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SMALL STATE SECURITY ENGAGEMENT IN A MILITARY
ALLIANCE – THE CASE OF ESTONIA

MA Thesis

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Abstract

A principal goal of a small state in contemporary International Relations is to ensure their survival, a task which is inherently more challenging for small states. Countering and mitigating those challenges often pushes small states towards alliance engagements. Up to now, most works analysing small state alliance engagement have quoted the benefits of multilateral alliance engagement for small states. In addition to sovereign deterrence creation measures, the theoretical discussion in the thesis hypothesises the use of bilateral security alliance relations as a separate tool of deterrence creation next to multilateral engagement. Such engagement is seen to be most widely used in times of increasing threat perception, with the increased speed and effectiveness of such commitments being more advantageous for small states than multilateral deterrence creation. This master's thesis engages with a single-case study of Estonia, through three relevant time frames of increasing threat perception, to chart the ways and circumstances in which different methods of security engagement is used. To do this, a three way model of multilateral, bilateral, and sovereign deterrence creation methods is used, mostly focusing on charting the balance of multi- and bilateral security arrangements through the use of relevant elites' speech acts and security documents. The results of the case study analysis indicate that the relevance of bilateral security arrangements within an alliance increases hand-in-hand with threat perception, with instances of higher security risks pushing a small state away from multilateral and toward bilateral arrangement. This thesis contributes to the literature of small state alliance engagement through highlighting the importance of bilateral engagements within an alliance as a tool of improving the speed and intensity of allied security engagement.

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Introduction

In the field of classical political science, a state's primary task is the preservation of its sovereignty. The goal of retaining the freedom and self-sufficiency of a political entity is most true for small states, for whom such a problem is existential. The following master's thesis will engage with the problems with what a small state might face in pursuing their goal of retaining their sovereignty and give insights into the different ways a small state might counter the inherent disadvantages posed by its size and lack of power when faced with competition with bigger states.

In most approaches to International Relations, the importance of military alliances has been analysed as a tool to fight such discrepancies in power balance. The literature has focused on the mitigating and empowering factors of alliance engagement to justify their wide prevalence in today's world. So far though, the scope of such research has focused more on big-power politics and balance of power dynamics, often paying less attention to smaller states in such a system and their engagement in such alliances. The theoretical framework analysed proposes a heavy reliance on multilateral security engagements for small states in International Relations, the author-side discussion focuses on the potential advantages of bilateral security engagements within an alliance structure and addresses their potential for being preferred over multilateral communication. The purpose of the study is to analyse how a small state chooses to deter threats in the context of engagement with a military alliance. The main approach will therefore use the concepts of deterrence and alliance politics to explain the choices a small country has in dealing with and countering a worsening in its threat perception.

This thesis will engage with the topics of small state alliance engagement in the case of increasing threat perception. The main goal of this master's thesis is to analyse the security engagement of a small state in distinct spheres of deterrence creation in instances when external security threats increase. The focus of the thesis is on charting the country's activities in three areas of creating deterrence: multilateral, bilateral, and sovereign deterrence creation. More importantly, the shift in the balance of using these areas is of paramount importance.

To elaborate further, the focus of this research is on how much a certain area of deterrence seeking is used in moments of changing security situations and heightened threat perception. The research question of the thesis is therefore: what deterrence-alliance strategy do small states follow in

instances of increased external security threats? The relevance of the question is also very much justified since earlier research has placed little attention on the bilateral aspects of deterrence creation within an alliance. The theoretical expectation of the thesis assumes that in times of extraordinary increases of threat perception against a small country, the employment of bilateral relations within an alliance system will be preferred over a multilateral approach. This is hypothesised to be done both due to the benefits of immediacy and straightforwardness of bilateral engagement over multilateral security engagements. Furthermore, one-on-one engagement with a bigger ally can also be preferred due to convenience, with pre-established relations between countries offering options for enhanced deterrence creation.

