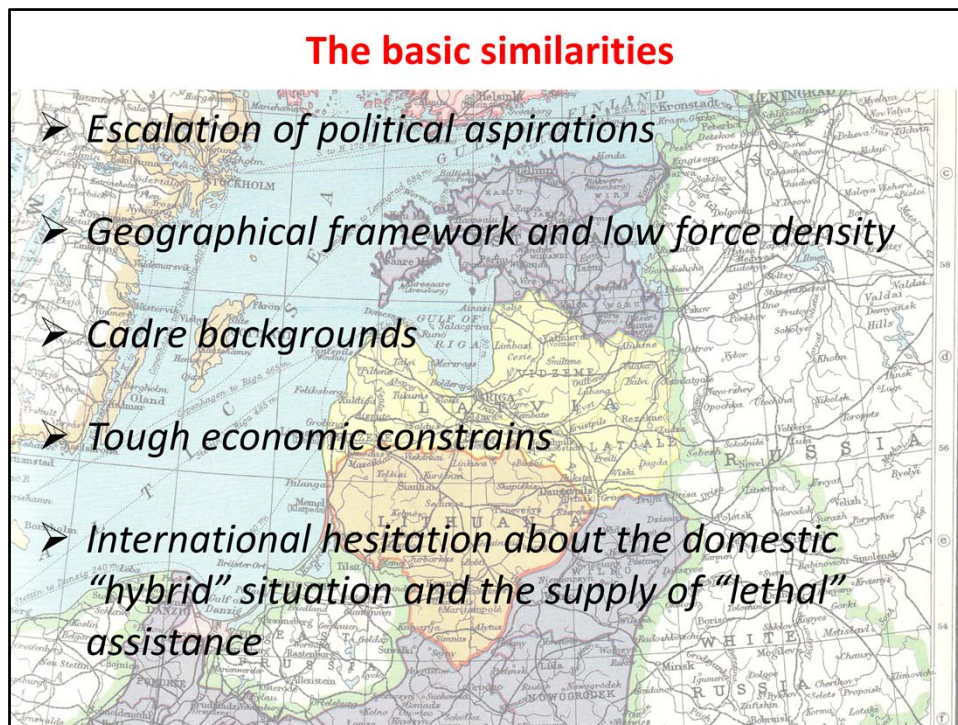




Thank you for the invitation and chance to use my studies of the Baltic Independence Wars and combine them with my own experience, observations and analyses of the development in the early-to-mid 1990s.



On the surface the similarities between the two situations are clear.

The escalation of political aspirations was roughly similar.

Very late the realistic objective had been a maximum degree of autonomy. Therefore the near consensus of the national leaders to aim at immediate full independence came late, leaving little time for preparations. Full state sovereignty only became a realistic option at the collapse that followed the defeat of first the Russian and then the German Empire in 1917-18 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in '91 after the failed August coup.

The geography with its problems and potential was roughly similar.

- The low level of the remaining enemy Soviet Russian forces and German and German-Bermont forces in 1918-19 meant that the operational and tactical problems *did not have to include the manning of a continuous front*. Fighting was concentrated in the sectors linked to the key infrastructure such as the main roads and especially

railways.

- In '91 the fast collapse of the strength and capabilities of the former mighty Soviet, now Russian, forces soon created another situation characterized by low troop density.
- This meant that the problems focused on the defence against coup attempts of irregular irredentist forces and the operations aimed at keeping control of key terrain and blocking access avenues against relatively limited size Russian forces.
- In both periods, it was therefore realistic for the small states to defend against the short term military threat.

In both cases the military forces had to be created by a combination of officers with an *education from Russian Military Academies* and men who applied their *civilian experience* and abilities.

The regular Baltic ex-Russian/ex-Soviet officers concentrated on developing the regular forces of the new states. In 1991 they were screened for loyalty to the extent possible, most critically in Estonia by colonel Ants Laaneots, initially less deliberately so in the two other states.

