
PERSPECTIVES

Approaching the Need for Defense Reform: Early Lessons Learned in Estonia

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Introduction

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia has had to overcome many challenges to become a democracy with effective supporting institutions. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the case of Estonian efforts to create the armed forces necessary to protect its newly regained independence. In recreating a military, Estonia had to start literally from scratch. With no institutional memory, little in the way of residual military infrastructure and equipment, and few trusted (at least initially) individuals with professional military education, training and experience, Estonia was faced with overwhelming challenges to create a national military structures from all but nothing.

Indeed, the Estonian example of reestablishing a national defense force has been even more challenging than other similar states. In 1999, recognizing that the defense planning and execution systems and procedures in Estonia required reform, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the US Office of Defense Cooperation, Tallinn signed an foreign military financing training case to assist the Estonian side to develop the structures and practices needed for an effective and efficient planning system. The Center for Civil-Military Relations (CCMR), Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, was commissioned to undertake this project. CCMR agreed to undertake this ambitious task and developed a unique methodology of delivering technical assistance in the larger area of defense restructuring and reform. As the project has been completed, this essay constitutes early reflections upon the challenges presented by such an ambitious project. An important caveat is needed: defense restructuring and reform are long-term processes and the changes being adopted by the Estonian Ministry of Defense and Headquarters Estonian Defense Force are still in the process of implementation. Perforce, some of the observations recounted are preliminary.

Background

Following independence in 1991, the new Estonian state attempted to move quickly to develop military capabilities in order to preserve its reclaimed national sovereignty. Due to the fact that the final Russian military personnel were only withdrawn from Estonia in 1994, Estonia chose first to create a para-military forces to undertake border security tasks. Thus, in 1990, the Estonian Border Guards were established with considerable assistance provided by their Finnish counterparts. The creation of what has become a highly professional and effective para-military organization did have negative effects upon the insipient efforts to create the Estonian Defense Force, as well as the subsequent development of the Estonian Ministry of Defense. Yet another complicating factor was the 1990 reestablishment of the Keitselite (Defense League, or national guard) that traces its creation back to the war of Estonian independence, 1918-1920. This

organization enjoys a special and important place in the Estonian national defense policy that is based upon the Nordic concept of total defense. Not surprisingly, many professional officers and enlisted personnel in the Estonian Army began and are still affiliated with or serve in the Defense League. However, from a bureaucratic perspective, the Defense League is a private organization, which complicates MoD and Headquarters Estonian Defense Force management and control.

Thus, the creation of the MoD in 1992 occurred in the context of other organizations with similar and/or support defense functions already in existence and operating. The Estonian Army was formally created in 1992, led largely by Estonians who had been professional officers in the Soviet Army, as well as some returning nationals. Importantly, the initial structure of the General Staff (in effect, the defense headquarters) was founded, not surprisingly on Soviet principles and procedures, and was not well-equipped to deal with a civilian-led MoD. Bureaucratic relations amongst these organizations and ministries were later to improve significantly. The important point being that initially it was difficult for the MoD and general staff to establish themselves as the principal actors in national defense.

As a result of these realities, by the late 1990s, significant structural, procedural and organizational weaknesses plagued the MoD and general staff. Estonia's membership in Partnership for Peace and particularly North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) Membership Action Plan (MAP) process made the need for reform urgent. While invitations for Alliance membership will always be dependent upon the vagaries of the political imperatives of the day, the employment of objective criteria can never be ruled out. Moreover, pressures were building in Tallinn that the MoD and military needed to be reformed.

Center for Civil-Military Relations' Program

The Center for Civil-Military Relations initiated its program in Estonia with a brief but comprehensive visit to Estonia to gain a full understanding of the depth of the problems Estonia faced. At that time, CCMR was asked to assist the MoD and General Staff to develop a National Military Strategy (NMS) document where two previous efforts had failed. An NMS was subsequently drafted in late 1999 and after full review by the Estonian government, was published in February 2001.

