
POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE BALTIC REGION IN THE BRITISH SECURITY STRATEGY AFTER THE BEGINNING OF RUSSIA'S SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION

N. V. Eremina 



St. Petersburg State University,
7–9 Universitetskaya Embankment, St. Petersburg, 199034, Russia

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The article presents an analysis of contemporary British military-political strategy in the Baltic region. Since 2014, there has been a notable increase in British presence in the area, leading to multiple security risks for Russia, particularly since 2022. This is due to the fact that the UK has increasingly linked its national security threats to Russia's policy towards Ukraine, as well as in the Black Sea and Baltic regions. By focusing on Russia's positions in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, the UK has defined its security priorities, explicitly connecting them to countering "threats from Russia and preventing Russia from gaining strategic advantages as a result of the situation in Ukraine," as clearly stated in the 2023 Security Review. It is no coincidence that British military strategists have started emphasizing the interconnectedness of the Baltic and Black Sea regions, as well as the Baltic and Arctic regions, highlighting the necessity of ensuring security in one part by addressing security challenges in others — primarily by limiting Russia's influence. Through an analysis of key British security documents within the framework of the regional security complex theory, the author demonstrates how the Baltic Sea region has become a crucial link for British military strategists, connecting the Far North and Eastern Europe.

The aim of the article is to determine how the UK's security interests are connected to and pursued through its interactions with the Baltic Sea region countries. To achieve this, the following research objectives have been set: to analyse the conceptual and strategic goals of the UK in the field of security and the implementation of its national interests; to outline the role and significance of the Baltic Sea region within the UK's broader international security strategy; and to identify specific tactical approaches employed by the UK to advance its national interests through cooperation with NATO countries in the region.

Keywords:

Baltic Sea Region, Arctic, United Kingdom, Russia, NATO, security

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Introduction

Research in the field of security over the past five years shows that the Baltic Sea region is becoming important for many NATO members. These countries are participating in joint military exercises, expanding their presence, and emphasizing shared responsibility for the security of the Baltic states. The concepts of the ‘Baltic-Scandinavian region’ and ‘Baltic-Black Sea region’ have entered military-political usage [1–6]. This allows us to speak about the geopolitical regionalization of the Baltic region. Kaledin and Elatskov point out that “in the broadest sense, one can consider not just the Baltic region as such, but the Baltic regional geopolitical system. It covers not only the Baltic region itself, understood in one sense or another, but also geopolitical relations with external actors having geopolitical interests in the region and significantly involved in them” [7, p. 149]. However, interactions in the Baltic region are not driven by individual countries but rather by their cooperation within NATO, whose position in the region has been strengthened by the accession of Finland and Sweden [8–11]. Smirnov notes that the governments of Finland and Sweden declared the process of joining NATO irreversible, citing the threats that arose in Europe in the so-called post-Crimean period [12, p. 44]. Ovcharuk points out that the accession of Sweden and Finland significantly strengthened NATO presence in the region: it increased the capabilities of the Alliance, the length of the border with Russia almost doubled, and allowed the use of the existing and the development of new military infrastructure in large areas.¹ However, the increase in opportunities has also led to an increase in risks, and therefore, in reality, has become the cause of escalation in the region. Zverev and Mezhevich note the strengthening of NATO as a whole precisely due to its more “rigid assembly” in the Baltic region [13]. Khudoley draws attention to the diametrically opposed positions of NATO and the Russian Federation on the security situation in the region, which will not allow for the formation of a dialogue.² As a result, researchers note a collapse of security for Russia, its specific regions and its allied Belarus without the possibility of resolving the problem using previous diplomatic methods.³ The problem is that NATO countries have doubled the number of their soldiers in the region

¹ Ovcharuk, A. P. 2022, NATO turns the Baltic Sea into a region of instability, *IMEMO RAS*, URL: <https://www.imemo.ru/news/events/text/nato-turns-the-baltic-sea-into-a-region-of-instability> (accessed 10.01.2024).

² Khudoley, K. K. 2023, The Baltic Sea Region: New Realities and Problems, *Valdai International Discussion Club*, 08.12.2023, URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/region-baltiyskogo-morya> (accessed 10.02.2024).