- When I started to work first in and with the Baltic States in the early and mid '90s, I found that small groups of ex-Soviet regular officers had been successful in establishing club-like basic service structures. One such example was the Lithuanian Air Force with two operational and one reserve air base, some helicopters and jet trainers and a basic radar ground environment.
- Another was the creation of the first real Lithuanian Navy ever. It was the result of the raw determination and political status of Commodore Raimundas Baltuska and brought his success in purchasing two Grisha-III class Corvettes. The short coast line with time-limited control of Memel/Klaipeda meant that the interwar "fleet" had been limited to a

presidential yacht that could be used as mine-layer.

- Baltuska's efforts in peace could be said to directly mirror that of the Estonian Johan Pitka in war in 1918-19.

In both 1918-20 and in the early 1990s, the regular Baltic Militaries were *supplemented by armed national volunteer militias*.

- In Estonia the Defence League (the Kaitseliit) was simply recreated as the armed nationalist alternative to the transition government's Home Guard (the Kodukaitse).
- In Latvia the prewar volunteer Guards (the Aizsargi) were replaced by a new national territorial defence organization (the Zemessardze).
- Something similar happened initially in Lithuania with the organisation of the national volunteer defence organization (the SKAT). It was seen as a more acceptable alternative to building on the recreated version of the sister organisation of the Kaitseliit and Aizargi, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (Šauliai).

In both 1918-20 and 1991-94, the forces had to develop with very little money.

- In the first period, the region, and especially Latvia, had been devastated by first war – by being front-line for two years - and later revolutionary upheaval.
- In the second period even the relatively wealthy Baltic Soviet Republics had been damaged by the gradual collapse of the Soviet economy in the 1980s that had been accelerated by the Perestroika reforms.

In neither 1918 nor 1991 did the West want to become directly involved by giving "lethal" assistance.

- *In autumn 1918*, in spite of the victors request, the defeated German

forces in control of the region did not hand over arms to the Balts for self-defence against the Bolsheviks.

- *From 1991 to 1994*, the Russian forces that gradually withdrew from the recreated Baltic States did not hand over part of their weapons and equipment – or anything else - to the new Baltic defence forces. The withdrawing Russians in Estonia and Latvia stole or destroyed as much as possible to sabotage the development of any successor forces.
- Support therefore had to come from other states, but in both the two situations the potential supporting states were wary of the political situation and likely instability of the Baltic States. In both periods, the situation was expected to change in the following years as the Russian political ego and military power re-coalesced after chaos. The situation was seen as far too “hybrid” to risk clear support. In 1991 giving “lethal” assistance remained ruled out for years as too provocative.

There were also political-strategic concerns. The potential Western supporting states disagreed whether it was a good idea to support a division of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.

- In the First World War Russia had been an essential (even if awkward and difficult), ally, and she would be important to have as an ally in a future war. Therefore as soon as the most likely short-lived Bolshevik nonsense had ended and a new autocrat had taken over, geopolitics meant that Russia should be recruited as a counterweight to a probably resurging Germany again.
- However, if the Bolsheviks did remain in power, it was important that Poland should become as large and strong as possible to play the counterweight role against Germany. This meant that any Lithuanian State should be as small as possible.
- In 1918 it was also unclear to the potential supporting governments

which political mobilizing factor was the stronger in the Baltic Region: nationalism or a social revolution against the highly unpopular German or Polish lords. The 1905 revolutionary events had indicated that the majority of the Baltic nations might have too much sympathy for the Bolshevik aims to fight for their bourgeois or moderate socialist leaders.

- Thus there was a clear potential for a “hybrid” conflict that could escalate into open social civil war.
- Giving support would also have domestic risks for the supporting states. The massive losses and expenses of the just ended continental great war had brought deep fatigue. No Western state was willing to face the risks of involvement in another land war. Even donating weapons might be a problem as large parts of one’s own increasingly restless population supported the Bolsheviks.
- Therefore military support to the Baltic Nations should be given without significant risks of own land forces of being pulled-into the fighting, and arms should only be donated to stable governments to help against *external* aggression.

