

Research Article

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Estonia And UNIFIL: The Benefits to a Small State of UN Peacekeeping

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Abstract: This article considers Estonia's contribution, since May 2015, of an infantry company to the Finnish contingent of the Finnish/Irish battalion of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. It is intended to provide a case study of a small European state's involvement in UN peacekeeping in the 'post-Afghanistan' security environment. Drawing on interviews with Estonian officials and peacekeepers, it sets out the rationale for Estonia's contribution and explores the degree to which participation has met the expectations of the Estonian defence leadership. It concludes that participation in UNIFIL has largely been a valuable policy, both politically and for the defence forces.

Keywords: Estonia, peacekeeping, small states, United Nations, UNIFIL.

1 Introduction

The Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) currently participate in eight international operations (Estonian Defence Forces 2016). Two of these are NATO-led (Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, Kosovo Force (KFOR) in Kosovo), one US-led (Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq), two fall under the auspices of the European Union (European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med) in the Mediterranean Sea, EUTM in Mali), and three are UN missions (MINUSMA in Mali, UNTSO in the Middle East, and UNIFIL in south Lebanon).² Estonia's parliament, whose approval is required for the use of EDF personnel abroad, has authorised the participation of a total of 101 personnel in these missions in 2017 (Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia), National Defence Committee 2016). The largest single contribution is to UNIFIL, where Estonia has supplied a platoon to the Finnish contingent of the Finnish/Irish Battalion since May 2015. Among European nations, Estonia is the third largest contributor per capita of troops to UN operations.³

This article explores Estonia's participation in UNIFIL as a case study of a small state's involvement in UN peacekeeping in the 'post-Afghanistan' security environment. It sets out the rationale for Estonia's contribution and explores the degree to which participation has met the expectations of the senior leadership in Tallinn. Empirical research for this article took the form of non-attributable interviews with eight former and serving officials in the Parliament of Estonia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of

¹ The author is grateful to Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, who kindly funded an International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) report on the Irish, Finnish and Estonian experience of UN peacekeeping through the lens of UNIFIL (Lawrence, Jermalavičius and Bulakh 2016), the research for which also forms the basis of this article. The views and opinions expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the ICDS or the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

² EUTM: EU Training Mission; MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; UNTSO: United Nations Truce Supervision Organization; UNIFIL: United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

³ Based on average monthly troop contributions to UN operations, January to April 2017. Data: International Peace Institute 2017.

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Defence and defence forces, in addition to seven Estonian peacekeepers in south Lebanon. In order to preserve anonymity, their remarks are not individually referenced in this article.

2 Background: UNIFIL, the Finnish/Irish Battalion, and Estonia

Israeli forces entered south Lebanon in March 1978, following a terrorist attack on a bus in Tel Aviv, to neutralise the threat to Israel from Palestinian militant groups operating from the border areas. The UN Security Council established the UNIFIL mission in the same month, mandating it to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security, and assist the Government of Lebanon in re-establishing its authority over the area (United Nations Security Council 1978). UNIFIL has remained in south Lebanon ever since. Its mandate was enhanced in 2006, following the UN-brokered ceasefire that brought to an end the Second Lebanon War, to include tasks such as monitoring the cessation of hostilities, accompanying and supporting the Lebanese armed forces, and ensuring humanitarian access to civilian populations and the return of displaced persons (United Nations Security Council 2006). The size of the mission was also increased in line with the new mandate; as of June 2017, its total strength was 11,317, of whom 10,503 were uniformed personnel (United Nations Peacekeeping 2017a).