³ Nosovich, A. 2022, Russia risks losing the Kaliningrad region after Sweden and Finland join NATO, *RUBALTIC.RU*, URL: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/editorial/20220523-rossiya-riskuet-poteryat-kaliningradskuyu-oblast-posle-vstupleniya-shvetsii-ifinlyandii-v-nato> (accessed 10.01.2024).

since 2022 and have increased patrolling of the Baltic airspace [14, p. 71]. Zverev rightly points out that “the Baltic region has become one of the most conflict-prone regions along the perimeter of Russian borders” [15, p. 27].

A special role in the Baltic region belongs to the UK, which has been present there and developing its economic interests since the 18th century [16]. But now we are witnessing its large-scale influence on the region, and the desire to play a more significant role in Northern and Eastern Europe. This is necessary for the global positioning of the UK in key points of the world within the framework of the implementation of the concept of ‘Global Britain’ and due to the growth, as it seems to the British, of threats from Russia [17–19].

Since security issues represent a tangle of interconnected challenges, and the modern state is involved in numerous partnerships (alliances, regional organizations, international institutions), including within a specific geographic region, the author of the article follows the methodology developed by Buzan and Wæver to identify trends in the development of regional security complexes.

The concept of regional security complexes (RSC) not only allows for a clear definition of a region’s characteristics but also explains the growing importance of a region through the interplay of regional and global security levels, driven by the involvement of other states (in this case, the UK) in regional affairs [20; 21]. The region is characterized by a set of features that unite territories (countries) into a *de facto* geographic cluster. This means that the states in the region are compelled to engage in both intensive cooperation and a shared understanding of security issues.

In accordance with the methodology for studying the regional security complex in the context of the UK’s international policy, using the Baltic region as a case study, the following steps were taken: 1) In the first stage, the strategic documents of the UK were analyzed to identify the country’s overall approach to security. This step was essential for understanding how the UK perceives the hierarchy of regional security complexes (RSCs), as outlined in its defense and security strategies; 2) In the second stage, the study focused on determining the UK’s specific approach to the Baltic region’s RSC.

The strategic objectives of the UK were correlated with their implementation within the framework of international agreements through the country’s participation in various regional, primarily military-political, organizations, especially since the general perception of the Baltic Sea region is also shaped by the participation of its states in NATO. In this case, the following criteria of the RSC are important: their role in shaping risks for a particular state and its national interests; the state’s response system to security challenges in the region with an emphasis on military-political cooperation between states. Taken together, this made it possible to identify how the UK’s security interests are linked and resolved through interaction with the Baltic region through the identification and securitization of security risks since Buzan and Wæver advocate the idea that the RSC is determined by the presence of common security problems that cannot be solved inde-

pendently of each other. This approach, through securitization, allowed Britain to interact with the states of the region in ensuring common security and, even more, to achieve a similar solution in neighbouring regions (the Arctic, the Black Sea) by solving security problems in a particular Baltic region in order to form a common security architecture with Britain's participation.

UK Security Strategy review: key challenges and partnership with NATO

To establish the importance of the Baltic region in the UK's international security system, it is necessary to analyze common strategic principles in understanding security in general. The Government of the United Kingdom publishes comprehensive reviews of the state of defence and its development approximately every five years, sometimes more often or less frequently, as well as White Papers, which are based on prepared reviews and propose specific security policy strategies for a long period of time. They are the main documents in the field of security and defense. The latest review to date was published in 2023, and it outlines the country's security objectives until 2030. After Brexit, the UK revised its defense and security strategy several times. So, immediately after the country's withdrawal from the EU on February 1, 2020, the government approved the idea of a "Global Britain". After the start of the special military operation (SMO) by Russia, the British began to use practical examples to justify their global presence in regions connected with Russia in one way or another. Among them, the importance of the Baltic region has increased significantly for Britain. In this regard, the question arises: what place does the Baltic region play in the security strategy after the start of the SMO? The answer to this question is necessary for the Russian Foreign Ministry to develop appropriate solutions. To answer this question, we will analyze the strategic British documents from 2023, paying attention to how they represent global interests, including taking into account the Baltic region, and what approaches are proposed to protect them. In 2023, the UK Department of Defense published another Integrated Security Review, which was a response to the events of 2022.¹ It justifies the following risks for the UK: the growth of new conflicts in the world, Russia's military capabilities and potential, the unpredictability of a number of international players like Iran and North Korea, and the escalating rivalry with China. Therefore, it is not surprising that the following urgent tasks were identified: strengthening the ideology of "Global Britain", modernizing the armed forces, and strengthening cooperation with key military and political partners, primarily the United States. All the above mentioned tasks are already being implemented in the Baltic region.