However, in the 1919 situation the Estonian leaders convinced the visiting British officials that those conditions were met and *the decision to give and sell weapons came immediately in spite of the concerns in London before the Royal Navy squadron departed for the Baltic Sea*

In the ‘91 situation, the break-up of other parts of the Soviet Union was accompanied by violence and even minor wars. Where the West had been willing to face and live with such problems as natural in the general chaos of 1919, this was no longer the case. Now political “omelets had to be made without breaking eggs”.

- The post-1944 colonization of parts of especially North Estonia and the Latvian east as well as larger towns with Soviet Russian speaking industrial settlers had created a new situation. The potential

supporting states were wary of the risks of doing anything that might lead to a repetition and escalation of the open violence that was instigated by Soviet hard-liners in February '91 to sabotage the move towards independence.

- Again there seemed to exist a risk of a “hybrid”, now ethnic, conflict that could lead to Russian intervention after having been escalated to civil war.
- As a preventive measure Latvia and Estonia were put under pressure to take legal and administrative steps to ease the pressure against ethnic Russians and other Russian language speaking residents prior to the start of any security assistance programs. The issues of historical rights and justice were politically far less important to the potential supporting states than ensuring a peaceful process.
- Lithuania was expected to negotiate a solution to the issue of Russian transit from Belarus to Kaliningrad through its national territory.
- As in '19 the building of good relations with the future more normal and friendly Russia was given a much higher priority than giving security assistance to the Balts. The three states would not require defence forces anyway after Russia had become “normalized”.
- *Therefore the Balts had to find their own sources of weapons.* The Estonians purchased arms from Israel. The two other states went to the market for former Eastern Bloc type weapons. Some weapons and equipment could be obtained by local or individual initiative from departing Russian soldiers or through minister's and commander's initiative as when the Lithuanians “bought” the corvettes and other equipment by infrastructure work in the Kaliningrad Oblast.
- The Lithuanian Air Force used its old contacts to buy four Czech produced L-39C Albatros jet trainers from Kyrgyzstan and get them home through the airspace of various states.

- The Chief of the Estonian General Staff, colonel Ants Laaneots, had a score of BTR-80 APCs confiscated and later bought some factory-new heavy mortars from contacts in Bulgaria.
- Some old equipment such as AN-2 transport and basic trainer aircraft could be taken over from the DOSAAF or civilian operators.
- When the Western attitude to giving assistance eased a little so that “non-lethal” military assistance could be given, the Latvian Navy could make one or two workable OSA-I class fast gun boats by cannibalizing others former East German Volksmarine boats handed over by Germany. Both Estonia and Latvia were given a former East German KONDOR-class minesweeper. Later followed *Storm* class fast former gun boats from Norway and small patrol vessels from Sweden and Denmark.
- It was only with the Partnership-for-Peace Program formula in '94 that a framework was developed that could help the Balts without the assistance being seen as provocatively directed against Russia.



The core difference between the two periods was the situation created by the previous years.

In 1919 the collapse of the Russian empire had taken place as a result of and within a major war.

- The fighting had been followed by a short liberal reform period in Russia that allowed the creation of autonomous government structures as well as the development of locally recruited and officered armed forces.
- Latvia had been divided by a front-line sector of the Eastern Front for two years from 1915 to 1917. Here national rifle regiments had been the elite units of the Russian Army and learned much from their experience of very hard fighting. The main initial problem was that the majority of the Latvian Rifle units started the Independence War as part of the Red enemy forces.

