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Sharing the Burden? Assessing the Lithuanian Decision to Establish a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan

The paper assesses theories explaining the states' burden-sharing decisions in an alliance and uses them to evaluate the Lithuanian decision to establish a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan. In the literature, several influences on such decision-making are identified. These fall into two broad categories of systemic and domestic factors. From the former, threat perception, alliance dependence, systemic pressures of alliance politics are analysed; and from the latter three clusters of aspects such as: state autonomy, elite consensus, space of manoeuver of the executive; bureaucratic politics and organizational interests, and third, some additional elements of strategic culture/state identity. While most factors have some explanatory value, the analysis invites the conclusion that in case of the decision to lead a PRT, the two most important elements were alliance dependence from the first cluster and strategic culture and bureaucratic politics from the second.

Introduction

The events in Ukraine in the beginning of 2014 mark a new era in history of Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization. Russian aggression revived the old purpose of the organization while its members analyse the developments of the last twenty years. Especially as the troops prepare to leave the scorched mountains of Afghanistan, the attempts to evaluate the experience of the "biggest operational and perhaps strategic challenge in years if not decades"[1] abound. Within these evaluations not only the failures and successes in this particular conflict are discussed, but questions are raised as to the viability of NATO itself.

Naturally, such questions have been raised before, so much so as to warrant the statement that the "persistence and evolution of NATO after the

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[1] Norton-Taylor, R. "NATO will be in Afghanistan for years, says military chief", *The Guardian*, 23 February, 2006.

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end of the Cold War is a central research puzzle for the academic discipline of International Relations."[2] The perseverance of an organization when the initial purpose of its establishment has disappeared proved to be one of the best examples for the validity of social constructivism in providing an understanding of international relations[3] putting on the defensive the adherents of the realist paradigm[4] who were seemingly found wrong by mere virtue of the NATO's continuous existence.

The Afghanistan experience brought back those speculations.[5] The operation was often presented as of vital importance for the organization and it was often emphasized that Afghanistan is the test of NATO's durability and continuous importance (or lack thereof). Thus, the approaching end of the engagement already brought about not only the soul-searching into the purpose of the organization, but also the mutual accusations of the partners for failures to perform adequately in such an important undertaking. While the Europeans quietly mumble about the lack of clearly defined end-states and inadequate planning of the actions in the conflict, voices from the other side of the Atlantic warn about the shortcomings of the European allies that were made evident on the ground in Afghanistan. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates was probably the bluntest in his speech when he told the gathered Ministers of Defence:

> In the past, I've worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance: Between members who specialize in "soft' humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the "hard" combat missions. Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don't want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today.[6]

The different levels and forms of contribution have thus re-entered the

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[2] Behnke, A. *NATO's Security Discourse After the Cold War. Representing the West.* London: Routledge, 2013, p.1.

[3] Works in this area emphasize the development of NATO into a "security community" (see, e.g. Adler, E., Barnett M., eds. *Security Communities.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and see it through the lens of identity formation (e.g. Risse-Kappen, T. "Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO" in Katzenstein, P., ed. *The Culture of National Security. Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[4] See, e.g. Waltz, K. "NATO expansion: a realist's view." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2000, Vol.21.

[5] It should be noted, however, that the rhetoric of imminent demise has been shrouding NATO almost since its inception. As Wallace Thies writes: "Looking back over the history of the Alliance there seems to have been scarcely a year when it was *not* widely said to be in crisis, or at least in disarray" (Thies, W. *Why NATO endures?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.1, emphasis author's)

[6] Gates, R. *The Security and Defence Agenda (Future of NATO).* 10 June 2011. http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581 (accessed 05 05, 2013)

political agenda in full force. With diminishing defence budgets in most of the countries that form NATO, the problem of "dividing" security seems to be achieving a renewed significance. The burden-sharing debate, thus, has both practical and academic importance.

In this paper I propose to use the burden-sharing debate in assessing a small state's decision making. I will look into a decision by one of the new members of the organization—Lithuania—to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan's Ghor province and see what contribution analysis of such a case could bring to the understanding of the dynamics of burden sharing in a security-providing organization such as NATO. For the purpose of this analysis, I will first look into the existing literature on the burden-sharing and present the main theoretical tenets in this area. I will distinguish the main systemic and domestic factors discussed in the literature and sum-up the aspects that need to be looked at in the analysis of decision making.

In the second section of this paper, keeping in mind the theoretical findings of the first part, I will examine the Lithuanian decision-making that led to the establishment of the PRT. I suggest that this case is particularly interesting to look into because here, contrary to some theoretical expectations, there is an example of a country contributing even beyond its means to a military operation. I will thus look into such systemic elements as threat perception, alliance dependence and, related to this, pressures of alliance politics identified in the literature. Secondly, I will look into the domestic elements in decision making, such as the freedom of manoeuver of the executive, elite consensus, bureaucratic politics and strategic culture. I will argue that while pressures of alliance politics explain participation in general pretty well, in order to understand the level of contribution the domestic factors are still the most important.

1. Explaining burden sharing decisions

Burden-sharing can be defined as "distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a common goal."[7] It has its roots in the collective action theory of Mancur Olson.[8] In his seminal work *The Logic of Collective Action*[9] Olson argued that when a group attempts to achieve

[7] Forster, P.K., Cimbala S. *The US, NATO and Military Burden-Sharing.* London: Frank Cass, 2005, p.1
[8] Ibid., p.9
[9] Olson, M. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.* Cambridge, MA: Harward University Press, 1965.

some public good, there are certain inherent mechanisms at work, which shape the interaction within the group and can have an influence over the outcome of collective action itself. The majority of public goods are deemed to be non-excludable (e.g. when gained can be used by anyone) and non-rivalrious (i.e. the use of it by one person does not reduce its availability for another person), which means that once the group decided to produce such a good, its members have a great incentive to defect and free-ride, thinking that the good will still be supplied by others without his/her contribution. This theory was further applied to the alliance politics by Olson himself together with his colleague Richard Zeckhauser.[10] Their argument was that as organizations such as NATO provides a pure public good (security), we face the situation of "exploitation of the large by the small" with the large countries providing disproportionally large contributions, while the small ones free-ride.