¹ Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, 2023, *HM Government*, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/641d72f45155a2000c6ad5d5/11857435_NS_IR_Refresh_2023_Supply_AllPages_Revision_7_WEB_PDF.pdf (accessed 15.03.2024).

Firstly, the concept of “Global Britain” was supposed, in the opinion of the British, to demonstrate the country’s international significance by showing its readiness to engage in solving international problems on the principles of shared leadership with NATO partners.¹ Let us immediately emphasize that it is Europe and the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole that are named as a priority for the UK’s security. For example, Africa and the Middle East are only part of the so-called wider neighbourhood in Britain’s international policy² (For more information on the hierarchy of regions from a security perspective, see [19]).

Secondly, although the 2023 Review sees the most valuable relations for the British with the countries of the Anglo-Saxon bloc, they are not leaving the European region after Brexit. Thus, the 2023 Review clarified the UK’s positions in specific regions to implement its national interests, drawing attention to the risks in Europe, primarily in the Black Sea and Baltic regions in connection with the events in Ukraine. It is the Ukrainian crisis that is now seen as the main threat to Britain’s security and interests, since the British associate it with the possibility of Russia’s growing international influence, and, therefore, the emergence of restrictions on the implementation of the concept of “Global Britain”, at least in Europe. This has now forced the British to reconsider and adapt this concept. Therefore, the main focus is on the task of countering Russia, which is called in the Review an unpredictable player capable of delivering high-precision strikes.³ Moreover, the British position on chemical, biological and nuclear threats, which the British associate with Russia in their official strategy, is particularly noteworthy. Such provisions should be considered as direct risks for our country. In addition, the British admit that they cannot independently mitigate these imaginary threats.⁴

¹ Defence in competitive age, 2021, *Ministry of Defence*, p. 2, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974661/CP411_-_Defence_Command_Plan.pdf (accessed 01.03.2024) ; Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2023, *HM Government*, p. 2, 66—68, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf (accessed 29.02.2024).

² Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, 2023, *GOV.UK*, p. 25, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world/> (accessed 29.02.2024) ; Chapter 2: The UK’s Africa strategy. The priority afforded to Africa by UK governments, Select Committee on International Relations and Defence, The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation, URL: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldselect/ldintrel/88/8805.htm> (accessed 29.02.2024).

³ Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, 2023, *HM Government*, p. 42, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world/> (accessed 15.03.2024).

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 33.

Thirdly, military-political cooperation with the United States is perceived as necessary to strengthen Britain's position in Europe, especially in the Baltic region. According to the British, cooperation in Europe should be strengthened through constant exercises, the British presence in Estonia and Poland, and missions to protect air and sea space with the participation of NATO naval groups, i.e. this is specifically and primarily about the Baltic region [22]. In the 2023 Review, the task of the British presence in the North as a whole to unite the Baltic and Arctic flanks is considered important.¹ This, in turn, allows Northern and Eastern Europe to be linked in military-political strategy. It is not surprising that Britain's relations with the Baltic states (primarily Estonia), Poland and Ukraine are listed as priorities.² In implementing their tasks in the region, the British rely on cooperation with NATO as a whole, especially in the area of nuclear weapons.³

The Baltic region in British defence strategy⁴

The Baltic region is considered by the British as part of the Northern macroregion, in which the Baltic Sea countries cooperate with the Arctic states. The UK traditionally relies on the Northern European states and develops multi-format interactions in the Nordic-Baltic region, since it itself belongs to the Northern European states⁵. These countries also call themselves valuable partners for the British in the context of strengthening stability and countering Russia's influence. Britain's Baltic NATO allies insist on increasing their importance in the Euro-Atlantic security structure, proposing, for example, to rely on the concept of the "Greater North". It means that the security of the Baltic states must be considered in tandem with the security of Britain's northern allies.⁶ The British call the North critically important for the security of the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole. But they still consider the Baltic region to be its most vulnerable part, since it is a link

¹ Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, 2023, *HM Government*, p. 40–41, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world> (accessed 15.03.2024).

² *Ibid.* P. 20.

³ *Ibid.* P. 33.