- In Estonia the units were created after the end of the fighting, but their key officers such as Ernst Põdder had personal experience from their extended service in peace and war with the Russian Army.
- In Lithuania the government and state structures had to develop within the framework allowed by the German occupation authorities.
- During the 1918-20 fighting the self-confidence and cohesion of the Baltic and especially Estonian units had been gradually improving in the fighting with various Red forces, German Baltic militia and White Russian elements supported by Germany.
- The result was that by 1920 the Baltic States militaries had experienced and self-confident cadres and units with an ever improving cohesion.
- However, the self-confidence was tempered by realism. Even the successful Estonian forces had experienced a constant improvement of Red Army combat power during the second half of 1919 and had been more than happy to accept a peace deal in winter 1920.

There was another difference between the first and second period: The military development among the Baltic States in 1919-20 was also influenced by the *fundamentally different threat perceptions* of Estonia-Latvia on one side and Lithuania on the other. In the two northern states Soviet Russia remained the main threat. On the other hand Lithuania had no common border or problems with the Soviets, a festering territorial conflict with Poland over the Vilnius Region and territorial ambitions in the German coastal Memelland.

In '91 there had been no protracted events such as the Great War fighting that developed a well-founded military and political self-confidence.

- Even if there were differences between the threat and opportunity perceptions among the Baltic States in '91, in this second period the

security challenge for all three was basically the same, even if the immediate security issues differed.

- In Estonia and Latvia the main concern was the large Russian speaking minority that dominated districts and towns. In Lithuania the most urgent outstanding issue was Russian transit to the Kaliningrad Oblast.
- The elites of the Baltic Soviet Republics had not sought military careers, and most of those who did become regular Soviet officers choose technically challenging service rather than careers in the infantry or tank branches.
- There was very few Balts of senior rank and staff academy education such as the Estonians Ants Laaneots and Oskar Mark and the Lithuanian Jonas Andriškevičius. Laaneots and Andriškevičius had some war experience, but only as Soviet military advisors in the Ethiopian Civil War.
- Therefore everything basically had to be started from scratch in '91, in Lithuania former Space Rocket specialists such as Vytautas Lukavicius and air force technical officers as Algis Vaiceliunas had to be used in the role of light infantry battalion commanders.

In 1919 the international assistance with arms, training and some volunteers had been given immediately in spite of the worry about the stability of the local governments.

- By spring that year the Estonian military success had created a solid bridgehead for the support. As a result of the German offensive during the next couple of months from Libau/Liepaja and Windau/Ventspils, the “bridge-head” for intervention was expanded to Courland and later again to Riga.
- Thus in spite of initial international hesitation, 1919 ended with well-led and reasonably well armed forces in Estonia and Latvia as well as

Lithuanian forces freed from the German occupation but now involved in a worsening confrontation with Poland.

In the second case from *1991 onwards, the international military assistance came years later* for reasons already given.

- However, contrary to the first period *the initially hesitant assistance had stayed and developed*, initially in the PfP framework and later guided by the programme to achieve and sustain NATO membership.
- The fact that many key supporting nations *stayed committed and involved for a long time had an important beneficial regional effect*. There had been natural resistance to very close co-operation among the Balts during the first period after the Independence Wars. In spite of the common threat key preparations such as territorial defence plans were left fundamentally uncoordinated between Estonia and Latvia. After 1944, the existing differences between the three states had been nourished by the Soviet authorities to ease rule by dividing.
- In the early '90's foreign supporting officials such as myself found a deep lack of real trust both among the three Baltic States and between individuals and agencies inside each state. However, the long lasting foreign support commitment and especially the common projects starting with BALTBAT and further developed with BALTNET, BALTRON, and BALTDEFCOL started to change the situation, partly by developing bonds of friendship among the younger officers and MOD civil servants.
- The co-operation was further deepened and consolidated by the common Allied Air Policing operation, the common energy projects and now common defence planning inside NATO.
- The true co-operation that had only existed in some short phases and places during the Independence Wars in the first period has now developed into becoming normality.