These arguments have often been brought up in the discussion of the military spending in the NATO countries (the concern that the quote of Robert Gates in the introduction clearly indicates). In academia, Robert Kagan argued that the US is providing global stability without any help from its European allies[11] while Rajan Menon contended that the US should abandon NATO, Japan and South Korea as they are allies that only cost much and contribute little to the advancement of the US interests.[12] Finally, in a slightly more measured argument, Stephen Cimbala and Peter Forster maintain that the US always takes on itself more international and domestic political risk when deploying troops abroad compared with its allies.[13]

Yet, many works have since disproved the idea that the US partners in NATO do not contribute. Jason Davidson, analysing six conflicts in which Americans participated since Vietnam found that their allies have been contributing more than theory and policy-maker statements would have us believe. Indeed, the fact that the allies did contribute troops "when they could have taken a free ride off American military might", according to the author "is a true theoretical and policy puzzle"[14] The same is noted in two seminal articles that shape a great part of contemporary burden-sharing decision debate where Andrew Bennett and his colleagues noted that many states chose

[10] Olson, M., Zeckhauser, R. "An economic theory of alliances." *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1966.
[11] Kagan, R. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order.* New York: Vintage Books, 2004.
[12] Menon, R. *End of Alliances.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
[13] Forster, P.K., Cimbala S. (note 7).
[14] Davidson, J. *America's allies and war: Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p.5

to contribute to the coalition effort during the Operation Desert Storm,[15] while Auerswald has shown that there was significant allied contribution in the Kosovo campaign of 1999.[16]

Why then do states decide to participate and "share the burden" in a coalition? Ida Oma in her review article of the burden-sharing literature, distinguishes between system-level, domestic perspectives and the integrated approaches that attempt to explain this phenomenon. In the first, the approaches that deal with the notions of "balance-of-threat" and the "alliance dependence" would fall. The second contains explanations related to state autonomy and public opinion, bureaucratic politics and strategic culture. The integrative models combine the two approaches.[17] The rest of the chapter will follow this approach in determining what factors should be assessed when discussing one or another country's burden sharing decisions.

1.1. Systemic factors in burden-sharing

Nik Hynek and Peter Marton[18], parallel to Ida Oma, distinguish two main systemic factors that influence the contribution of a state to an operation. The balance-of-threat hypothesis, based on ideas presented in Walt's book *The Origins of Alliances*,[19] postulates that the states balance not against power of other states, but rather against commonly perceived threats. Thus, for Forster and Cimbala, "the willingness of states to assume the burdens of collective intervention is directly and primarily proportional to their perception of threat."[20] Yet, while this hypothesis seemed to work in case of Desert Storm analysed by Bennett and his colleagues[21], it did not explain countries' participation in the Kosovo campaign[22] or Afghanistan.[23]

The alliance-dependence or alliance-importance hypothesis fared better in explaining the state contributions to alliance-led operations. It is based on

[15] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J.,Unger, D. "Burden-sharing in the Persian Gulf War." *International Organization*, 1994, Vol.48, no.1.
[16] Auerswald, D. "Explaining wars of choice: an integrated decision model of NATO policy in Kosovo." *International Studies Quarterly*, 2004 Vol.48.
[17] Oma, I.M. "Explaining states' burden-sharing behaviour within NATO." *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2012.
[18] Hynek, N., Marton, P. "Introduction. What makes coalitions s/tick?" In Hynek, N., Marton, P. eds *State-building in Afghanistan. Multinational contributions to reconstruction*. Marton. London: Routledge, 2012.
[19] Walt, S. *The origins of alliances.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1987.
[20] Forster, P.K., Cimbala S. (note 7), p.27.
[21] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J., Unger, D. (note15).
[22] Auerswald, D., (note 16).
[23] Hynek, N., Marton, P. (note 18)

the classical work by Glenn Snyder[24] where he contended that states in alliances face two dilemmas: entrapment (being drawn into conflicts they do not care about) and abandonment (being left by their allies to their own devices). The more dependent a state is on the alliance, the more the risks of abandonment are deemed higher than a possibility of entrapment.

Similarly, Sarah Kreps has shown that public opinion hardly matters in the decisions to increase or decrease the amount of troops in an operation and cannot be a determinant of a state's behaviour in an alliance. Instead, she argues that in the case of Afghanistan the internal dynamics of the states participating in ISAF can be characterized by elite consensus induced to a great extent by external "systemic pressures to cooperate" that increase the "reputational costs of defection"[25] and make it very unlikely. Thus we see that in most of the troop contributing states the public support for the war in Afghanistan has been very low throughout the period of her analysis (2006-2010) while at the same time the countries kept increasing the troop numbers and dispensing with caveats on their operations.[26]

1.2. Domestic factors in burden-sharing

Bennett et al. distinguish two internal motivators for sharing a burden: state autonomy; and, bureaucratic politics. They argue that states will contribute more willingly where there is public support for doing so and where an executive branch which is less institutionally constrained would be more willing to contribute to the operations than that which is weaker or less autonomous.[27] While Bennett et al. found support for this hypothesis in their examination of the case of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the importance of public opinion was contested in the aforementioned Kreps article. She argued instead that the elite consensus on the foreign policy issues was the main determinant of contributions. The governments in the states where such a consensus is present, according to this theory, have little to fear in their decision-making regarding expeditionary operations, as the opposition shares the same values and thus the governing parties will not get punished for their support for unpopular war in

