LATVIAN ARMED FORCES: GROUND FORCES STRATEGY TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract:
This paper outlines the current organization of the Latvian National Defence Forces and perspectives of their development till 2012. Further, it refers to preparation of commanders and training of military units and troops within the Ground Forces.

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General

What should be the National Armed Forces of the Latvian Republic? That question emerged topical after the events of 11 September 2001 in the USA. Usually, military structures develop on the basis of past wars experience. However, today the principles may change.

The Latvian Republic seems out of imminent threat of global conflict in relatively short period of following several years or a probable direct military aggression in the short future. On the other hand, new potential hazards of possible threats to the Latvian Republic keep arising that may evoke from the internal political instability of the countries in the closest neighbourhood, especially East of Latvia (Russia, Belarus), and also from the impending real growing actions and consequences of organised crime, terrorism and last but not least uncontrolled flow of refugees to the national territory. Any prediction of the future development in the neighbouring countries, of the consequences of growing militant (clear-cut, bellicose) nationalism’s possible influence, or of potential ethnic, religious or territorial disputes that can give rise to and escalation of a whole number of both military and non-military threats to national security in a wide variety of types, can be made only with difficulty.

In this respect, the Charter of Partnership among the Baltic Sea Countries and the USA showed up its significance. It was signed in January 1998 as the basic document to determine relations between USA and those countries. The Chart, among others, confirmed Baltic Sea countries’ right and chance of integration into the euroatlantic structures as well as their right of free decision and choice on the form of individual...
or collective provisions of their own security and it confirmed at the same time the views of and attitudes to the indivisible Europe security concept. Simultaneously, it is necessary to remind in relation to the security provisions in the Baltic region also the cooperation among the three Baltic countries and North European countries (3+5 principle) in the political and military areas being another important factor for the Latvian Republic security. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (herein further as CBSS) keeps calling over sessions regularly on various levels discussing matters such as European Union augmentation with “North dimension”. Project BALTSEA (Baltic Security Assistance) on military cooperation of the participating countries is an example of its activities.

The Republic of Latvia was invited on 21 November 2002 at Prague NATO Summit to access the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance and on 13 December 2002 in Copenhagen the EU.

In 1999, a planning system of NAF development was established, comprising a long-term plan (12-year period), a mid-term plan (4 years) and a short-term plan (one year). Those documents have been developed on the basis of “National Defence Concept” approved by Seym (Parliament) on 20.9.1999. Two years later on 20.9.2001, Seym passed amendments to the document laying down the priorities and principles of NAF building carried out according to funds allocated to national defence.

The objective of the long-term plan (DOK-1) consists in building and deployment of a defence system that shall work on the total defence principle. It issues from the ability to provide for the Republic of Latvia territory protection and for participation in the collective defence of the North Atlantic Alliance according to Article 5 of WT (Washington Treaty).

The objective of the mid-term plan (DOK-2A, 3A) is to develop a structure of NAF appropriate to the RL’s defence system and to precondition meeting the goals as stated in the long-term plan, i.e. to capacitate the target Armed Forces.

The objective of the short-term plan (DOK-2B, 3B) is to define structure, tasks for the year and detailed NAF funding plan.

The Latvian Republic strategy rises from the principles, priorities and actions to eliminate threats. The national defence bases on the principles of total defence, territorial defence, conscript service and mobilisation, cooperation of NAF and society and on international cooperation (cooperation among the Baltic States, cooperation within UN, EU, OSCE) and on interoperability with the North Atlantic Alliance.

1. Republic of Latvia National Armed Forces: Contemporary structure

The **Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces** of the Latvian Republic is the President. The central body for government administration to control security and defence is the Ministry of Defence (Riga). It addresses defence policy, personnel matters and international cooperation, headed by the Minister of Defence.

The **executive body to control NAF** is Staff of NAF (Riga). It is the supreme Command level responsible for issues such as combat readiness, operation engagement
of forces planning and mobilisation, building and armament, training, strategic planning and providing for forces actions. It is headed by NAF Chief of Staff who is responsible to the Minister of Defence.