Ireland, a country with a long history of prominent participation in UN peacekeeping, contributed a battalion to UNIFIL from its inception until 2001, when the mission was scaled down by the UN. Finland, also a frequent and active participant in UN peacekeeping, contributed a battalion from 1982 to 2001. The first joint Finnish/Irish battalion was formed for a 12-month period in 2006-7 to support the instigation of the enhanced UNIFIL mission, and the second (and current) joint battalion was created in 2013 when Finnish troops returned to south Lebanon to join the Irish, who had returned in 2011 (Defence Forces Ireland 2017; Finnish Defence Forces 2017). The joint battalion is regarded by both countries as a means of contributing in significant numbers to UN operations and of securing battalion-level experience and training without placing too great a strain on national resources (Lawrence, Jermalavičius and Bulakh 2016: pp.11-12). Command is alternated between the two countries, with the commanding nation – at the time of writing, Ireland – providing common services such as camp supplies and battalion-level communications, and the majority of the troops. As of June 2017, Ireland contributed 364 uniformed personnel to UNIFIL and Finland, 303 (United Nations Peacekeeping 2017b). Although it is presently the junior partner in the battalion, Finland's overall contribution is higher than it would normally be as the figure also includes around 160 troops committed for a 12-month period to the UNIFIL joint reserve battalion (Yle Uutiset 2017). Finland agreed to replace France in this role following France's invocation of Article 42.7 of the Treaty of Lisbon after the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015.

Estonia's first contribution to UNIFIL was from December 1996 to June 1997, when it deployed a company under a Norwegian battalion as part of the development programme for the Baltic peacekeeping battalion, BALTBAT (Asson 2015: p.171). Since May 2015 it has contributed a platoon (38 personnel as of June 2017 (United Nations Peacekeeping 2017b)) integrated into the Finnish company of the Finnish/Irish Battalion.

3 Two decades of high-tempo operations

Figure 1 illustrates that in the period following the reestablishment of its independence, Estonia has been an inconsistent troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions. Apart from its provision of platoons to a Danish UNPROFOR battalion in Croatia for a six month period in 1995 and the previously mentioned company to UNIFIL from 1996 until 1997, both deployments conducted in the framework of the development of BALTBAT, its military contribution prior to the 2015 UNIFIL deployment was limited to one or two observers in UNTSO and specialist staff in MINUSMA (International Peace Institute 2017).⁴ For much of the

⁴ UNPROFOR: United Nations Protection Force in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina; UNTSO: United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (Middle East); MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

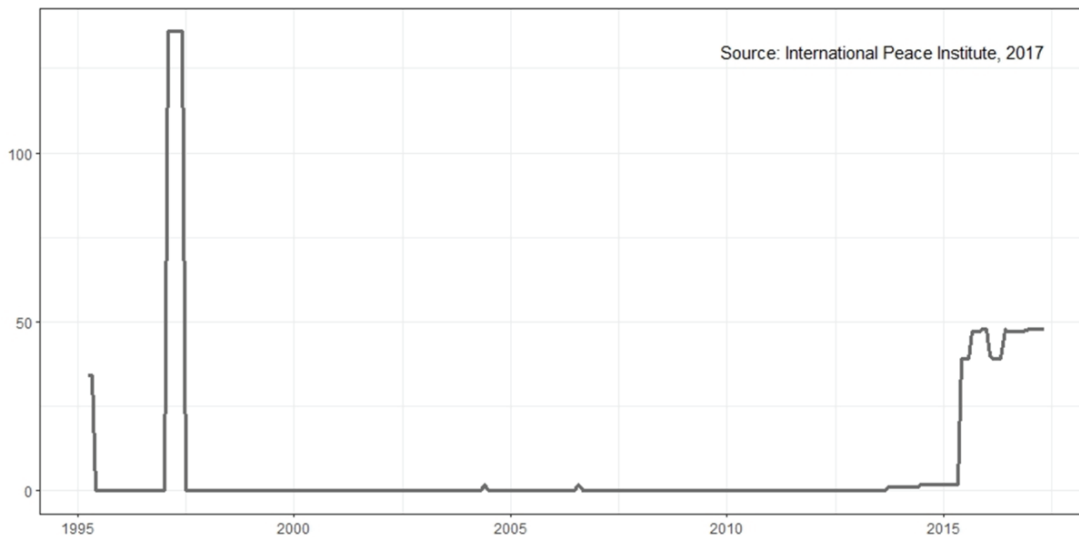


Figure 1: Estonian Troop Contributions to UN Missions, 1995 - Present.

past two decades, Estonia has focused its military participation on NATO and US-led coalition operations and, to a lesser extent, on EU operations, deploying in relatively large numbers to theatres such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq and Afghanistan (Paljak 2013: pp.234-7). Additionally, throughout the same period it has held forces on standby for the NATO Response Force and EU Battlegroups. The operations during this period – in particular in Iraq and Afghanistan – have been combat intensive, requiring a more traditional set of military skills than those dominant in peacekeeping operations.