[24] Snyder, G. 1984. "The security dilemma in alliance politics." *World Politics.* 1984, Vol. 36, no.4.
[25] Kreps, S. "Elite Consensus as a Determinant of Alliance Cohesion: Why Public Opinion Hardly Matters for NATO-led Operations in Afghanistan." in *Foreign Policy Analysis.* 2010, Vol. 6, p.202.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J., Unger, D. (note 15)

an election.[28] In the same vein Davidson indicates that the stance of opposition on the issue of military deployments or particular operations is "the single most important factor in whether the public is electorally relevant"[29] and, as a consequence, whether the public opinion on war matters.

The second domestic factor – bureaucratic politics – indicates that "the level and kind [of contribution] depend also on the role and influence of the chief executive relative to top bureaucratic actors."[30] Following the work of Graham Allison[31] it is maintained that there are three elements that should be taken into consideration here: first, that government actions are the results of compromises in bureaucratic bargaining; second, that where one "stands" depend of where one "sits"; third, that the "outcome of the bureaucratic bargaining depends on top officials' relative bureaucratic power."[32] As this type of investigation needs extensive access to the behind-the-scenes interaction among the main actors in the state decision making (and having in mind that the principal actors may not be the most visible ones), this is the factor whose value and potential for the explanation of decision-making is the most uncertain.

As the third factor, the currently popular investigations into strategic culture could be mentioned. Strategic culture is understood as "a number of shared beliefs, norms and ideas within a given society that generate specific expectations about the respective community's preferences and actions in security and defence policy"[33] While the "culture" itself has often been deemed too wide a variable for a robust explanation of political phenomena, it has been noted that strategic culture works to a certain degree to explain the state's willingness to use force and the reasons to do so. For example, German unwillingness to use its troops outside the German borders have often been explained by exactly this variable.

In the *Strategic Cultures in Europe*, Heiko Biehl and his colleagues outline a number of elements that should be examined in order to determine the outlook of a country's strategic culture, among them: the level of ambition in international security policy; the scope of action for the executive in decision-making; foreign policy orientation; and the willingness to use military force.[34]

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[28] Kreps, S. (note 25).
[29] Davidson, J. (note14), p.19.
[30] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J., Unger, D. (note15), p.47
[31] Allison, G. *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis.* Boston : Little, Brown, 1971.
[32] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J., Unger, D. (note15), p.47-48.
[33] Biehl, H., Giegerich, B., Jonas, A. "Introduction." in Biehl, H., Giegerich, B., Jonas, A., eds. *Strategic Cultures in Europe. Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent.* Potsdam: Springer, 2013, p.12.
[34] Ibid, p.13

These elements do correspond to some extent to the domestic explanations of burden-sharing as provided by Bennett et al. (e.g. "the scope of action for the executive" is synonymous to "autonomy of the executive" in Bennett et al.) and could be very useful in further investigation of burden-sharing decisions.

Similarly, the idea that discourses matter when it comes to shaping the decisions to contribute (or not) and how to contribute to the operations could be added here. Christopher Coker, for example, emphasizes the importance of the dominant discourse in his deliberations on the potential of the European use of the military in NATO context and the consequences of the "demilitarization" of Europe.[35] Andreas Behnke, on the other hand, analyses the failure of NATO itself to "reinvent" the identity of the West in the War on Terror, leading to the lack of cohesion in the organization and sometimes lukewarm participation of American allies in the missions such as Afghanistan.[36]

1.3. Integrative models

In his work, Daniel Baltrusaitis argues that no decision making account can produce a full picture without looking at both the internal and external factors.[37] Ida Oma also finds that the integrative models work best in explaining states' decisions to share the burdens of a coalition militarily or financially. According to her, these models are "hardly parsimonious, but arguably better at capturing the complexity of real-world decision making."[38] Of such models four could be mentioned. In Bennett and his associates' work, there are five factors under consideration, three belonging to the "systemic pressures" part and two to the domestic (collective action, balance of threat and alliance dependence for external and state autonomy and bureaucratic politics for internal), finding that external factors did explain rather well the contribution itself and the internal factors the form it took.[39] At the same time, Hynek and Marton, basing their work on the Bennett's analysis look into balance of threat, relative size of a country, and alliance dependence for the external factors and "the room for manoeuvre for the executive" and "the organizational interests,

[35] Coker, Ch. "Farewell to Arms: Europe's meritocracy and the demilitarization of Europe." in Matlary J.H., Petersson M. *NATO's European Allies. Military Capability and Political Will.* Houndmills : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

[36] Behnke, A. (note 2).

[37] Baltrusaitis, D. *Coalition Politics and the Iraq War: Determinants of Choice.* Boulder, CO : First Forum Press, 2010.

[38] Oma I.M. (note 17), p. 569.