⁴ NATO included the countries of the Baltic Sea region — Poland in 1999, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2004, Finland in 2023, Sweden in 2024, despite the fact that Germany became a member of the Alliance in 1955, and Denmark has been a founding member of NATO since 1949.

⁵ Countries or areas / geographical regions, *United Nations*, URL: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/> (accessed 19.09.2024).

⁶ Jermalavičius, T., Billion-Galland, A. 2023, British Power in Baltic Weather: The UK's Role in Nordic-Baltic Security and UK-Estonia Defence Cooperation, *The International Centre for Defence and Security*, URL: <https://icds.ee/en/british-power-in-baltic-weather-the-uks-role-in-nordic-baltic-security-and-uk-estonia-defence-cooperation/> (accessed 20.01.2024).

in the formation of Euro-Atlantic security, taking into account its proximity to Russia, its connectivity with Eastern Europe, and its access to the Arctic and the Atlantic as a whole.¹

It is easy to see that since 2023, the UK has been paying closer attention to the logistical link between the Baltic and Arctic regions, which collectively represent the concept of the North of Europe for the UK's security strategy. It was the factor of Russia's international strengthening, the operation in Ukraine and the endless calls for strengthening security from the Baltic countries that led to the UK developing an approach to the so-called broad neighbourhood located on the periphery of the Euro-Atlantic in 2023. This approach connected the Baltic and Arctic regions, as the British refer to the Arctic as a "periphery" in their documents. In addition, in 2023, Britain's new Arctic strategy was published, which stated that the country would defend its Arctic interests by promoting NATO's positions in the region and in Northern Europe as a whole.² The participation of British forces in the formation of NATO's total control over the exits to the Arctic through the Baltic allows the British to declare "Britain's global presence from the Arctic to Antarctic".³ To strengthen its presence in the Baltic region, the British have set up the Joint Expeditionary Force, which includes ten NATO allies. Its aim is to provide security for NATO countries in the High North, the North Atlantic and the Baltic region, mainly through annual exercises.⁴ The actions of the British will be presented in more detail in the third part of the article.

The Baltic region is of great importance to the British, not only because of its connection to the Arctic but also because of its proximity to Eastern Europe. Britain calls itself a leader in maintaining security on NATO's Eastern European flank. To this end, interactions with Estonia and Poland are important to the country,⁵ especially since the Baltic region countries themselves persistently propose their anti-Russian practices.⁶

¹ Depledge, D. 2019, Britain, Estonia and the Wider North, *RUSI*, URL: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/britain-estonia-and-wider-north> (accessed 12.01.2024).

² Looking North: the UK and the Arctic. The United Kingdom's Arctic Policy Framework, 2023, *UK Government*, URL: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e38ed3e90e0762637e30d0/looking-north-the-uk-and-the-arctic-the-uks-arctic-policy-framework.pdf> (accessed 29.02.2024).

³ Annual Report and Accounts 2022 – 23 For the year ended 31 March 2023. *Ministry of Defence*, p. 3, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1172507/MoD_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23.pdf (accessed 11.03.2024).

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 31.

⁵ *Ibid.* P. 25.

⁶ Jermalavičius, T., Billion-Galland, A. 2023, British Power in Baltic Weather: The UK's Role in Nordic-Baltic Security and UK-Estonia Defence Cooperation, *The International Centre for Defence and Security*, URL: <https://icds.ee/en/british-power-in-baltic-weather-the-uks-role-in-nordic-baltic-security-and-uk-estonia-defence-cooperation/> (accessed 20.01.2024).

In addition, the UK is actively promoting the narrative of the Baltic-Black Sea region, which is the most strategically important for Russia. It is not surprising, therefore, that within the framework of the International Fund for the Support of Ukraine, the British cooperate primarily with the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Lithuania). These countries have jointly accumulated over 520 million pounds for the Fund, which provided the supply of more than 10 thousand units of anti-tank weapons, more than 200 thousand sets of ammunition and more than 300 infantry fighting vehicles.¹