Another difference between the two periods was *the leading politicians' attitude to the defence burden*.

- During the first period the position and prestige of the armed forces had been built on their key contribution to gaining independence. It was natural to give a relative high priority to the armed forces in the next years, both by making funds available and by using general conscription to fill the war time strength.
- During the second period the renewed independence had been deliberately sought using non-violent means. The first armed forces created were built to establish a symbolic presence at the state borders.
- A Soviet military background gave little prestige in the reborn states. The deep militarization of the Soviet society and personal experience from Soviet military service had created a deep resistance to anything that seemed similar to the Soviet model such as the Nordic or Swiss model of Total Defence.
- During the period '91-93 there was little optimism that own military resistance to a Russian military return could make any difference and very little willingness to contribute with a talented son's valuable time as reserve cadre, such as the Nordic or Swiss model would require.

There were now two conflicting views about whether a Russian return should be met by anything but a short symbolic action followed by passive resistance.

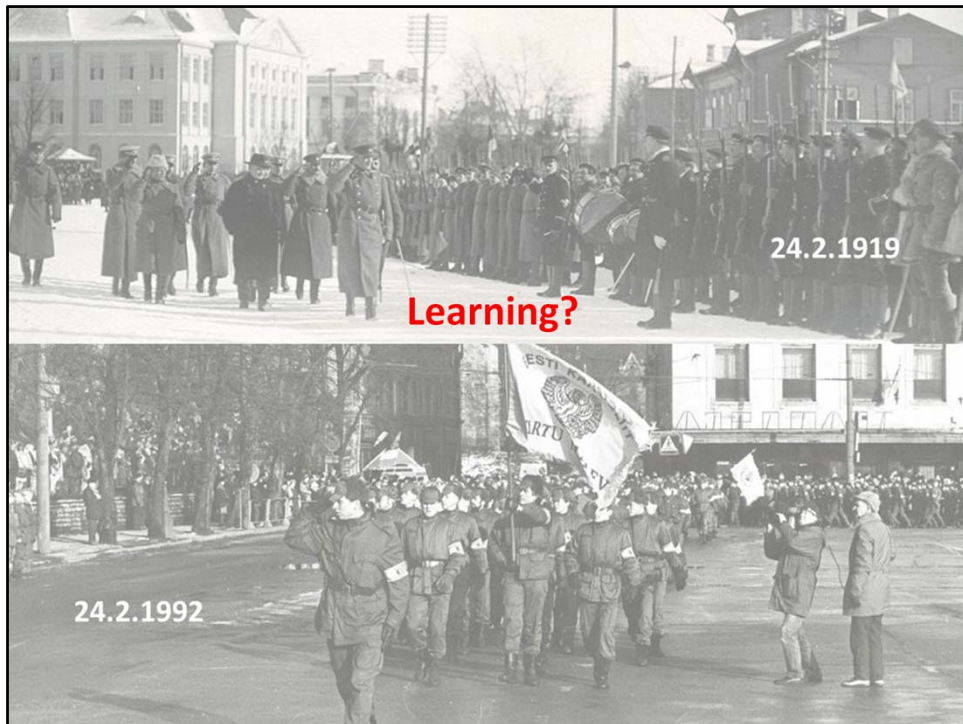
- As Kaarel Piirimäe has found for Estonia, a group of National-Conservative historian "restorers" considered that the Inter-war military should be created to the extend possible.
- From '93 onwards the Finnish inspired former Soviet colonel Ants

Laaneots with the first Finnish Military Academy Graduates led by Leo Kunnas took over to develop a military with the ambition to deter and defend as the Finnish planned to do. The centre of the initiative became the concentration of dynamic officers in the Kuperjanov Battalion and the Combat School in the south-eastern town of Võru.

