIGNAL and COMMAND. Responsibilities and is adjusted each year to the capabilities of the strengths indicated in the ARMED FORCES DEVELOPMENT PLAN.</td>
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To attain required end strength for full self defence capability, current law needs to be modified to allow conscription of all able bodied citizens subject to draft, putting them through a 2-months basic training course, retaining a small number on active duty, with the rest being offered a choice of either voluntarily joining the National Guard or joining reserve battalions, collocated with National Guard units throughout the country. The available annual number of conscripts has not been accurately established but varies somewhere between 10 000 and 15 000.

The reservists would serve to a specific age, calculated by computing the conscript pool against required end strength. However, the annual costs of basic training first need to be established and budgeted for in advance and it makes no sense to do basic training unless each conscript upon completion of the training is issued at least a uniform and individual weapon. To this end, the Ministry of Defence is planning to request an additional 30 000 M-14 rifles from the US (10 000 have been previously requested and received) to ensure standardisation of individual weapons as well as spare parts. Additionally, reserves require not only weapons but refresher training as well and the cost this needs to be computed as well.
The current defence concept mandates small unit territorial defence, light infantry weapons and portable anti-air and anti-tank weapons. The recent reorganisation has announced the intent to formally place all ground forces, including the LATBAT and corresponding training centre under National Guard headquarters but the question reasons how long it will take the National Guard to fully implement this decision.

The 16,000 strong National Guard, which as stated previously comprises close to 90% of the National Armed Forces and is the mainstay of territorial defence is currently at a crossroads. The early enthusiasm is slowly dissipating, willingness to sign up for a 3 year term is becoming a problem, some of the law and order duties are being assumed by trained police and there are still no governmental compensation for the time put in, no retirement plan and in some cases even a long wait for a uniform. Only when the state assumes full responsibility for the National Guard can it legally mandate obligatory service in a time of crises – currently reporting for such duty is up to individual conscience and patriotism. It is hoped that the new law “On National Guard” will address these problems and more reciprocal accommodation is reached between the state and the National Guard; without that territorial defence is impossible.

With this arrangement, the National Armed Forces Commander essentially commands the three traditional components and some small special units. Figure no.1 provides the possible force structures with the unshaded units already in existence. The exact numerical strength of the territorial defence forces will be determined by the threat analysis available resources compromise.

**National Administrative and Disaster Relief Missions**

The last of the four missions consists of national administrative responsibilities; staff functions and maintaining in peacetime infrastructures needed to support the previous 3 missions. To execute these structures these missions consist of the Armed forces Staff, staff battalion (honour guard company, band, motor pool etc.) military hospital, athletic club, logistics facilities Adazi and other training centres. High on the list is National Armed Forces support for relief of disasters. Needless to say these supporting structures need to be reduced to the minimum to ensure that sufficient funds are available for the execution of the three priority missions.

On the legislative side that portion of the law that pertains to the National Armed Forces has already been extracted from the law “On State Defence” and now the law “On National Security” will incorporate the rest of that law. Because many questions dealing with security have not been resolved. Exact role of State President in defence, what happens when Cabinet, Saeima or president cannot carry out their responsibilities in emergency and may even require changes in constitution, it will be discussed at National Security Council prior to second in Saeima. The law on National Armed Forces should be passed within a month or two – the sticking point of the exact status of the National Guard volunteers, as indicated previously, will be addressed separately in a law “On National Guard”.

Much ado is made over the disparity of the Baltic States defence budgets, expressed as percentage of GNP. Clearly, the expenditures are for foreign relations, not defence, but these are national computations and I’m not sure how they would compare when reduced to required NATO budget guidance. I believe, however, that once the progress that is finally under way in the defence area is recognised by the government, the additional funding to bring the expenditures to a full percent of GDP will be found before the end of the year. And next year will see additional promised increases.

Finally, looking at defence at the regional level, it is obvious that Latvian defence establishment needs to determine where they see their future – Lithuania, no doubt, will have the sponsorship of NATO member Poland while Estonia will have NATO sponsorship of Finland. The military threat to Finland has changed significantly, other northern countries are reducing their defence forces and I feel it is only a question of time before Finland will ask for and receive NATO membership. I feel with the reduced threat, the voters in Finland will not accede in the future supporting enormous defence costs when the same can be achieved for considerably less with the NATO insurance policy.
GUNDARS ZALKALNS graduated from Boston university in 1963 as ROTC Distinguished Military Graduate and was awarded regular US Army commission. Subsequent to that, he has served in different branches, mostly in plans and operations positions in US, Germany and Korea. His assignments include a combat tour in Vietnam 1967-68 with the 4th Infantry Division. His last assignments were at HQ 6th US Army, V Corps HQ in Germany and as advisor to California National Guard. His 18 decorations include Vietnam Service Medal with 4 Campaign stars, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit and FRG Cross of Honor (Ehrenkreutz). He retired from service as a lieutenant colonel and since 1993 has been a consultant at the Latvian Ministry of Defence, Presidential Defence Advisor and since January 1995 National Security Adviser to the President and Secretary, National Security Council of Latvia.