[39] Bennett, A., Lepgold, J., Unger, D. (note15)

such as those of the military, key state agencies" etc. for the domestic factors.[40]

The other two models that can be mentioned in this sub-section are, first, the Auerswald's model, which takes into account collective action, balance of threat, public opinion and government institutional structures, finding that in sum these factors explain better the state's behaviour than taken separately.[41] Secondly, Jason Davidson's model in which he combines the alliance value (similarly to alliance dependence); target threat to national interest and prestige; and public opinion and electoral relevance.[42] He finds that the combination of these factors explain rather well the decisions to participate or not in the international military operations.[43]

1.4. Factors to consider in analysing Lithuania's decision to establish a PRT in Afghanistan

From the above discussion several factors could be distinguished that would provide a lens through which to look at the decision of Lithuania to participate in the ISAF mission by leading a PRT. These can be divided into systemic and the domestic factors. Of the former, we should look into:

- The importance of a threat. Hynek and Marton suggest that the level of "threat-balancing" can be judged by the public discourse in the country regarding public health and crime issues related to the drug-trade that has roots in Afghanistan and the understanding of terrorism threat rising from the same quarters.[44] We should therefore look into the public discourse regarding these two issues in order to evaluate the importance of the threat and its possible impact on the participation in the mission.
- Alliance dependence/Value of alliance. How much is the Alliance valued and could this value provide an explanation of Lithuanian decision to establish a PRT? What is the dominant discourse around NATO in the country?
- The systemic pressures of alliance politics. Davidson distinguishes the threat to prestige as an important factor in the state's decision to participate in an operation. According to him, "providing military support for the United States can contribute to a state's prestige whereas a refusal to provide support could lead others to believe the state is

[40] Hynek, N., Marton, P. (note 18), p.14.
[41] Auerswald, D. (note 16).
[42] Davidson, J. (note14).
[43] Davidson, J. (note14), p.171.
[44] Hynek, N., Marton, P. (note 18), p.10.

neither willing nor able to engage in military action."[45] At the same time, for Kreps it is the costs of defection, the stigma that it carries, that make it difficult for a country to abandon its allies in mission like the one in Afghanistan.[46] The longer the states cooperate, the less probable is defection from military missions even if there are domestic pressures to abandon the endeavour.

From the domestic factors it will be important to look into the following:

- State autonomy, elite consensus and the space of manoeuvre of the executive. These three factors can be put together as they use different words to advance very similar ideas. The question to be asked here is: is the executive constrained by the other branches of power or does it have a substantial autonomy vis-à-vis both society and the legislature? Do the parties in government risk losing elections if they do not act according to popular wishes? Is there any substantial opposition to the deployments in general and the one under analysis in particular?
- Bureaucratic politics and organizational interests. As the negotiations below the top level of decision making have an impact on the outcome of the process, it is important to look at this level in the analysis of decisions taken to lead a PRT. It is important to ask what other actors besides, in addition or in opposition to the executive have a say in influencing such decisions? What is the actual weight of different actors in this process? Who has an interest in a mission like a PRT? And finally and importantly, what is the role of military itself in shaping such a decision?
- Ideational and strategic culture/state identity explanations. While many factors that are analysed in assessing a state's strategic culture will be present already in the previous examination (e.g. state autonomy is often analysed as part of state's strategic culture), some additional questions should be asked with regards its impact on decision making. It is important to assess what a state's self-image is and how that is related to the decision to lead a PRT? How is the state's identity shaped and what influence does it have on deciding to participate or not in a mission?

[45] Davidson, J. (note14), p.17.
[46] Kreps, S. (note 25), p.202.

2. The Lithuanian decision to lead a PRT[47]

2.1. Background

Lithuania started participating in the international military missions very soon after re-independence, its first mission being the United Nations UNPROFOR II in Croatia 1994-1996. It was considered that by contributing to the UN mission the country "could put itself on the map and announce to the rest of the world (most importantly, to the West) its existence and active support for the ideas they followed. … Peacekeeping was also seen as one of the first steps towards NATO"[48]

When the US and with it the NATO alliance itself was attacked on September 11, 2001, Lithuania did not hesitate to offer support for the hurt hegemon sending its first military unit, SOF Aitvaras to Afghanistan in November 2002. In 2003, it sent troops also to Iraq.

In 2004, Lithuania was accepted into NATO. At the same time, the American forces overrun Iraq only to be embroiled in an ever intensifying insurgency while in Afghanistan, the seemingly destroyed Taliban used the respite given by the shifting American attention towards Iraq to recuperate and grow. NATO took over the ISAF mission in 2003 and in 2004 started expanding its operations in the entire area of the country (until then it was limited to Kabul area). It was decided to concentrate on the reconstruction efforts while the American continuing Operation Enduring Freedom dealt with the war-fighting in the areas that still contained large amounts of Taliban resistance in the South of the country.

As a part of this expansion the American partners in NATO received invitations to participate and lead the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Such an invitation had been advanced to the Baltic States in 2004. Latvia and Estonia, however, were reluctant to commit and it was agreed that the

[47] Unless indicated otherwise, the information used in this article has been gathered in a series of interviews with the officials involved in decision making on the international operations. I am grateful to mr. Vitalij Dimitrijev and mr. Mantas Lapinskas advisors to the Seimas Committee of National Security and Defence; Mrs. Jovita Neliupšienė and Mr. Mindaugas Žičkus, advisors to the President; mr. Tomas Urbonas, head of International Operations department, Ministry of Defence; dr. Vaidotas Urbelis, director of Euro-atlantic cooperation department, Ministry of Defence; Col. Valdas Šiaučiulis, Director General for Capabilities and Armaments at the Ministry of Defence; col. Petryla, head of J5, Joint headquarters; mr. Aleksandras Matonis, former head of Lithuanian Special Mission in Afghanistan; LTC Dalius Polekauskas, 5th Commander of the PRT; mr. Marius Alekna, PR department, Ministry of Defence.

[48] Paljak, P. "Participation in International Military Operations." Lawrence. A., Jermalavičius, T. eds. *Apprenticeship, Partnership, Membership: Twenty Years of Defence Development in the Baltic States*. Tallinn: International Center for Defence Studies, 2013, p.206.

countries would reject this proposal and contribute to the mission otherwise. Yet, Lithuania was still toying with the idea of becoming a lead-nation in PRT. Once such an interest was shown, the country received some pressure from the US to go through with it and eventually it was agreed both domestically and internationally that Lithuania will become the lead nation of a PRT in the Ghor province in central Afghanistan in 2005. It assumed this role on June 30, 2005, and successfully handed over the province to Afghan security forces in autumn of 2013.