The following analysis will chart the intricacies of alliance politics, draw on state engagement in a system of international relations and analyse deterrence and security creation for a small country within an alliance. The empirical sources will then be employed in measuring the different types of deterrence creation strategies for a small state. For data selection, the focus rests on elites' speech acts and security documents which are complemented by official troop and capability changes in a small country's deterrence creation. To elaborate, the combination of elites' speech acts and factual changes in military troop size and capabilities will form the body of the empirical analysis of this master's thesis.

The relevance of this topic is justified by a couple of factors. Firstly, as mentioned, small state engagement in alliances has been under-researched in today's International Relations. The significance of bilateral deterrence creation measures has lacked wider identification as a possible strategy for a small state within an alliance. Secondly, the thesis follows a case study in the face of a significant increase to the risks of facing military aggression, which helps chart the changes in bilateral and multilateral deterrence creation methods over time and change in threat perception.

For this, this master's thesis conducts a single-case study analysis, focusing on the Republic of Estonia. The small European country has shown its willingness and ability to employ different strategies of deterrence creation, also important is the security situation around the country, which has seen significant changes in threat perception over the past few decades. Estonia's selection for the single-case study focus is also justified by its clear and time-specified actions in creating deterrence as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). After gaining independence from the USSR, the small state pursued active cooperation with the Western Bloc,

gaining membership of NATO as early as 2004. Today, Estonia's actions in the sphere of security politics can be characterised as bold and active. The small state spends 3% of their GDP on defence, is working closely with NATO allies, and backing up their defence commitment to Ukraine with proportionally the biggest military aid in Europe. In addition, the three time frames employed for the analysis also chart a distinct increase in threat perception, guiding the study towards identifying subsequent changes in deterrence creation strategies in Estonia.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. First, an overview of the relevant theoretical branches connected to the final goal of the thesis will be given. The theoretical overview will address the main purposes of alliance engagement and propose advantages and disadvantages for different models of alliance engagement for small states. The methodological part of the thesis will justify the case selection and give a concise summary of the data sources and methods used. In addition, the use of three distinct time frames of analysis will be provided to aid in making the analysis both comparable in time and giving clear boundaries to the analysis conducted. Finally, the empirical analysis will chart the empirical data for the three time frames, constructing the case study's deterrence creation in the three proposed spheres of security creation across time. The intensity of threat perception change will also be analysed through elites' speech acts and factual changes in the regional security situation. Following that, a description of the results will be provided with a discussion charting the changes in deterrence creation models for Estonia over time and increasing threat perception.

1 Alliance theory

One of the main theoretical pillars of this master's thesis concerns a state's ability and intent to provide for its security. For a state, one of the ways to achieve the goal of security in international relations is to join an alliance either through establishing a new alliance with partner nations, or by joining an existing alliance of nations. Such an approach is especially true for small states, for whom the issue of preservation of sovereignty or, survival, is their main policy goal. Also, crucially, the vulnerability of small states is much more pronounced when compared to the threats faced by bigger countries. Smaller states have inherently more pressure in maintaining their security in order to ensure survival. To this end, smaller states have to prioritise survival and counteracting inherent weaknesses deriving from their small size. This is done by creating and enhancing security for themselves. For this, a small state can employ multiple strategies of ensuring survival. At its most basic, it comes down to a dilemma – fight for your rights alone or align with other nation(s) to ensure survival. Most often, in today's world, the second option is preferred by small states.

In practical terms, in today's political system, this means engaging in an agreement or partnership of sorts. For small states such a partnership is formalised through an alliance treaty. As Mearsheimer (2001: 17-19) argues, states are inherently selfish, trying to fend for their own survival and thriving. To that end, the formation of alliances with likeminded states is one of the main strategies countries employ to achieve those goals (Mearsheimer 2001: 19-20).

This means a commitment to engaging in an alliance system. The following discussion will outline the characteristics of an alliance system, the ways in which a small state engages in such a system, and the benefits such an engagement offers.