This operating pattern was common among European countries during this period, when even those with strong affinities for the UN such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, increased their involvement within NATO and the EU at the expense of UN peacekeeping (Koops and Tercovich 2016: pp.597-8). For Estonia, the period corresponds to a time when its foreign and security policies (like those of the other Baltic states) were primarily aimed at persuading the Allies of its qualifications for membership of NATO. After its 2004 accession, Estonia aimed to position itself as a strong supporter of the Alliance's expeditionary agenda, in part as leverage in persuading other Allies to recognise the continuing strategic threat posed by Russia and the continuing importance of NATO's core task of collective defence. For these related purposes, a high pro rata commitment to international operations led by NATO or NATO Allies was deemed essential by Estonia's leadership. It is perhaps then unsurprising that Estonia's key security and defence policy documents, the 2010 National Security Concept and the 2011 National Defence Strategy, both developed at the height of the country's commitment to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom, make scant reference to UN peacekeeping or, indeed, to the UN more broadly (National Security Concept of Estonia 2010; Ministry of Defence (Estonia) 2011). Estonian officials note that an unofficial hierarchy of operational partners (NATO > EU > UN > OSCE) continues to guide their thinking in determining where to contribute armed forces abroad. Coalitions of the willing are also referenced in the National Defence Strategy (Ministry of Defence (Estonia) 2011: p.18); Estonia's participation in operations over the past two decades would suggest that US-led coalitions, at least, would also sit somewhere between NATO and the EU in this hierarchy.

Along with its Allies, Estonia withdrew its combat units from Afghanistan in 2014 after 11 years of operations that had involved more than 2000 troops and one of the highest casualty rates amongst ISAF participants (Paljak 2013: p.236; Praks 2015: p.193). The Scouts Battalion, the fully professional component of the EDF which had supplied almost all of the troops to Afghanistan and other missions, was both operationally fatigued and about to undergo a major capability upgrade with the introduction of the CV90 infantry fighting vehicle. Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern areas of Ukraine had caused the Allies, in particular those like Estonia which felt geographically vulnerable, to put more

attention on territorial integrity and national defence. Finally, also in 2014, Estonia provided a contingent of 50 troops to the French-led European Union Force mission in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA), a deployment that had for the first time proved controversial with sections of the press and parliament and, to a lesser extent, the public. Why, under such circumstances, did Estonia wish to send troops abroad once more to participate in UNIFIL?

4 Estonia's motivation for participating in UNIFIL

Bellamy and Williams (2012: pp.3-6) offer a framework of five rationales – political, economic, security, institutional and normative – as a tool to analyse why states contribute peacekeepers to UN missions. In the sections that follow, this framework is applied to Estonia's decision to contribute to UNIFIL from 2015 onwards, expanding on an earlier analysis by the author (Lawrence 2017). Political considerations substantially dominated Estonia's decision, although it also recognises a number of economic, institutional and normative advantages to participation. The security rationale – that deploying peacekeepers to mitigate a particular conflict that would otherwise pose a threat to national security is beneficial – was not a consideration for Estonian decision-makers.

5 Political rationales

Central to the political rationale is Estonia's concept of the indivisibility of security. The National Security Concept states the principle that, "Estonia regards its security and the security of its allies as indivisible – the factors affecting the security of its allies also affect Estonia, and vice versa" (National Security Concept of Estonia 2010: p.4). In practical terms this means that Estonia believes that it must make a contribution to multilateral security arrangements if it is to derive security from such arrangements itself – "we must be ready to help others, if we want to be helped ourselves", as one interviewee explained. Estonia has thus endeavoured to demonstrate, in particular to NATO Allies, that it is not just a security consumer, but a security provider too. This endeavour has recently become more urgent in Estonian eyes as the arrival in 2017 of a multinational battalion under NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) programme (NATO 2017a) is viewed as an additional item (albeit a very welcome one) to place on the consumption side of the balance. In pursuit of this policy of demonstrating its resolve in security and defence matters, Estonia has been, since 2015, one of only a handful of Allies to achieve the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence (NATO 2017b: p.8). It has also been a substantial contributor to NATO (and other) operations; while it has not achieved NATO's target of having 10% of its armed forces deployed on operations, it has made serious efforts to do so and has been above average in this regard (see Table 1).