2.2. The greatest gamble? Explaining the Lithuanian decision to lead a PRT

As this was supposed to become the largest international endeavour the small state had undertaken over its short period of independent existence, the decision to establish the PRT did bring some tensions between the political and bureaucratic actors, even if, in the end, the mission has been positively evaluated by all the parties concerned (MOD, MFA, Parliament, etc.) with the voices arguing how little good it actually brought to the people on the ground[49] rather in a minority. The mission has been called the greatest gamble in newly post-independence Lithuania. Participants of the decision making process as well as the observers noted how little information was wielded for the establishment of the mission and how little actual planning took place before the decision was taken. In order to explain this, I will look at the factors outlined in the previous section and try to see how they could help to explain this decision.

2.2.1. Importance of the threat

Hynek and Marton found that the importance of threat was rather low across the spectrum of countries participating in the ISAF mission, except for the larger ones that experienced more obvious terrorism threat and could also link the fight in Afghanistan with resolution of some public health issues.[50] Lithuania has not felt jihadi terrorist threat before the missions in Afghanistan

[49] Račius, E. "Trials and tribulations of the Lithuanian participation in the NATO ISAF mission." in Hynek, N., Marton, P. *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction.* London : Routledge, 2012.
[50] Hynek, N., Marton, P. (note 18).

and Iraq started. Quite to the contrary, it was feared by some politicians that the participation in such missions as Iraq and Afghanistan that would put Lithuania on the radar of such terrorist groups.[51]

As it comes to the public health issues, this factor was mentioned at least once during the debates on the participation in the missions. The financial aspects of the operations were always the most debated aspect in the parliament, and one of the arguments of the supporters of these missions was that Lithuania would spend more trying to deal with the consequences of the drug trade than it does in the actual missions.[52] These reasons, however, were never prominent in the discussions of the participation in ISAF.

2.2.2. Alliance dependence

The findings of Hynek and Marton that alliance dependence can explain well the decisions of countries to participate in the mission of ISAF, can be confirmed in the Lithuanian case as well. As previously mentioned, Lithuania looked to NATO for its security guarantees and the discourse on the ISAF mission in general and leading a PRT in particular has necessarily been embroidered with the continuous references to solidarity with other NATO countries, with the arguments about the necessity of Lithuania to contribute to the common effort, to be provider not only consumer of security and the "moral" obligation of the country to be a part of military operations of its partners.

In terms of finances the PRT-NATO protection nexus is often brought up as well. During the parliamentary debates as well as in the wider political discourse, Lithuanian decision to lead a PRT is often connected with the NATO air-policing mission with the main argument being that by leading a PRT the country pays for its share of the NATO air policing of the Baltic states.

The notion of being "security providers, not only consumers" and active participation in the NATO operational efforts is deemed to be giving an additional political weight for the small countries in the alliance. As Piret Paljak writes, "The strong perception in the three Baltic countries is that their participation in international operations (though not only that) has

[51] There was a number of members of the Seimas who continuously raised objections against the deployment of Lithuanian troops abroad with the main arguments usually centring on two issues – that of finances and the most popular argument being that the financial resources needed for these missions will impoverish Lithuanian pensioners; and that of Lithuania becoming a lackey of the US.

[52] See, Seimo stenograma nr. 19(281), 12 April 2007.

given them the political capital to also make their own demands"[53] with the especially welcome possibility to have at least some influence over NATO-Russia relations.

The factor of alliance-dependence can thus explain the participation in the ISAF mission. It does not, however, explain the particular type of participation. By taking upon itself responsibility to lead a PRT Lithuania was going beyond its means and did not behave as the promoters of alliance dependence thesis would suggest.

2.2.3. Systemic pressures of alliance politics

As previously mentioned, participation in the NATO missions was used as a show of commitment before entering the organization and was seen a kind of springboard of the NATO accession. After entry into the organization, when the small states like the Baltic ones could have followed Olson's advice and enjoyed a free ride, however, we see the increased participation in international missions and larger commitments on the ground.[54] This can partly be explained by the enthusiasm of becoming members of the alliance and the need to show the sceptics that the Baltic countries will not be only a burden to the NATO (the difficulty if not impossibility to defend the three states was often stated as an objection to their entrance to the organization). In order to achieve such a change of perception, it was understood that the countries need to be stricter in adherence to the requirements of the organization than the older members themselves. Thus, for example, Estonia is one of the very few countries in the Alliance which proudly adheres to the criteria of spending 2% of its GDP on defence and Lithuania decided to go beyond the usability targets established exactly at a time of their entrance into the organization at the Istanbul summit of 2004. As these requirements stand at 40% of land forces to be deployable to crisis response operations abroad and 8% in an actual deployment, Lithuania set its own usability targets at 50% and 10% respectively.

Kreps analysis found that the systemic pressures to cooperate rise with the increased length of existence of an alliance. The states are more willing to

[53] Paljak, P. (note 48), p.225.