The importance of the Baltic region is confirmed by regular discussions of security issues in the country's Parliament. Thus, members of the House of Commons draw attention to the fact that it is in the Baltic region that it is possible to confront Russia first and foremost and prepare for this confrontation thanks to NATO.² British parliamentarians are discussing the readiness of both NATO as a whole and the United Kingdom individually to repel possible attacks with conventional weapons, and the emphasis in these debates is on the Baltic flank, pointing to the lack of preparedness of their own armed forces (in particular, this idea was expressed by high-ranking NATO military personnel, while Russia's influence on Lithuania is associated with an additional threat from Belarus).³ Parliamentarians also discuss internal threats to all Baltic countries from the Russian-speaking minority.⁴ The British associate cooperation with the United States and NATO as a whole with the main way to counter threats in the region. Thus, when discussing the Sixth Report of the 2022—2023 session, members of the House of Commons noted that Britain's leadership in NATO is considered literally as "a vital component of relations between the United States and the United Kingdom, while the Baltic region allows Britain to lead both to the Far North and the North Atlantic".⁵ An additional emphasis in the discussion of the supposed threats to Britain and the Baltic region from Russia is the certain "knowledge" of Russia that the Baltic countries share with British parliamentarians.⁶

It should be noted that the UK strategy for the Baltic region is fully aligned with NATO strategy. Immediately after the launch of the SMO, NATO confirmed

¹ Ibid. P. 6.

² Brooke-Holland, L. 2022, UK forces in Estonia, *House of Commons Library*, p. 1—4, URL: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9639/CBP-9639.pdf> (accessed 09.07.2024).

³ The UK and NATO's capacity to respond, 2014, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two-NATO — Defence Committee*, URL: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/358/35807.htm> (accessed 09.07.2024).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Special Relationships? US, UK and NATO, Sixth Report of Session 2022–23, 2023, *UK Parliament*, URL: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmdfence/184/report.html> (accessed 09.07.2024).

⁶ War in Ukraine — the threat to the Baltic states, *UK Parliament*, URL: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/committee-corridor-podcast/committee-corridor-war-in-ukraine---the-threat-to-the-baltic-states/> (accessed 09.07.2024).

the general approach of 2014, which identified Russia as the main threat to the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. At the same time, NATO pointed to the main areas of confrontation with Moscow, including the Baltic, Black Sea and Mediterranean regions.¹

Thus, the SMO, which the British call “the Russian invasion of Ukraine,” became for them a formal pretext to strengthen their own presence in the Baltic region, to declare themselves as a leader in maintaining security on NATO’s eastern flank, placing the main emphasis on interaction with Estonia and Poland.²

UK security and defence activities in the Baltic region

The updated Integrated Security and Defense Review of 2023 were welcomed not only in the UK, but also in the Baltic region, as it emphasized Russia’s “aggressiveness” as well as Britain’s role in ensuring the security of Northern Europe, which includes the Baltic States and the Far North. Therefore, practical cooperation with Estonia, Poland and Finland is considered important for the British in 2023.³

The UK’s support for its Baltic partner countries is primarily through its military presence. Currently, British units in the region are based in Estonia and Poland and support NATO’s air mission in the Baltic. In November 2022, Estonia and the UK signed a Security Roadmap. It outlines the following areas of activity: increasing the effectiveness of existing battle groups, strengthening Estonia and strengthening the defence of the Baltic region. Estonia has committed to providing the British contingent with additional accommodation and other support facilities.⁴

The United Kingdom also invited Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway and Denmark to join defense efforts, bringing them under the new Command of the Joint Forces of the North in Norfolk. Another way to strengthen the Baltic region is through cooperation within the framework of the Nordic Countries Forum between Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Its members cooperate at the level of defence ministers to discuss security issues with the aim

¹ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022, *NATO*, URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf (accessed 09.07.2024).

² Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23 For the year ended 31 March 2023. *Ministry of Defence*, p. 25, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1172507/MoD_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23.pdf (accessed 11.03.2024).

³ Jermalavičius, T., Billion-Galland, A. 2023, British Power in Baltic Weather: The UK’s Role in Nordic-Baltic Security and UK-Estonia Defence Cooperation, *The International Centre for Defence and Security*, URL: <https://icds.ee/en/british-power-in-baltic-weather-the-uks-role-in-nordic-baltic-security-and-uk-estonia-defence-cooperation/> (accessed 20.01.2024).