Following the ISAF drawdown, there was a strong consensus among Estonian decision-makers that a unit of the EDF should continue to be deployed in an international operation. While domestic circumstances may have favoured a period of recuperation, both senior civilian and military officials believed that the political benefits of flying the flag abroad far outweighed any benefits that might have accrued at home from a pause in operations, and looked with some urgency for options. Unfortunately, few were available to match what Estonia could realistically provide. Estonia retains a conscription system – from a peacetime army of around 5,700, around 3,100 are conscripts each serving for 8-11 months (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2017: p.107) – and the consequently heavy training requirement for each conscript cycle makes it difficult for the EDF to provide training teams of any size for operations such as the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, without a detrimental impact on national capability. It has only limited niche or specialist capabilities - any sizable contribution would need to be largely provided from Estonia's fully professional army component, the light-infantry Scouts Battalion, and thus be restricted to an infantry role. Concerns over issues such as culture, climate, logistical support, equipment, training and cost also precluded some options, for example, Estonian officials doubted their ability to successfully contribute to

Table 1: Average Percentage of Total Military Personnel Deployed, 2005 – 2014. EU27: The EU Member States, less Denmark

Year	Estonia	EU27 Average
2005	4.63	3.97
2006	8.57	4.58
2007	6.46	4.20
2008	8.31	4.45
2009	8.23	4.06
2010	<i>Not available</i>	4.09
2011	<i>Not available</i>	3.48
2012	7.05	3.42
2013	7.12	4.04
2014	4.30	2.22

(Source: European Union, European Defence Agency, 2014)

UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. Finally, the domestic circumstances advocating a pause in operations had at least some impact - while it would not necessarily be a condition of Estonia's participation, officials certainly preferred to make a smaller contribution than had been the case in Afghanistan, in a less intense environment with a lower casualty risk.

The opportunity to participate in UNIFIL arose organically through the close relationship at all levels between Estonian and Finnish officials and military staff. Estonia considers Finland to be a key strategic partner and the two countries share much in terms of history and culture. Many Estonian defence personnel, in particular those who joined the EDF in the early years after Estonia re-established its independence, have received training in Finland and the defence systems of the two countries are similar. The Finnish proposal to work together in UNIFIL arrived at a very opportune moment and was enthusiastically received in Estonia and rapidly implemented. It is worth emphasising here that Estonia did not set out with the specific aim of contributing to UNIFIL, or for that matter to a UN peacekeeping operation. Its aim was to provide a visible presence in any international operation. Of the very few options available, the opportunity to take part in UNIFIL arose at the right time, and offered conditions that closely matched Estonia's aspirations.

Nonetheless, the chance to operate alongside the Finns was a key political factor that would contribute to the decision to participate in UNIFIL, rather than to explore other options for deployments. The National Defence Strategy makes clear that, "Participation in international operations will be used to intensify co-operation with Estonia's strategic allies" (Ministry of Defence (Estonia) 2011: p.9). Officials claim both that Estonia takes great care in selecting countries to work with and that there is a specific purpose in working with Finland, but also that the relationship between Estonia and Finland – "brother nations" – is largely sentimental. Through this combination of head and heart, Finnish-Estonian defence relations have remained strong during the period since Estonia re-established its independence, but Finnish sensitivities have made the practical expression of this relationship more difficult since Estonia joined NATO. The UN, however, offered a neutral framework for practical Estonian-Finnish defence cooperation. Estonian officials assessed that including an EDF contingent in the Finnish UNIFIL company was, for Finland also, primarily a political act. The combined operation would mean that individual Finnish defence personnel would be denied opportunities to participate in a coveted peacekeeping mission, while the Finnish defence forces as a whole would benefit less from the training and experience that Finland regards as a key institutional rationale for its participation in UN peacekeeping (Pasternak 2012).