[54] The Lithuanian decision to lead a PRT can be compared with the Latvian participation in the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT) in Nurestan and Kunar and Estonian decision to "specialize" in the special operations forces in the troubled areas of Southern Afghanistan. These two engagements though probably less politically visible are often considered more risky and thus sometimes more valuable. Lithuanian SOFs also participate in ISAF mission already since 2002 and their disengagement is not predicted in the nearest future.

participate and face larger "reputational costs of defection." This analysis was useful to explain states' participation in the Afghanistan campaign, but refusal to do so in Iraq. As Iraq intervention was headed by a 'coalition of the willing' it did not create the same institutional incentives to cooperate as Afghanistan war led by NATO. This factor, however, has little explanatory value for the small new NATO members' participation in the campaign. The "prestige costs" were sometimes mentioned in the debates both in the cases of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars;[55] however, it explains better the continuation of commitment than the decision to join the operation.

2.2.4. State autonomy, elite consensus, space of manoeuver of the executive

Research about the strategic-defence environment of Lithuania points out a couple of important elements with respect to state autonomy. Particular emphasis is put on the lack of public interest in security/defence issues. It has been noted that issues of defence occupy the last places in the lists of concerns that the Lithuanian public expresses. This disinterest has been explained primarily through the idea that "by decisively turning towards the West in 1994, Lithuania has developed an optimal foreign and security policy reflecting the aspirations of its people."[56]

As the public is not interested in defence and security issues,[57] the political parties tend to put notions regarding defence in the last paragraphs of their programmes, and the changing Governments afford them only very limited space in its reports and its plans for action, while the President devotes at best a couple of sentences in the annual speeches to the Parliament.[58] In the division of coalition portfolios, the post of the Minister for Defence is almost never contested and the number of people actually interested in the job is probably as low as three or four. There is therefore little interest for the politicians to raise concerns about defence and security policy and the existence of an elite consensus on hard security can be perceived.

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[55] Žr. Kaučikas, Nerijus. „Kam Lietuvai misija Irake?" [Why Lithuania needs mission in Iraq?] Veidas, nr.37, 15.06.2005.

[56] Miniotaitė, G. "Lithuania's evolving security and defence policy: problems and prospects." in *Lithuanian annual strategic review 2006.* 2007, p.177-178.

[57] Eurobarometer statistical data through the years shows that Lithuanians do not perceive any security or foreign policy problems, such problems being mentioned by only 0-1% of interviewees. See, e.g. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_lt_lt_nat.pdf

[58] Urbelis, V. "Lithuanian Strategic Culture." in *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2006.* 2007, p.197.

Another reason for this consensus is also that the expert community on security and especially defence issues is extremely small, counting only tens of people involved. These are often confined to the institutions working on the defence-security issues, primarily, the Ministry of Defence, with the rest scattered among the Parliamentary Committee on National Defence and Security, President's team, MFA. There is also only a handful researchers writing on the security issues and many of those sit on two chairs (i.e. are also part of the ministries).[59]

The legislature, though nominally in charge of supervision of the executive, in fact lacks the expertise to seriously challenge decisions coming for their approval from the MOD.[60] In addition, the aforementioned elite consensus (which could also be stemming from the lack of interest and expertise) resulted in the inter-party agreements being signed that limit the scope and possibilities of change in the security/defence policies. In 2001, with the NATO membership in sight, all the major political parties signed an agreement on defence policy, which was renewed in 2004, in 2008 and finally in 2012. The details of implementation of these and other general strategic documents (such as National Security Strategy, Military Strategy) are left for the experts and bureaucrats to figure out.

To sum-up, in Lithuania there exists an elite consensus regarding the defence issues, the space of manoeuver for the executive is large, as both the public and (following the public) the politicians show little interest in defence issues. In recent years, no party has gone into elections with the notions of changing the foreign or security policy on the agenda. While there is opposition to some concrete deployments (especially Iraq and Afghanistan), this opposition is mostly ignored on the political level and the parliament continues to support the projects presented to it by the MOD. Finally, though public opinion about the mission has steadily been negative,[61] in line with Kreps argument, participation in the operation continued.

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[59] Ibid., p.198.

[60] As Gricius and Paulauskas write, this problem is common for the new democratic states as few civilians in them "have the knowledge and understanding of the military affairs to serve as civilian defence policy experts" (Paulauskas, K. and Gricius, A. "Democratic Control over the Armed Forces in Lithuania" in *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2002*, p.246)

[61] The support for the mission hovered at around 20-30% throughout the period of engagement. See, e.g. „Realių grėsmių Lietuvai nėra, o jei bus mus apgins NATO?" [There are no real threats for Lithuania and if there would be we would be protected by NATO?] in http://www.spinter.lt/site/lt/vidinis/menutop/9/home/publish/NDYxOzk7OzA= and Žukauskaitė, L. „Taikos rėmimo operacijų įtaka Lietuvos kariuomenės įvaizdžiui" [Influence of support for the International operations on the image of Lithuanian armed forces] in Kardas 2009 Nr.2 (473) for some statistics.

2.2.5. Bureaucratic politics and organizational interests

Legally, the decisions regarding armed forces' missions abroad when they contain a potential combat element should be approved by the Parliament. When the proposal to lead a PRT was presented to Lithuania, however, it was not yet clear how to act in such a high profile engagement. It was therefore decided that the highest defence authority in the state – the State Defence Council, members of which are the President of the country, the Speaker of Parliament, the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and the Commander of Armed Forces – should formulate the decision regarding this issue.

Yet, even such a high-profile decision making suffered from the same flaws that dr. Urbelis describes: "Lithuanian defence bureaucracy, that includes high ranking military officials, clearly establishes rules of the game. Others either have no expertise (political parties), or interest (public), or money (academic community)."[62]

When the proposal to lead a PRT came to the table of Lithuanian decision makers, this proposal was instantly forwarded to the MOD, which prepared military advice. Even though the decision itself was discussed at various levels (starting from internal ministerial discussions ending with the highest level – National Security Council), various misgivings that the officials other than MOD had[63], the military establishment managed to overrule these misgivings. It emphasized its readiness to lead the PRT and the use that it would give both the country in the eyes of the NATO partners and the Armed Forces themselves in terms of invaluable experience. Eventually, the decision was made based solely on the military advice.[64] Clearly, the lack of expertise in other governmental institutions on defence matters allowed the point of view of the military to take the upper hand and push through a decision that seemed to be useful for its position and internal development.