The Center for Civil-Military Relations assessment, was based on the subsequent reform project, established the following general observations:

1. Inadequate communication between the MoD and Joint Staff and within these organizations;
2. Lack of clear high level planning priorities;
3. Lack of agreement on the definition of key concepts (e.g., Total Defense and Territorial Defense) and nomenclature (e.g., what constitutes Service missions);
4. Disagreement over which strategic/operational concept should serve as the basis for planning Estonia's national defense;
5. No clear hierarchy of planning documents;
6. Long-term force development was inadequately linked to the planning process;
7. Lack of agreement on the roles and missions of the MoD, the Joint Staff, the Services, and the Defense League;
8. Inadequate time for organizations to implement planning guidance;
9. Financial programs were not responsive to planning guidance;
10. Weak institutional memory;
11. There are no common tasks, conditions and standards within the Army to guide institutional training.

In short, CCMR found that Estonia's defense planning system was relatively underdeveloped, and largely in a state of stasis. It was difficult to ascertain precisely how defense planning was being conducted, or which specific plans linked to others. Yet, notwithstanding the lack of success in Estonian defense planning, there were indications that the system and procedures was improving and even had a modest record of some successes.

Upon a full assessment of the Estonian defense planning system, CCMR formulated a number of principles to guide its envisaged technical assistance project:

1. A technical assistance project based upon the overriding principle of national capacity-building in defense planning and execution of plans.
2. CCMR would not establish a permanent presence in Estonia out of concern of creating dependency on foreign experts and to limit costs.
3. Consensus-building would be taught through group problem-solving of identified shortcomings of the planning system.
4. The introduction of an external planning system should be avoided in favor of reforming the existing systems that are increasingly becoming NATO-focused. Should this approach fail, only then should new planning methodologies be considered.
5. Group education would be the means of conveying technical training in defense planning to ensure that key planning officials from all relevant organizations were made aware of the principles and procedures of the reformed system.
6. The use of proven international subject matter experts (SMEs) and senior mentors for senior Estonian defense leadership.
7. Short workshops that focused on applying education/training to the Estonian situation/problem with the aim of drafting/devising reformed practices, documents, and procedures where relevant.
8. The project would produce, in the end, a draft Estonian Defense Planning Manual that would document the reformed system and contain key planning documents and would be widely distributed.

The project identified the following nine (9) modules to execute this plan. Each workshop module produced a deliverable or document that was intended to be implemented by the Estonian Ministry of Defense and General Staff following legal and policy review:

1. Roles and missions, March 2001. Identification by Estonian participants of 139 detailed missions. CCMR reformatted these missions into a matrix so organizations and institutions have a better understanding of their peacetime, transition to war, and wartime relationships with other agencies.
2. Force structure, April 2001. Identification by Estonian participants of fourteen major missions for the Estonian Defense Force. These missions formed the basis for the development of a capabilities-based force structure and systems architecture that the workgroup now is staffing among its several agencies.
3. Defense planning and budgeting, May 2001. Program budget processes model that will crosswalk, or associate, with the capabilities/force structure process, all of which are explicitly tied to the major missions for the Estonian Defense Force. The resulting process of processes will enable Estonian decision-makers and analysts to obtain high fidelity visibility of all aspects of Estonian national defense structure.

4. Contingency planning, June 2001. Identification of where fundamental reforms need to be undertaken from high-level to mid-level defense structures in order that effective contingency planning can be undertaken.

5. Logistic support for operation plans, July 2001. The working group identified a number of gaps in logistics planning coordination with outside organizations.

6. Inter-ministerial and PVO coordination: Defining total defense, September 2001. The working group produced the following:

- Recommended revisions to the official definition of the total defense concept;
- A refinement in roles and missions in total defense in peace, tension, crisis and war, and;
- A draft transition to war matrix that established generic changes in roles and missions as international tensions escalate to wartime.

7. Review of plans, October 2001. The working group developed a proposed new family of resource and operation plans coordinated with the national budget year.

8. Planning and review process, November 2001. Reviewed eventual changes in planning and review process process were examined, particularly in the context of Estonian eventual membership in the alliance.

9. Review project for integration, December 2001. The working group, with the view to ensure that the planning system developed was comprehensive and effective, reviewed the entire family of deliverables for integration.