Estonian officials also recognise a number of political benefits to participating in UNIFIL which, while not necessarily driving the decision to take part, certainly strengthened the case for doing so. Most tangibly, in 2015, Estonia submitted its candidacy for the Eastern European group slot for non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council during the period 2020-21, a position for which Romania has also applied (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Estonia) 2017a). Estonia's decision to apply had, however, been made some years earlier and officials had worked to identify ways to support their bid. Participation in peacekeeping is one strand that would help to demonstrate Estonia's commitment to the UN. An early

initiative to place staff officers into various missions and into UN headquarters did not succeed through a combination of the heavy competition for such positions, the inability of the EDF to provide suitably qualified candidates, and Estonia's unfamiliarity with the UN's peacekeeping bureaucracy. Nonetheless, this activity raised the profile of the UN in the EDF and more widely, made the decision to contribute troops to UNIFIL easier. The UNIFIL contribution, of course, provides the demonstration of commitment that Estonia had sought and images of the operation – and others – feature prominently in the 'Estonia 2020-2021' campaign materials (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Estonia) 2017b).

More broadly speaking, officials have argued that involvement in UNIFIL is helping Estonia to develop a wider perspective on the world and improving bilateral relations in a region where diplomatic resources are otherwise scarce (the only Estonian ambassadors resident in the region are located in Egypt, Israel and Turkey (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Estonia) 2017c)). Of more direct relevance to Estonian security, operating in the Middle East is well received by countries on NATO's southern flank such as Italy, Spain and France, who tend to be more concerned about the threats that come from this region. A willingness to work towards addressing such threats is seen as helpful in overcoming the divide between the northern and southern Allies with regard to their security concerns (Alexander and Croft 2015) and in ensuring that threats perceived by the northern Allies – principally, those emanating from Russia – are also taken seriously in the south.

6 Economic rationales

The 2015 decision to participate in UNIFIL was not made on economic grounds; nonetheless, officials recognise that there are some economic benefits that accrue from taking part. In particular, there are economic benefits to working with Finland, as the Finns provide the Estonian contingent with vehicles and other logistical support, reducing the overall cost to the Estonian government. Even so, the cost of deploying troops exceeds by some margin the UN reimbursement rate for uniformed peacekeepers of \$1,332 per soldier per month (United Nations Peacekeeping 2017c). Individual soldiers benefit from operational allowances that make a substantial difference to their basic salaries. This is regarded by officials as an important aspect of recruitment and retention (although soldiers and potential soldiers are motivated more by the opportunity to serve abroad than by the financial rewards for doing so) and is thus also part of Estonia's rationale in seeking to deploy troops abroad regularly.

7 Institutional rationales

Participating in operations is regarded by the EDF leadership as an important part in the development of the national armed forces, ensuring that soldiers gain experience with matériel, tactics and procedures, as well as building career motivation. Beyond this national context, officials welcome the opportunity to deepen cooperation with the armed forces of other nations, to exchange knowledge and understanding, and to enhance interoperability.

Just as Estonian security policy prefers the EDF to participate in NATO and coalition-led operations over those of the UN and OSCE, so the EDF itself tends to value combat missions over peacekeeping, believing that these offer better preparation for their wartime roles. The EDF also take some pride in their readiness to deploy to tough combat zones (during ISAF, the EDF saw heavy fighting in the restless Helmand Province) and to operate without national caveats restricting the use of Estonian troops by senior commanders. Even though the leadership of the defence forces are convinced that operations are an essential part of force development, there were some reservations that the peacekeeping role was too dissimilar to the EDF's wartime role and that the environment in south Lebanon was too different from the environment in Estonia to provide real opportunities for personnel and matériel development.

8 Normative rationales and small-state perspectives

Although they might be expected to do so, given Estonia's clear status as a 'small state', Estonian officials do not stress normative rationales for participating in UN peacekeeping. Estonia may be readily categorised as a small state according to the most common objective measures (e.g. geographical size, population and influence (Hey 2003: p.2)). It may also be considered small by comparison with the other states with which it interacts (according to Steinmetz and Wivel 2010: p.6, a small state is "the weak part in an asymmetric relationship"). In this regard, Estonia's smallness is only accentuated by the fact that it is bordered by, and perceives that most of its security challenges emanate from, a large and aggressive state. Finally, from a power possession dimension (Wivel, Bailes and Archer 2014: pp.6-7), Estonia's military capacity is dwarfed by that of its eastern neighbour in both magnitude and, as evidenced by Russia's acts of aggression in Georgia and Ukraine, intent.