[62] Urbelis, V. (note 58), p.198.

[63] E.g. the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister himself had doubts about the costs and availability of the civilian element of the operation.

[64] Urbelis, V. "NATO transformacijos iššūkiai Lietuvai." [Challenges of NATO transformation for Lithuania] in Jakniūnaitė, D. and Paulauskas, K. eds. *Beieškant NATO Lietuvoje.* Vilnius : Vilniaus Universiteto Leidykla, 2010., p.165.

2.2.6. Strategic culture/state identity explanations

Lithuanian strategic culture is often described as Atlanticist and militaristic.[65] These two factors, in addition to a specific situation of the country in 2005, explain pretty well the Lithuanian desire to undertake such a complex mission as that of leading a PRT. Diplomatic cables disclosed by Wikileaks in 2011 reveal that as it became increasingly clear that a joint Baltic PRT will not materialize, the US started exercising political pressure[66] on one of the three countries – Lithuania – and seemed to have found in it the right target. Lithuania being the largest of the three Baltic countries and with a long and cherished history of statehood and even imperial extent, was always the most ambitious when it came to the foreign policy. When the accession to the Euro-Atlantic alliances has become a reality, Lithuanian foreign policy, until then exclusively oriented to achieve this goal, had to be reconsidered. The first years in the EU and NATO have thus been characterized not only by the euphoric feelings and sense of accomplishment, but also by the frantic search for a new meaning. It was therefore with great enthusiasm that the country's foreign affairs establishment jumped on the idea of regional leadership emanating from the US and first introduced in the Polish policy debate from which it came to the Lithuanian one. The result was a "hyperactive", overly ambitious foreign policy rather mismatched with the size and resources of the country.[67]

Calls to lead a PRT came exactly in this climate in which Lithuania, new member of the EU and NATO, started taking seriously its role as a regional leader, with a responsibility to promote peace and democracy in the Eastern neighbourhood and in general play a larger international role. It is also against this background that the decision to take the responsibility to lead the PRT has to be understood. While there obviously was some pressure from the US side

[65] Militaristic strategic culture is defined by "how much attention is devoted to the military instrument within the broad spectrum of security and foreign policy tools, in how far the carriers of strategic culture are willing and ready to use this instrument, and what kind of boundaries to its use exist" (Šešelgytė, M. "Lithuania" in Biehl, H., Giegerich, B., Jonas, A., eds. *Strategic Cultures in Europe. Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent.* Potsdam: Springer, 2013, p. 221. See also Urbelis, V. (note 58)).

[66] In a commentary, one of the researchers analysing the documents called it the "pressure of unprecedented level" arguing that it was only against this pressure that the Lithuanian politicians reluctantly gave in and decided to show their support for the establishment of a PRT. (BNS. E. Račius: Wikileaks dokumentai rodo, jog Lietuvos politikai nusileido JAV spaudimui dėl Afganistano [E. Račius: Wikileaks documents show that the Lithuanian politicians gave in to the pressure of US regarding Afghanistan] *delfi.lt.* [Online] 11 09 2011. [Cited: 23 02 2013.] at www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=49513320) My reading of the documents and discussion with the other observers of the process hardly support such a one-dimensional view of the decision making. True enough, the Americans did press for more commitment, yet, there were more domestic interests at play and the American requests, it could be said, was music to Lithuanian ears.

[67] Šešelgytė (note 65), p. 219.

to take the leadership position, there was also a great national need for fulfilling greater regional ambitions in Lithuania. If the country wanted to be a regional leader, influencing a large post-Soviet space from Minsk to Baku, it could hardly reject a call to become a lead-nation in a small province of Afghanistan. The cost of defection and a blow to prestige that such a defection would entail also explains why when the costs of operation started to rise exponentially, when the financial crisis hit and it became clear that Lithuania has harder and harder time fulfilling its obligations, the PRT continued its business as usual.

As for the "militaristic" part of the description of Lithuanian strategic culture, the importance of the military instrument in its foreign policy is always emphasized and the participation in international operations is seen as a tool to advance foreign policy agenda. When it comes to the concrete implementation of the missions, the foreign affairs bureaucracy leaves it all to the military colleagues. It thus comes as no surprise that the country participated actively in the engagement in Afghanistan, but saw the establishment of PRT through a rather purely military lens.[68]

It was thus the perceived military readiness for such a mission that had the most important weight in the decision-making regarding the PRT. This readiness itself, however, was also more based on wishful thinking and a desire to do things than on a real assessment of the situation. Lithuania plunged into the mission as into the greatest gamble, without much prior knowledge of where it was going,[69] without adequate understanding of what it entailed[70]

[68] While there was some emphasis on the civilian projects in the Lithuanian media, these had considerably minor importance than the military side. For the critique of this approach see (Račius, E. "Lithuania in the NATO mission in Afghanistan: Between Idealism and Pragmatism", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2009-2010* and Račius, E. (note 49).