1.1 Alliance Formation

First, a discussion about the definition of an alliance will be provided. Snyder (1990: 104-105) defines alliances as a formal association of states for the use of military force, intended for security of their members against specific other states. It is important to note, that this definition employs the use of security and military means as a part of the definition, putting less emphasis on economic, cultural, or other means. The purpose of an alliance-contract is also to combine the capabilities of each individual member to enhance the overall capacity of each of the allies

(Morgenthau 1948). This means, that no matter the inequalities of the member states in an alliance, in most cases a commitment by all sides is expected in a traditional alliance (Waltz 1979: 118-119). Furthermore, Waltz (1979: 119-120) suggests, that states are in a constant situation of “self-help” and in a situation where survival is the main goal. For achieving that goal, a state often employs a strategy of alignment with other states. By doing this, an alliance is pooling together resources to enhance its influence in pursuing its common goals (Walt 1997: 157-158).

States subscribing to the notion of alignment with other members is the basic foundation of a functioning alliance (Snyder 1990: 105). By alignment, members represent their common interests and expectations between themselves, an alliance therefore is a formalised expression of such an alignment. When joining an alliance, members commit to the notion of supporting other members in the pursuit of their goals and satisfaction of their security and military expectations. Also, important to mention, an alliance’s functioning and purpose is directly linked to the existence of an adversary, the presence of an external threat is clearly tied together with the motivation behind establishing an alliance (Walt 1985: 4). In other words, in the absence of an (perceived) adversary, the creation of an alliance is much less likely than in the case of one being perceived to exist. Stemming from this, the increase in the perception of that threat posed by the adversary also increases the likelihood of the alliance being established.

Also very relevant, as Snyder (1990: 105) notes, is the context of alliance formation and the perceived longevity of it. An alliance formed during a crisis or war situation (coalition) acts very differently to an alliance formed during peacetime, with the latter offering more benefits and functions like deterrence of attack (Snyder 1990: 106). Similarly, an alliance can be formed to perform either a defensive or an offensive function. An alliance can also be formed in an *ad hoc* or permanent way, with the former usually offering similar losses in performance compared to the latter one. For example, an *ad hoc* alliance or coalition is much less likely to offer comparable assurances of security when compared to a permanent alliance, with the longevity of a permanent alliance being much more pronounced.

Benefits of an alliance system for its member states

Before we engage further with the concepts of alliance alignment and potential risks, it’s crucial to discuss what states hope to gain when joining a military alliance. Snyder (1990: 110) differentiates between three benefits in a classical alliance system – deterrence, defence, and

preclusion. These three benefits are seen as being the fundamental pillars of a state's calculus on whether to join an alliance or not. Of course, joining an alliance has some drawbacks as well. The costs of maintaining a partnership in an alliance are also defined by Snyder (1990: 110).

Given those costs, there are benefits to joining an alliance which often outweigh these costs, which is why seeking alignment in procuring a state's security is the preferred course of action for most states in international relations. Preclusion is one of the three benefits in an alliance system (Snyder 1990: 110). The basic rationale of preclusion as a benefit is in the fact that a state which has already aligned with one alliance and its members cannot align with an adversarial system. Therefore, aligning an ally with your interests inherently makes the likelihood of them joining an adversary instead of you diminish significantly. The second benefit of joining an alliance is increased defence in the case of an attack against a member (Snyder 1990: 110). The most straightforward of the three benefits, defence as a benefit comes to play when an actual attack occurs against a member of an alliance and, importantly, if the treaties that stipulate helping an ally come to fruition. The members of an alliance pledge their aid in the situation in which the core pillars of the alliance treaty are called into action. For example, in the case of an armed attack against a NATO member country, the states that have signed the Washington Treaty have promised to engage in collective defence when the Article 5 criteria have been met.

The third, and often the most nuanced benefit of membership in an alliance is deterrence. The most basic concept for this study is deterrence, which, as defined by Snyder, is an action aimed at "reducing the probability of enemy military moves towards inimical to one's self" (Snyder 1960: 167). To complement this definition, an additional definition is used that describes deterrence as a "threat to use force in response as a way of preventing the first use of force by someone else" (Morgan 2003). The thesis' main definition of deterrence is combined using the two definitions. Deterrence therefore is to be understood as an employment of force aimed at reducing the probability of the enemy using force against oneself. This is done that the definition would not include only the military moves but a more general idea of a posing a threat against someone.