Hey (2003: p.5) summarises the most commonly cited behaviours of small states, including those that might lead them to participate in UN peacekeeping operations: small states tend to "emphasize internationalist principles, international law, and other 'morally minded' ideals" and "secure multinational agreements and join multinational institutions whenever possible". While Estonia has clearly worked hard and successfully to join multinational security and defence institutions, and while several interviewed officials acknowledged the importance of contributing to regional and international peace, ideas such as internationalist principles and moral duty were not generally cited as explanations for participation in UNIFIL. Officials reach instead for the transactional rationales described above. In terms of small-state theory, Wivel, Bailes and Archer (2014: p.4) provide a more persuasive explanation for western small-state participation in international operations, observing that:

The Gulf War ... and the struggle over former Yugoslavia created new demands for active conflict management, and small states were also expected to contribute to their solution even if their immediate security interests were not under threat.

This was an expectation that Estonia, along with the other small states of central and eastern Europe freed after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, were happy to meet (Bugajski and Teleki 2006: pp.65-67). More broadly speaking, the explanations given by Estonian officials tend to support Neack's (1995: p.194) contention that,

there is little evidence in support of the idealistic explanation of state participation in UN peace-keeping. In terms of who participates and how they participate ... states participate in peace-keeping to serve their own interests.

9 Outcomes

Considering the set of political and institutional rationales described above, is there any evidence that Estonia has achieved what it expected from the deployment of the EDF to south Lebanon? In the political dimension it is, of course, not possible to differentiate between outcomes that result from contributing to UNIFIL and those that result from other policies; nor even to identify any definite causality between outcomes and policy in the complex and multidimensional world of security policy. Furthermore, it is simply too early to make a conclusive judgment on the value of the decision to take part. Nonetheless, it is possible to make some general observations.

First, it is almost certainly the case that Estonia's forward leaning defence policies, including its readiness to participate in UN peacekeeping, put it in good standing with other Allies who are, in return, more ready to recognise and take steps to address Estonian security concerns. Estonia (and the other two Baltic states) have been very successful in converting the political capital they have gained from their enthusiastic participation in operations into Alliance policies in their own favour. These have included the development of contingency plans for the defence of the three states (Demmer and Neukirch 2010), securing a long-term commitment to provide air policing for their airspace (Tammik 2012) and, most recently, the

permanent deployment of multinational battalions to their territories under the EFP programme. In addition, US forces are regularly rotated through the Baltic region under the US European Reassurance Initiative (US European Command 2017). The EFP battalion based in Estonia includes around 300 French troops. Estonian officials maintain that France's participation in a region that is not central to its traditional security concerns is, at least in part, a result of the goodwill generated by Estonia's participation in UNIFIL and, especially, in EUFOR RCA and EUTM Mali. Similarly, the close cooperation between Estonia and the UK in the ISAF – Estonian troops served in Afghanistan under British Command – made the UK the natural choice to act as a framework nation for the Estonian-based EFP battalion.

Second, operating with the Finns has also reinforced the (already close) Estonian-Finnish defence relationship. In terms of both domestic and international consumption, Finland treads carefully in the development and presentation of its security and defence policies (Seppo and Forsberg 2013) and Estonia was under no illusions that merely working with the Finns in south Lebanon would be enough to produce substantial policy or declaratory changes in Estonia's favour. Interviewed in May 2017, for example, Finnish Minister of Defence Jussi Niinistö illustrated the complex logic of Finland's security relations with its southern neighbour when he suggested that Finland's assistance to Estonia in the event of an armed attack might, under the EU Treaty of Lisbon, include military aid, but at the same time that Finland would likely not allow NATO troops to use Finnish territory in any NATO collective defence operation that would presumably follow such an attack (Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) 2017a). Nonetheless, some visible and concrete steps have recently been taken to enhance the Estonian-Finnish defence relationship beyond the context of UNIFIL. In 2017, for example, Finland participated for the first time in Estonia's annual Spring Storm national defence exercise (Ministry of Defence (Estonia) 2017). In the same year, the two countries also renewed their bilateral defence cooperation framework agreement (Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) 2017b) and agreed to cooperate in the procurement of South Korean K9 Thunder howitzers (Adamowski, 2017). While none of these developments can be directly attributed to participation in UNIFIL, the process of working together to implement a bilateral defence undertaking some 3000 km from home must surely have stimulated the defence relationship at all levels.