**National Armed Forces** (Diagram 1) are built of innumerous regular forces and reserves. The country has introduced general conscription service lasting 12 months. The forces represent peace establishment of 5,500 personnel (including control bodies) to comprise Land Forces, Air Force, Navy, National Volunteer Forces and directly controlled units (secret services, military police, Special Operation Unit, Government and Constitutional Agents Protection Service, staff battalion and National Defence Academy). The Republic of Latvia Armed Forces houses also the Department of the Interior where other forces belong to, such as frontier guard. When mobilised, the Latvian Armed Forces establishment should reach 50,000 personnel.

**Diagram 1: NAF organisation structure (current)**

**Land Forces** (4,300 personnel, HQ Riga) consist of a motorised brigade and supporting units under direct command.

**Motorised (infantry) brigade** (HQ Adazi) TOE contains almost 1,500 personnel. It is made of its headquarters and staff and four infantry battalions.

**Air Force** (270 personnel, HQ Riga) posses no combat fixed or rotary wing aircraft assuming just declarative nature position. It is only represented by 1 Air Force Base (Lielvarde) and 1 electronic battalion.

**Naval Forces** (930 personnel, HQ Riga) consist of Naval Bases (Riga, Ventspils, Liepaya) whose structure houses a fleet of battle vessels, battalions of mine-sweepers, battalions of supporting vessels, several battalions of patrol boats, Coast Guard fleet (HQ
Riga). Armament consists of mine sweepers, patrol boats, Coast Guard and supporting vessels.

Militia is organized into four territorial brigades.

Boundary Guard is under the command of the Department of Interior in peace while in war it would accomplish missions within RL NAF.

2. Perspective development of the Republic of Latvia NAF until 2012

Structure development and perspective RL NAF build-up

The NAF development bases on the analysis of military nature threat assessing the risks and threats to national security and comparing these and the current national security concept of the Republic of Latvia. The strategy is then stated on the principles, priorities and actions to eliminate the threats. The defence concept of the Republic of Latvia stipulates its defence principles, in operational concept – operation strategy. The operation analysis assessed the operation area, various threat and risk scenarios, and also NAF combat efficiency. The Operation Defence Plan essential structure has resulted from operation analysis followed by RL NAF structure development that suggested NAF structures in peace and in war as well as their implementation process. The Finance team analysed and assessed the NAF cost by contingent structures concluding in proposals submission (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2: Development structure of NAF 2002—2008
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By the end of 2000, Latvia had produced “National Plan of Armed Forces Development” for the following period (by 2004) that substantially reviewed the existing plans of NAF development. An essential change was that the stress was put on the collective defence in the Baltic region and expected incorporation of Latvia into NATO. The plans and goals became consequently more realistic largely with respect to the possible allocation of available economic resources. The defined threats and potential risks implied among others necessity to build rapid reaction forces that could beside of accomplishment of missions on own territory deploy within peace and Alliance operations.

Therefore, the structure of logistics, MoD and NAF Staff were modified as well as building up of some common Baltic projects. Recently, having been consulted with NATO experts, the so far ambitious plans in the land and air forces establishment have been reduced. Latvia turned from the total defence orientation concept building up together the NAF and a mobilisation system based on the territorial defence concept.

The NAF building plans combine the national defence elements and Alliance commitments. A considerable progress has been made in building the Joint Command Structure and in reorganization of all three NAF Services. In accordance with NATO standards, Logistic Support Command was established and in November 2000 Training and Doctrine Command that will have taken full responsibility for NAF peace training (except follow on training of reserves and operation training of Navy and Air Force) by the end of 2004. By that time, the new operational commands – NOC (Navy Operational Command), AOC (Air Operational Command) and SOC (Special Operations Command) will have been established and responsible for military districts control. The Command and Control System is under construction.

All the Commands will be responsible to the Joint Operational Commander (JOC) who will be responsible for execution and coordination of operations, war planning and follow on training of reserves. He will as well assume direct responsibility for the Latvian portion of the Baltic project BALTBAT, built as a fully professional unit (by the end of 2003), effectively deployable abroad within the future Latvian Article 5 commitments to NATO.

During the interim period (by the end of 2004) the mobilised units will be supported by Militia (National Guard). Then they will integrate into the Land Forces. At the end of 2008, the Land Forces will constitute of those units, LATBAT battalion and also 6 mobile battalions of light infantry. Their structure will be similar being armed with newly purchased offroad vehicles, anti-tank weapon systems and mortars.