Deterrence in an alliance system involves the integration of military capabilities of different countries, which creates a security umbrella over the allies. The concept of deterrence involves the ability of an alliance to convince the adversary that the cost of attacking is higher than the potential gains (Snyder 1960: 167). Therefore, deterrence is achieved when an adversary is convinced that

the cost of attacking outweighs the benefits of such an attack. Deterrence is particularly important for small states, which have limited military capabilities to defend themselves against larger adversaries. In this context, alliances provide small states with the capability to deter adversaries.

On the other side of the equation lie the aforementioned cons of joining an alliance for states. The two main risks of joining an alliance are the relative loss of sovereignty or freedom and the increased risk of conflict (Snyder 1990: 110). The first, relative loss of freedom for an aligned state embodies the fact that when joining an alliance, states take up extra responsibility vis-à-vis their co-members. This in turn diminishes the state's capabilities to act by their own accord, now having to account for the needs and purposes of other states that have aligned with the ally. This is a known trade-off for states, because of the described benefits an alliance offers – in this sense, joining an alliance is all about weighing up the pros and cons, with the increase of positive effects, one has to account for the negative effects that come along.

The second risk of joining an alliance is the increased risk of war. With the inclusion of more allies, often the risk calculus changes for the worse as well. This is due to the fact that different states have different adversarial rivalries and therefore the merger of two countries' interest tends to increase the risk for both. According to Morgenthau's theory on balance of power (1948), this increased risk of war can be mitigated in the case in which the adversary of the alliance members is identical or when the adversaries of the aligning states are in an alliance contract with each other.

Let's imagine a theoretical scenario in which there are two states A and B, who are looking at the potential costs and benefits of allying together. On the other side, there are two non-allied states X and Y, respectively adversarial to A and B. If, in this scenario we imagine the alignment of A and B then their respective risks increase due to the increase in the number of potential adversaries for the new alliance. This means that for state A, the number of adversaries effectively doubles in this example due to the fact that the new alliance merges the countries' adversaries. On the other hand, if states X and Y were to be allied between themselves as well, then the respective increase in risks will be less severe for both A and B when joining the alliance due to the fact that states X and Y were allied between themselves anyway. This means that the costs of employing a strategy of alignment with another country can be decreased in the case in which the adversaries whom the allied nations are seeking protection from are allied themselves, or in fact the same state.

Glenn Herald Snyder (1960) sees deterrence in working in a situation of two adversarial actors, the deterrer and the aggressor. The goal of the deterrer in such a relationship is to alter the risk calculus of the aggressor by creating circumstances in which a potential move against the security of the opposing state would not prove worth the potential gains. In this association, he sees the aggressor having four parts to their risk calculus, with which the party must deal with before a potential aggression might make sense (Snyder 1960: 167). These can be separated into two bigger categories. The first and more fundamental part of the risk calculus is about the valuation of an objective's worth and the cost which the aggressor is expected to pay when the aggression is initiated (Snyder 1990: 167). This creates the basic aggression dilemma for an actor – is the potential of gains by military escalation worth the repercussions that will result out of the action itself.

The second part of the calculus encapsulates the probability and credibility of responses by the deterrer (Snyder 1990: 167). The credibility of a deterrent comprises of two smaller subsections, the magnitude of the response and the probability of the aggression actually resulting in a response at all (Snyder 1990: 167). These two parts of deterrence credibility can only be looked at together, meaning that for a functioning deterrence system both criteria have to be met. In a hypothetical situation, a very high magnitude response to an aggression would not amount to much in an aggressor's mind if the likelihood of the response itself coming to fruition would be minimal. The same logic applies in a mirrored scenario in which the likelihood of a response is very high but the response itself quite limited. Therefore, a functioning deterrence system incorporates both the substantiality and high likelihood of a response for a credible deterrent.