While assessments of the degree to which political expectations have been satisfied can only be speculative, it is possible to make more tangible assessments concerning the institutional impacts. In some respects the benefits have been limited - participation in UNIFIL has, for example and as expected, done little in terms of matériel development. Much of the equipment for the operation is provided by the Finns, while back at home, the deployment has caused some problems in synchronising the introduction of the Combat Vehicle CV90 infantry fighting vehicle.

With regard to the skills of individual and squad soldiers, the expectation of some members of the EDF that UNIFIL would provide little opportunity for development after the rigours of Iraq and Afghanistan have, however, proven false. The training programme designed for the first deployment included around two months (out of five) of mission-specific training and a particular challenge here was to train out the 'Afghanistan mindset' while ensuring the preservation of the soldiers' basic military instincts; there was a fear that otherwise, as one interviewee explained, the EDF would be "too barbarian and kinetic" for peacekeeping. For example, conducting counter-IED (Improvised Explosive Device) drills in Lebanon, where the threat level is low and the risk of upsetting the local population potentially more detrimental to the mission, requires a far more discreet approach than it does in Afghanistan. The Finns, with their extensive experience in UNIFIL and peacekeeping more widely, were able to assist the Estonians in this transition. Equally, the Estonians were able to pass on their own procedures, for example, in terms of counter-IED and anti-riot drills and patrol debriefings, to the Finns. Unfortunately though, the opportunities for such exchanges are limited due to the UNIFIL practice – for reasons of operational safety and security – of conducting military tasks such as patrolling on a national basis. Further, during downtime, the scheduling of patrols and other tasks largely keep the national contingents separate from each other. Exchanges of procedures and practices take place during rare formal battalion-wide training sessions or, less efficiently, simply through casual observation of each other's approaches.

More broadly speaking, as the EDF has settled into the mission, the challenges and personnel development advantages of peacekeeping over warfighting have been (re)discovered. Being placed

between two adversaries, rather than facing one, requires skills such as conflict management, judgement, cultural awareness, patience and tolerance. Several Estonian peacekeepers have remarked that this makes peacekeeping in many ways a harder mission than combat and suggested that more effort could be made in pre-deployment training to develop and practise these skills. Corum (2013: p.37) observes that the defence forces of the Baltic states have been “by most standards ... highly successful” in leveraging participation to contribute to their force transformation programmes, in particular as they concern developing interoperability “with NATO and allied partners at every level and on every kind of operation”. Estonia’s participation in UNIFIL is an opportunity for a more mature defence force, highly experienced in warfighting, to place more emphasis again on building interoperability for lower-end operations.

10 Conclusions

From the time at which its defence forces were first capable of doing so, Estonia has participated at reasonably high levels in international crisis management operations. Its primary motivation has been to draw attention towards its own security concerns and to build among Allies and partners a readiness to come to the country’s assistance should its own security be threatened. Its participation since May 2015 in UNIFIL is no different; Estonia has participated primarily for realistic, rather than idealistic, reasons in an operation that arose at the right time, under conditions that closely matched national preferences. This is not a criticism: Estonia’s realist rationale means that it provides resources that coincide with the wider needs of the UN and the international community, creating a clear win-win situation.

To the extent that an assessment can be made of the degree to which Estonia has accrued the benefits it expected from its contribution to UNIFIL, the news is largely good. In general, participating in international operations has served Estonia well and there are good reasons to be optimistic that UNIFIL will help it, at the very least, to maintain its reputation as a responsible Ally and partner, and thus to be well placed to secure foreign and security policy gains in the future. More concretely, the operation has given Estonia an opportunity to refresh its bilateral relationship with a key strategic ally, Finland.

For the Estonian Defence Forces, while the operation has led to some technical problems in relation to the introduction of new equipment, it has allowed the defence forces to continue a policy that regards operational experience as an important aspect of professional development, which would otherwise have been difficult to achieve. It has also allowed the defence forces to rebuild a skill set that had been largely absent from its contingent during the years it has been involved in high-tempo operations. While UN peacekeeping may not have been the first choice for the defence forces, their participation in UNIFIL has served them, and their country, well.

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