Status of Project

CCMR's technical assistance project, as outline above, was conducted from March to December 2001. At a review conference in December 2001, Estonia approved of the work prepared over the past nine months and directed that the project complete it work by ensuring that where necessary deliverables be reviewed, fleshed out, and prepared for ministerial approval. Specifically, these projects addressed the following issues:

- Develop national tasks lists comprising three levels of war, i.e., strategic/theater, operational and tactical. March 2002.
- Create a capability-based defense planning methodology based upon the national tasks lists. March 2002.
 - Draft the teams of reference for the Joint Operational Commander. May 2002
 - Adapt the Bi-Strategic Commander's Guidance on Operational Planning for Estonian national and multinational usage. June 2002.
 - Develop policy guidelines for employing war-games and simulations to review operation plans. September 2002.
 - Draft format for the Joint Operational Commander's projected operational standards. September 2002.
 - Develop weapons acquisition policy and decision-support methodology. September 2002.
 - Draft a national Logistics Concept. October 2002.
 - Draft a national Host-Nation Support Concept. October 2002
 - Complete development of the Estonian Defense Planning Manual that will contain the key elements of the defense planning system developed under the supervision of CCMR. This key document was published in December 2002 and was placed on both the Ministry of Defense and Headquarters Estonian Defense Forces intranets.

Preliminary Lessons Learned

The CCMR project provided, in totality, a comprehensive and integrated defense reform structure. That said, its full implementation is a process that can only be effected over time. Not

withstanding the formal implementation of these reforms, institutionalization is a longer-term process. In light of the recent experiences of CCMR, the following observations may be of use to other US security assistance offices:

- A technical assistance project of this magnitude can be accomplished without establishing a permanent presence of foreign experts in a recipient country, with a significant reduction in cost to a country's foreign military financing budget.
- High-level support by senior defense leadership and the country team is needed to ensure that key personnel are made available to participate in workshops and to ensure that reforms are implemented.
- Implementation of deliverables is not always self-evident on the part of the recipient country and will likely require close coordination with the ODC and country team to monitor progress and, if required, provide additional focused technical assistance. Implementation must be seen as constituting the most challenging element of any technical assistance project and strong emphasis, perforce, must be placed throughout such projects on senior leader development.
- It would be a mistake to attempt to replicate in other countries the specifics of this Estonian project. However, the employment of the principles and concepts outlined above are arguably constants and would be most useful in the reform of allied and friendly countries' defense planning and execution systems, organizations and procedures.
- Perhaps the project's most valuable product has been to teach Estonian planning inter-agency coordination and consensus-building through team problem-solving.

Conclusion: Benefits to recipient country and the US

The potential benefits that accrue to a recipient country from technical assistance in the areas of defense planning and execution, as described above, are considerable. A planning system and series of procedures that are based upon indigenous practices and realities, developed in a consensus-building manner, is more likely to be maintained and improved upon over time, vice an imported system. Moreover, a responsive defense planning system will make civilian defense leadership aware of the clear costs and benefits implications of their decisions that must balance effectiveness and efficiency.

From the perspective of the United States, such a program manifests America's commitment to the host country, while contributing in a meaningful way, to its national security. US interests are furthered within the context of the Bush Administration's security cooperation strategy by encouraging defense reform. Importantly, such a project can go a long ways in furthering openness with a country's own population, as well as its neighbors. Finally, through close cooperation between agencies of their departments of defense, such programs inform US defense policy and decision-making, as well as strengthen bilateral defense cooperation.

About the Author

Thomas-Durell Young is European Program Manager, Center for Civil-Military Relations, at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. His responsibilities at CCMR are to develop and manage the execution of a large number of assistance projects throughout Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Prior to taking this position in March 2000, he was a Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College. Dr. Young received his Ph.D. and "DES" from the Institute Universitair de Hautes Etudes Internationales, Université de Genève (Geneva, Switzerland), and is a 1990 graduate of the US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He has authored five books and monographs and over 89 articles and book reviews. His latest book, he co-authored with the late John Borawski, *NATO after 2000: The Future of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance*, was published by Praeger in 2001. In 1999, he was the inaugural Eisenhower Fellow at the Royal Netherlands Military Academy, Breda, the Netherlands. He is co-editor of *Small War and Insurgencies* and is on the editorial boards of *Defense and Security Analysis* and the *Australian Army Journal*. His foreign languages are French, Italian and German.