In 2007, the total NAF peace establishment should approximately reach 7,800 personnel (war 26,000 personnel). The Land Forces peace establishment will reduce from today 4,300 to some 2,100 personnel due to manning and exemption of TRADOC from its structure (Land Forces war establishment will approximately count 21,900 personnel including Boundary Guards). The NAF war structure at all levels will be as iden-
tical with the peace structure as possible to allow fast and efficient deployment to partial or full war organisation, if necessary.

The RL NAF (2002—2008) structural organisations in peace and in war are depicted in Diagrams 3 and 4, respectively.

Diagram 3: NAF structural organisation in peace

Diagram 4: NAF structural organisation in war

*Career rules for commanding staff*

There were no career rules by 2000. The only precondition was that to become lieutenant it was necessary to pass the elementary course (platoon leader course) at the National Defence Academy of the Republic of Latvia or analogous course abroad. It
was undetermined what courses are needed for the officers to promote. The former rules stipulated that:

- Lieutenant – university graduate – may promote to first lieutenant after 2 years of service;
- Lieutenant – without a university degree – after 3 years;
- First lieutenant to captain after 3 years of service;
- Captain to major after 3 years of service;
- Major to lieutenant colonel after 4 years of service;
- Lieutenant colonel to colonel after 5 years of service.

The RL NAF have introduced new career rules since 2000. Under the rules, the officer, elementary course leaver, serves 3 years in the rank of lieutenant. The positions for service are platoon leader or deputy company commander. After three years of service the officer promotes to first lieutenant.

The duration of service in first lieutenant rank lasts 3 years. The position is deputy company commander. After leaving a captain or a junior officers staff course he/she may take any position at battalion staff except cell officer.

The captain course graduate officer having served at least 6 years in military promotes to captain rank. The captain service period lasts 6 years being posted as company commander, battalion staff cell officer or another position at brigade staff except cell officer.

After 12 years of service in NAF and graduation from company commander course the officer promotes to the rank of major. The positions for the 6 years vary from brigade staff officer, battalion deputy commander or other. The officers who have served at least 18 years in military and have not graduated from a battalion commander course and failed at the attestation hearing retire.

The officers who graduated from the battalion commander course and passed the attestation hearing promote to the rank of lieutenant colonel to be posted as battalion commanders, brigade staff cell officers, senior officers at the staff of the Land Forces or NAF or another job.

The qualification for promotion to the rank of colonel comprises at least 23 years of service and graduation from the senior officers course. The duration of service in the rank of colonel lasts at least 6 years being posted for brigade chief of staff, brigade commander, General staff cell officer, Land Forces chief of staff.

**RL NAF officers training concept**

To unify the officers training system and improve the quality of military education the Republic of Latvia Minister of Defence issued Order 335 on 20th November 2000 approving a new concept of officers training.
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Under the new concept, only those who comply the following may become officers:

- University graduate;
- Elementary officer course (platoon leader course);
- Promotion requires graduation from the adequate course as stipulated in the career rules;
- The NAF concept states 280 officers (200 reserve, 80 active) are necessary to train every year. The required number of cadets should be selected purposefully from:
  - University undergraduates;
  - University graduates;
  - Conscripts after their obligatory service;
  - Professional military personnel;
  - GCE holders.

The selection is under the responsibility of NAF Recruitment Centre (RC). The commission consists of MoD, NAF, NDA representatives. Two hundred cadets use to be selected according to “Act on conscript service” and Government Regulation on “military education of students at civilian universities”.

The civilian university graduates who have made their mind to serve in military, graduated from the elementary officer course (platoon leader course) and hold the bachelor degree, sign contract with MoD for at least 5 years.

The civilian university graduates who did not graduate from the platoon leader course during their studies for various reasons, sign the contract with MoD for at least 5 years and may study at NDA. After graduation they start their troop duty.

The conscripts (after their obligatory service finished) and professional military personnel, both GCE holders, may study military schools abroad if decided by the RC commission and signed the contract with the MoD for at least 5 years, being promoted to lieutenant after graduation.

The GCE holders allowed to study abroad by the commission are obliged to sign the contract with the MoD for at least 5 years, being promoted to lieutenant after graduation.

If the military school abroad does not provide university degree (master or bachelor) the officer serves till the rank of captain and then retires.

After the elementary platoon leader officer course the leavers are posted to:
  a) platoon leaders (active duty),
  b) specialists (active duty),
  c) reserve.