1.2 Punishment and denial

For the purposes of the following discussion of dualities of alliance engagement, the thesis will mostly employ the use of concept definitions by Snyder, whose works on the intricacies of alliance engagement benefits and risks is extensive. The heavy use of Snyder's work is justified by the work's similar approaches to both defining and employing relevant concepts, which helps maintain the focus of the theoretical discussion.

In this analysis, the main emphasis is on the severity and level of creating deterrence for a small state within an alliance system. For that, a two-level approach of deterrence creation is employed: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. As the main duality of deterrence creation, the

following discussion will outline the characteristics of the two, including the varying levels of severity both options offer. The concepts of deterrence by punishment and denial were first coined by T. C. Shelling (1960), who in his book “The Strategy of Conflict” outlines the concepts. Schelling argues that punishment involves threatening an adversary with harm if they take a certain action, while denial involves threatening an adversary with the inability to achieve their objectives if they take a certain action (Shelling 1960). Even though one can differentiate between the two distinct levels of deterrence creation, it is important to note that in most cases punishment and denial work in tandem to enhance deterrence.

Deterrence of denial can be understood as a pre-emptive, its main goal is to deter an aggressor by denying them the chance to attack with the balance of military capabilities being close to equal in the region (Mazarr 2021: 15). Denial is therefore the more active deterrence creation methods of the two, with adversarial military capabilities on one end being close to matched on the deterrer’s end. Important to note though, is that deterrence of denial measures are most often not seen as a pre-emptive military attack on the adversary but more a heightened military presence in the region to deter aggression through presence of capabilities. In the calculus of the potential aggressor, the implausibility to attack in the first place is created by a balance of power in the theatre – demonstrating and employing the capabilities to defend against the aggressor is seen as the act of deterrence by denial.

The other dimension of creating dissuasion of the aggression is deterrence by punishment. The less active of the two, punishment encompasses a reactionary response to an armed aggression by the assailant (Mazarr 2021: 15-16). In essence, instead of a constant military presence in a region or a member state, a punishment-centred deterrence strategy implies using non-regional capabilities in response to an attack against a friendly state (or an alliance member in this case) (Mazarr 2021: 16). This is often done through promises of overseas assets being committed to a region of escalation after the initial outbreak of a conflict. Here, an important part of the deterrent having an effect is in the plausibility of the punishment coming into play in the first place. In this sense, deterrence by punishment has close ties to Snyder’s concepts on the probability and credibility of a deterrent. In the case of an armed aggression, the strategy of punishment is heavily reliant on the credibility of the actor providing the assurances. In a hypothetical scenario, without

the credibility of an armed reaction (i.e punishment) by a larger ally, the size of the reaction force is less relevant than the plausibility of the force being deployed in the first place.

As mentioned before, these two main strategies of deterrence creation act hand in hand. In most cases the constant pledge of troops stationed in a region of unrest (denial) is coupled with the pledge of a more severe reaction in case of an escalation (punishment). Both of these strategies are employed in modern alliance-deterrence strategies, with NATO being the foremost example of such strategies with its pre-stationed battlegroups acting as a deterrent and the NATO response force seen as the punishment side of the equation.

1.3 Risks of abandonment and entrapment

The following part in dissecting alliance systems after a successful formation of an alliance is the debate on how and to what extent should an ally commit to helping their partner with their security. Similarly to previous discussions about the dynamics, the alliance security dilemma offers two prongs or “horns” that describe its logic (Snyder 1987: 466). These two risks show the difficulties in engaging with a partner within an alliance system, with both bigger and smaller states having their own fears when it comes to more pronounced commitment to each other. These two dilemmas are in the centre of the calculus for states when engaging with their partners, with smaller states’ fears often being inverted with those of the bigger nations. To continue, I’ll lay out the basics of fear of abandonment and fear of entrapment and discuss the different options states have to mitigate these fears.