[69] The Lithuanian delegation wanted to get another province for establishment of its PRT, Badghis province which was rather small and close to the Italian Forward Support Base in Herat. Yet, when Spain sent a helicopter squadron to the RC West, it got to choose a province for PRT and chose Badghis. Lithuanians were thus left with Ghor. According to one official, the knowledge about the latter province in the country amounted to a "couple of journalistic reports about the World Food Program convoys … trying to reach the land ravaged by famine and snow" (see, Baublys, D. "Lietuviai Gore: be ambicijų skaičiuoti inauguracines juosteles" [Lithuanians in Ghor: Without ambitions to count inauguration ribbons] in Bernardinai.lt, 2006, http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/-/28048 Another MFA official called the province "the far side of the moon" (Vilnius, Embassy. "PRT Roadmap: From Lithuania to Afghanistan." In *Wikileaks.* [Online] 28 01 2005. [Cited: 25 02 2013.] www.wikileaks.org).

[70] Initially, it was believed that the mission will not weigh heavily on the budget of the country, it was thought that 8-9 mln litas/a year (2.3-2.6 mln euros) will be enough. Yet, soon the costs rose to 64 mln litas (18 mln euros) for the military part alone. (Račius (note 49), p. 266). It was also believed that the Americans will provide all the logistics support for the PRT for the length of its duration, yet, this support has largely dried out after two years, when the PRT got established and operational.

and with high hopes that quickly appeared rather empty.[71] This was a unique occasion of decision making where the dreams of some people[72] took shape in a favourable environment, where the visions of grandeur had more hold of the imaginations of political decision-makers than the harsh assessments of reality. In the atmosphere of the euphoria of finally being a part of the Western institutions, it seemed for Lithuanians that the sky was the limit and that they can pull off any great project that they can come up with. Eventually, the gamble played off, but the experience brought caution to decision making as well.

Conclusions

Forster and Cimbala write, "human nature tends to dictate that each individual holds its values in higher esteem than its neighbour … this means that others' contributions are never counted objectively. As a result, others' contributions are never viewed as sufficient."[73] The burden-sharing debate on the political level seems to suffer from this type of subjectivity. As it can be seen in the analysis above, subjective reasoning was also in the background of decision making regarding the establishment of Lithuanian PRT.

When assessing factors advanced in the literature to analyse the Lithuanian decision to establish the PRT, it appears that not all of them are relevant for explaining the Lithuanian decision. From systemic factors, alliance dependence may explain participation itself, though not the form it took. From the "domestic" factors, two were most important: first, its strategic

[71] The greatest issue here was the promised support for the PRT. As was mentioned before, it was believed in Lithuania that the US will keep supporting Lithuanian PRT logistically and also provide development funds, yet, the latter support was indeed meager. Only years after its establishment did PRT receive any substantial contribution for development projects. In addition, it was believed that many countries will send their personnel to become a part of the Lithuanian-led PRT. Yet, the diplomatic correspondance disclosed by wikileaks shows the sad story where such hopes were dashed one by one, with the potential allies pulling out from the support for the Lithuanian PRT with the initial mission supported only by the modest deployments of Danes, Croats and Icelanders.

[72] The then-Commander of Armed Forces Gen. Valdas Tutkus and Col. (now General) Gintautas Zenkevičius charged with the creation of military advice for the project, were the ones who were the most enthusiastic for the project with the gen. Tutkus especially emphasizing the training aspect of the mission. As he once expressed himself: We could not imagine a surgeon operating right after leaving the University. The same is with the Armed Forces without practical skills, without having smelled the gunpowder or heard the explosions they are worth little. Exercise, no matter how intensive, how close to the battle conditions, will never replace the experience gained in the military operation. (Tutkus, V. "Kariuomenės vado žodis apie Lietuvos kariuomenės dalyvavimo PAG ir kitose tarptautinėse taikos rėmimo operacijose reikšmę." [Word of the Chief of Armed Forces on the importance of participation in PRT and other international peace support operations] *Kardas.* 2007, vols. 5-6)

[73] Forster, P.K., Cimbala S. (note 7), p.18.

culture, especially, the idea that was developed at a time of Lithuania as a leader of the region and "militaristic" view of its foreign policy; and second, bureaucratic politics. As was pointed out, the Lithuanian decision making regarding defence and security policy is heavily dependent upon the expert opinion. Before the establishment and during the entire period of functioning of the PRT, the military readiness to lead the PRT and the usefulness of it for the military has been continuously emphasized.

Other elements advanced in the literature have some explanatory power in analysing this decision. The freedom of executive and political consensus helps explain the ease with which such an important and costly (primarily financially, but also potentially in terms of human losses – Lithuania lost one soldier in the PRT, a very low casualty rate, but the decision makers could hardly have known that in advance) decision has been taken. The level of dependence for the formulation of defence decisions on the military and defence bureaucrats explains why there was so little discussion about the issue.

These two elements, however, do not explain the particular shape of the contribution. The fact that Lithuania, contrary to its Baltic sisters, decided to take the lead in such an important endeavour should be explained by the search for its new identity and the ability of the military to push forward its interests. This aspect of decision making which proved to be so important in the Lithuanian case is, however, not adequately researched in the current literature on burden sharing and provides a possibly fruitful avenue for future investigations.[74]

Egdūnas Račius predicted in 2010 that "Lithuania will have to withdraw from the mission shamefully (and possibly with losses)."[75] Yet nothing of the kind happened. Even though on some levels (especially where development projects are concerned) the mission could have done better, it has been a success on many others. The Lithuanian Armed Forces are particularly pleased about it, as it enhanced training, helped develop the legal basis for such missions, forced to organize the logistic support and provided invaluable leadership experiences and gave understanding of the type of missions the country wants to participate in and the capabilities it has for them. The small state's greatest gamble was a very lucky one.

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[74] Gricius and Paulauskas noticed that in Lithuania MOD „sometimes behaves as a lobbying group rather than an impartial government institution" (Gricius, Paulauskas (note 60), p.229) though they only provide a couple of examples to that regard.

[75] Račius, E. (note 68), p. 206.