⁴ Joint Statement between the UK MOD and the Estonian MOD, 8 November 2022, *GOV.UK*, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-between-the-uk-mod-and-the-estonian-mod> (accessed 11.03.2024).

of achieving further integration of the armed forces. The Forum also develops a common stance on the policy towards Russia. In addition, London has contributed to the formation and development of the following defence structures: the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO) between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; the Scandinavian-Baltic Eight (NB8), which includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden — in particular, through the NB8 + UK format. At the same time, the British support civilian expert structures, such as the Aurora Forum, through which security experts meet with officials. This forum is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Commonwealth Affairs in order to deepen ties between like-minded partners after Brexit.¹

Over the past decade, the UK has recognized the need for a broader approach to the Baltic region, linking the Arctic and Eastern Europe through it. In particular, the British believe that the regions of the High North and the Baltic are inseparable in strategic terms (especially since defence cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries was formalized in 1992). The British believe that a security crisis in the Baltic region will inevitably trigger a reaction from the countries of the Far North, which want to strengthen their own defense capabilities, and vice versa. Meanwhile, in such a crisis, the British expect both regions to count on their support.

Cooperation with Estonia is becoming central to Britain, where exercises are being held that have seen around 1,000 British troops stationed in the country as part of a mission known as Operation Kabrit.² The British are clearly implementing NATO's strategy of strengthening the Baltic flank by sending additional troops to Estonia and Poland. The enhanced forward presence is just one aspect of the UK's broader support for NATO.³

In addition, NATO members, including Britain, are conducting large-scale exercises in the Baltic Sea ("BALTOPS"). We would like to emphasize that a large British military headquarters has been deployed in the Baltic region to support the Joint Expeditionary Force. The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is "a multinational defense structure created to ensure the security of the Far North, the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea region in response to global security challenges".⁴

¹ NORDEFECO, URL: <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco> (accessed 25.03.2024) ; <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/lithuanias-foreign-vice-minister-skusevicius-attends-the-nordic-baltic-uk-foreign-ministers-meeting:33195> (accessed 25.03.2024) ; Aurora Forum, URL: <https://auroraforum.co.uk/about/> (accessed 25.03.2024).

² Deployment Baltics, URL: <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/baltics/> (accessed 09.07.2024) ; Depledge, D. 2019, Britain, Estonia and the Wider North, *RUSI*, URL: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/britain-estonia-and-wider-north> (accessed 12.01.2024).

³ Ibid.

⁴ What is the Joint Expeditionary Force, URL: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10074/CBP-10074.pdf> (accessed 09.07.2024).

The permanent headquarters of the Joint Force is based in London, with units in Lithuania and Latvia, and liaison officers from the UK are in Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Sweden. Therefore, in general, it is the British who coordinate the military activities of the Joint Expeditionary Force countries in the Baltic Sea region.¹

An equally important practical example of cooperation between the countries of the region and the United Kingdom can be considered the joint activities of London and Tallinn at the Cyber Defense Center in Estonia, which even culminated in their joint bid to form the headquarters of the NATO Defense Innovation Catalyst in the North Atlantic in 2022. Estonia and the United Kingdom jointly manage the European regional office of this headquarters [24].²

Another important example of practical support is the regular visits of British diplomats to the countries of the region. These visits are primarily related to the Ukrainian crisis and SMO. Thus, the heads of various British governments, as a result of negotiations, consistently strengthened the grouping in Poland and Estonia, sent RAF Typhoon fighters to ensure the security of the airspace of the Baltic and other European regions in the face of increasing threats in Ukraine.³ The Labour Party representative David Lammy, appointed as the UK Foreign Secretary after the elections on 4 July 2024, confirmed all agreements with partners during his visit to Poland.⁴ There are currently around 10,000 British men in Europe, mostly involved in logistics and sending military supplies to Ukraine (via Poland), further underlining the importance of the Baltic region for the UK.⁵

By the beginning of 2024, it can be stated that the British have proven their leadership in ensuring the security of the Baltic region. Thus, on January 11, 2024, the command of the land contingent of the NATO response force was delegated to the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps of Great Britain. As a result, 16,000 British Army

¹ Joint Expeditionary Force deploys to the Baltics. May 2022, *GOV.UK*, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-expeditionary-force-deploys-to-the-baltics> (accessed 15.03.2024).

² Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23 For the year ended 31 March 2023. *Ministry of Defence*, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1172507/MoD_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23.pdf (accessed 11.03.2024); NATO enhances technological advantage through innovation initiatives, *NATO*, URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/news_194587.htm?selectedLocale=ru (accessed 11.03.2024).

³ Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23 For the year ended 31 March 2023. *Ministry of Defence*, p. 33, URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1172507/MoD_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23.pdf (accessed 11.03.2024); Allison, G. 2022, Britain deploying more fighters to Cyprus, *UK Defence Journal*, URL: <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/britain-deploying-more-fighters-to-cyprus-amid-russia-tensions> (accessed 10.01.2024).

⁴ Zehra Nur Düz, 2024, Britain's new top diplomat travels to Poland for discussions on Ukraine, *Anadolu Agency*, URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/britain-s-new-top-diplomat-travels-to-poland-for-discussions-on-ukraine/3268915> (accessed 09.07.2024).

⁵ *Ibid.* P. 3.

personnel with tanks, artillery, and helicopters were deployed throughout Eastern Europe in the Steadfast Defender exercise from February to June 2024. It is noteworthy that a special role within the framework of the Joint NATO Response Force is assigned to the 7th British Light Mechanized Brigade “Desert Rats”, which led the Joint NATO High-Readiness Task Force (although, of course, the Baltic region is not a desert at all). In addition, the British have pledged to keep a brigade in the UK on high alert at all times to rapidly strengthen Estonia and the entire Baltic region during the crisis. The British also provided a reconnaissance squadron to the US-led NATO combat group in Poland and a ground-based air defense system (Sky Sabre) to protect Polish airspace.¹

Thus, one of the most prestigious brigades of the British Army operates in the Baltic region as the main NATO response unit, which, of course, directly testifies not only to Britain’s leadership in NATO, but also to the importance of the Baltic flank for NATO as a whole.

Conclusions

The British see bilateral ties with the Baltics, Poland and Ukraine as key to building multilateral alliances and ensuring Euro-Atlantic security as a whole.² This shows that the European core remains central to British national defence and security policy. This finding is particularly significant in the context of the Anglo-Saxon debate about Britain’s reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific region, as the British are strategically and practically focused primarily on Europe. At the same time, the Baltic region in the British military strategy, as in the NATO strategy, is a link between other regions, and therefore it has a high military-strategic significance. It is here that London seeks to demonstrate leadership and prove its primacy in ensuring the security of Europe as a whole.

Currently, the British are building their zone of control and defense in the Baltic Sea region, starting from direct deployment on the territory and participation in exercises, and ending with work in the framework of cyber defense and innovative developments. Russia may consider the British strategy in the Baltic region as their strengthening in the European North (its Baltic and Arctic flanks). For Russia, this means increased risks not only in the Baltic region itself, but also in the Far North. It is clear that in the long term the UK will take increasingly consistent steps to strengthen the interaction of the Baltic and Arctic flanks in order to unite the countries of Northern Europe, and then to tie them to the countries of Eastern Europe, given that Britain views Ukraine as a necessary element in justi-

¹ Desert Rats leading NATO’s first line of defence in 2024, URL: <https://armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/army-news-2024/british-desert-rats-leading-nato-s-first-line-of-defence-in-2024> (accessed 10.01.2024).

² Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, 2023, *HM Government*, p. 20, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world> (accessed 15.03.2024).

fyng its presence in Eastern and Northern Europe.¹ It is therefore not surprising that the British are actively offering Estonia to participate in resolving security issues in the Far North and, conversely, inviting Denmark to cooperate in Estonia, i. e. in the Baltics. The link between Estonia and Finland is significant within the framework of the defense projections promoted by Great Britain, as evidenced by the increase in the number of military contingents in the Baltic region countries. It is worth noting that digital technologies are becoming a valuable tool for strengthening the UK in the region since two important European locations for countering cyber threats are located in London and Tallinn under direct British control.

Moreover, the UK's global positioning, declared as "from the Arctic to Antarctic", is impossible without strengthening the British presence and direct involvement in the affairs of the Baltic region. In this regard, it is important for Russia to view any movements by a potential enemy in the Baltic Sea region as the beginning of changes in the Far North, and vice versa, and the Baltic region as a zone that is being prepared directly for military clashes, for which London is directly responsible. And here the actions of Estonia, Finland, Poland and Great Britain, whose joint manoeuvres are already indicating an escalation of tensions, will be of key importance.

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¹ Ibid. P. 40—41.

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The author

Prof Natalya V. Eremina, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia.

E-mail: n.eremina@spbu.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1349-8659>



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