Ad a) Military education for platoon leaders:

- Short-Term Special Course (company commander course, junior officers staff course, etc.);
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- **Captain Course** (required 3 years of service after leaving the platoon leader course). Will be provided at NDA. The course is a prerequisite for promotion to captain rank.
- **Command and Staff Course** (required minimum 3 years of service after leaving the captain course). The course is held at NDA. The course is a prerequisite for promotion to major lieutenant colonel ranks.
- **Baltic Defence College** (*BALTDEFCOL*). After leaving the course and positive assessment by the MoD attestation commission the graduate promotes to colonel.
- **Senior Officers Course** is held abroad at military educational facilities.

**Ad b) Military education for specialists:**

The same career rules apply as to the platoon commanders. Besides, these attend technical and staff courses.

**Ad c) Military education for reserve officers:**

The reserve officers may study in the technical, commander and staff courses at the NDA, at the NAF training facilities and also at military schools abroad.

**Training of Land Forces units**

The training of military personnel (both conscript and reserve) is the essential mission for NAF development. Time factor should be considered as 1—2 weeks after mobilisation the reserve personnel should be ready to accomplish their mission within the battalion organisation being carried out stepwise. It is necessary to build military bases and train instructors responsible for privates and NCOs training. So that NAF were able to defend the whole national territory in non-traditional manners, it is necessary to develop the conscript training programs for 12 months.

The training scope is as follows:

- Basic training of conscripts – 2.5 months;
- Technical training (squad leaders, signalmen, drivers, artillerymen etc.) – 4 months;
- Follow on training and platoon/company exercises – 4 months;
- Follow on training and battalion level exercise – 1.5 months.

After 12 months of training the whole infantry battalion passes under the district commanders responsibility as mobilisation reserve. The battalion remains under their command for 15 years. The first company will be ready in 2001, other two in 2002 and the first battalion as a unit in 2003. From 2006, two battalions are expected to be ready. The battalion training (610 enlisted and 110 NCO) shall take place in military training facilities Adazi and Aluksne. The officers of those battalions may be employed in various jobs once training finished, such as battalion commander may teach at the NDA. The battalion officers shall attend various courses. The battalion shall exercise 7 to 14 days...
every 5 years. The exercise shall be planned by the district commands. The officer training in the battalions is expected to take 21 to 50 days, NCO training 14 to 21 days.

Conclusion

Feasibility of the mentioned requirements needs achieved NATO standards and continuous grow of the unit number that introduce the standards. All that must be done by NAF under the situation of ongoing necessary reorganisations. That implies, among others, the unique need of reaching new quality of RL NAF via systematic and organisation measures aimed mainly at the RL NAF establishment and structure, system and style of command and control, development in RL NAF informatisation, optimization of structural organisation and location, at personnel matters, welfare, RL NAF personnel training, standardization and modernization of armament, economic and logistic support for the RL NAF etc.

The NATO representatives expressed satisfaction with the steps made so far by Latvia in its way on accession to the Alliance. Significant effort has been made to train individuals and units for efficient participation in the NATO led peace operations and exercises. There are several lacking items, though, such as missing heavy trucks for the Land Forces, low combat efficiency and capacity of the Air Force concentrated only in AD and airspace surveillance. For the Navy narrow spectrum of activities limited to mine clearance and patrolling is considered a handicap.

Apart from the already mentioned NAF have faced another challenge in officers and NCO training. Due to persistent lack of officers (approximately 500) many staff positions are manned by officers or NCO without appropriate training. There are even officers manning high staff positions lacking military experience and university education or training appropriate to the position. It is a result of the inconsistent training system for officers and missing career rules in the Latvian military till 2001. Further, there are problems with the cadets who studied abroad (Germany, Sweden, USA) as those countries have trained officers in different systems and the graduates are unable to apply their knowledge to Latvian military conditions.

For an efficient training system of the commanders, staff and units the NAF Staff should issue annual training plan directives. The NDA provides courses as required by the NAF Staff. For the commanders, staff and units training it is an imperative to find the right training method and material means. The required status for the armed forces to get to presume adoption and accomplishment of the assigned tasks in personnel policy (structural organisation), technology and service, theoretical and practical military art and command and control.

The necessary prerequisite for implementation of all the measures is allocation of sufficient funds for the Republic of Latvia Armed Forces to be able to accomplish their mission.
References