- The Estonian Center-Left political forces basically considered the ambition to establish a military defence against Russia as futile. Using Kaarel Piirimäes terms, these “reformers” had concentrated their efforts on developing first the unarmed volunteer Home Guard (the Kodukaitse) and thereafter the border and coast guard (the Piirivalve). To do a little more without neither embracing the self defence ambition nor breaking directly with it, the reformers lent their active support to the participation in peace-keeping operations within the new PfP framework.
- The situation in Lithuania was roughly similar to Estonia with a fundamental disagreement between the National-Conservative political forces on one side with an ambition to fight in case of a Russian return - even if futile - and on the other the political forces of the former Socialist Nomenklatura . The latter emphasized border and internal security and later embraced peace-keeping operations and abolished the conscription needed to create forces large enough to for a territorial defence effort.
- The attempt to restore the Inter-War uniforms and traditions came later than in Estonia and was driven by returned American-Lithuanians, and especially by the retired U.S. colonel Jonas Kronkaitis during his periods as Vice-Minister of National Defence and as Chief of Defence.
- In Latvia very few politicians had ambitions beyond a purely symbolic restoration of small forces with little relevance in national territorial defence. Nearly all were what Kaarel Piirimäe call “reformers”. As their fellows in the two other states they would embrace peace-

keeping and later other international operations and end conscription. Any effort to defend the country would have to be done by the volunteer National Guard.

In the '90s in all three states the result of the never openly expressed disagreement about the role and ambitions of the defence effort became a development marked by friction and competition between three armed forces: the Interior Ministry elements (Border Guard and Security Police), the small regular forces and the volunteer national militia. The development varied from country to country, but the situation did not really change and improve until the possibility and reality of NATO membership created a new and developing framework for defence focus and eventually for the use of resources.



The bridge between the two periods would as already mentioned soon be marked by the restoration of the formal uniforms and symbolic activities of the former periods such as:

- In Estonia: the Independence Day Parade on Freedom Square in Tallinn;
- In Latvia: mounting the Guard at the Riga Freedom Monument.
- In Lithuania the traditions had to be adjusted as the capital had now moved from Kaunas to Vilnius.

Soviet type parade goose-stepping ground drill was dropped to be replaced by Inter-War or Western style. In the Estonian restoration the new units adopted old names. In Lithuania, the Interwar Army's princely unit names were used again.

During the next years the Soviet type discipline through a harassment regime (Dedovshchina) and very high training death rate was suppressed and replaced by the creation a traditional and Western type corps of cadre NCOs. This development was catalysed by the influence of

returning Baltic born, senior mainly U.S. officers that soon arrived to inspire and demand. In Estonia the good example of the Finnish Army had a similar effect.

However, it took years to accomplish and the public reaction put conscription under pressure.

The fundamental difference in domestic political attitude to the military meant that *little of professional substance was initially learned or repeated from one period to the next* in spite of the geographical setting being the same as were the operational problems of low troop density.

Focussed critical, in-depth and in-context military history analysis of selected relevant cases from the Independence Wars as well as First and Second World War fighting in the region may change this. The volunteer defence organisations have sought learning from the Forrest Brothers. And operations such as the German landing on the Estonian Islands in 1917 have been studied as a general insight case.

Learning and inspiration from the regular 1944 defence operations has been hampered by Western Allies' understandable negative reaction to any fascination with the Baltic Waffen SS units' 1944-45 operations. This both because the understanding of the WSS is normally anachronistic and inherently immature and because the Russians can and will exploit any such cases politically.

One common potential inspiration from both periods comes from the role allowed to dynamic personalities such as the Estonians Johan Pitka and Ernst Põdder in the first period and the Estonian Ants Laaneots, the British-Latvian Jānis Kažociņš as well as the Lithuanians Raimundas Baltuška and Vytautas Lukavičius in the second.

The activities of all these persons underline the importance of dynamic persons in achieving results and innovation in spite of few resources and general bureaucratic inertia, the "Oblomov-syndrome" and buck-passing.