First up is the risk of abandonment, which describes the fear of a (usually smaller) ally in its engagement with bigger partners (Snyder 1987: 467). The relative vulnerability of smaller states in the face of potential adversarial encounters with its perceived enemy dictates the smaller states’ need for external assistance. This assistance is most often offered by one or multiple bigger allies who can “level the playing field” between the smaller ally and its potential adversary. From this a clear risk for the smaller state arises – what if my allies do not commit to helping me as they promised? This fear of being abandoned in the face of conflict is the essence of the first horn of the dilemma (Snyder 1987: 467). Fear of abandonment is especially major for small states which are heavily reliant on their bigger allies for military and other support measures. Important to stress in this context is the fact that, the bigger a state’s reliance on its partners, the bigger the perceived

risk in case of abandonment. The risk of being left alone with a crisis or war situation is something that all states wish to avoid.

How can smaller states deal with this risk? One option for smaller states might be to choose to decrease their fear of being abandoned by increasing their own defence capabilities, therefore, sovereignty on matters of defence. By doing this, smaller states attempt to decrease their reliance on bigger states by enhancing their security by themselves – investing in their own defence capabilities. For example, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have been employing this option quite aggressively after their accession to NATO. Out of all the 31 members of NATO, the Baltic states are a part of a limited group of states that commit at least 2% of their GDP as a part of their defence spending. This is a clear effort taken to mitigate the above risk to show both commitment to their defence and their readiness to enhance their own security despite their membership of the alliance.

Though, it is important to mention that the commitment to enhance their security by notable investment in their own defence is much more difficult to achieve by small states. This is due to the limitations of small nations listed above – the relative smallness of their economies dictates that their contributions in this area are harder to achieve when compared to bigger states. The reasoning behind this is quite simple, even a solid contribution in terms of a percentage of their small national economies is nominally often not enough to make a sizeable enough contribution to their sovereign defence capabilities. Also, the efforts of increasing defence expenditure come at the cost of other public services, which are already harder to maintain due to the lack of capital in such states. Nevertheless, the example of Baltic states' deterrence behaviour points at a balance between sticking to the alliance, while never taking it completely for granted, and ensuring their own defence capabilities to the level they can afford.

In addition, the creation of increased reassurance measures from the alliance might be considered as another mitigating option (Walt 1987: 262-265). This might come in the form of prepositioned troops, political assurances. From the perspective of the smaller state with fears of being abandoned, closely participating in the framework of the alliance by taking part in training exercises for example can be seen as a way to mitigate this risk and gain extra assurances of not being abandoned.

On the other hand, fear of entrapment can be a big concern for bigger states engaging in alliance relations with allies. Entrapment risks encompass the fear for larger states that by aligning with one or more smaller states the risk of being dragged into a conflict that may not be in the bigger states' interests (Snyder 1987: 467). Such a case can be observed with the United States of America during the Vietnam War. The US had politically committed to the defence of the South Vietnamese government, which resulted in their long and costly entanglement in the Vietnam war. This commitment to the South Vietnamese is a clear example of how a bigger state might become entrapped in a conflict it might not have wanted to partake in to start with. A part of that equation is also the fear that in case of a conflict, the relatively small size of the allied nations might force the bigger states to contribute disproportionately into solving a conflict, therefore limiting their freedom to act in other disputes.

Similarly, fear of entrapment can also be a concern for smaller states in alliances. This could occur in the instances in which the alliance engages in conflicts where smaller allies are used as semi-proxies. For example, a prolonged engagement taken up by an alliance might force the smaller ally to engage side-by-side with their allies, therefore tying up their resources in another theatre and limiting the small states' security. A good example of such a risk coming to play is the US-led campaigns in the Middle East after the 9/11 bombings of 2001. After evoking Article 5 of the Washington treaty, the US dragged numerous allies into the conflict with Iraq and subsequently Afghanistan. Estonia, for example contributed military troops to both the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, further diminishing its already limited capabilities by employing them abroad. Though, such contributions were justified at the time by offering much needed field experience to Estonian officers, their absence from domestic engagement can also be seen as having a disadvantage for the small state's security.

As mentioned before, the two "horns" of the alliance security dilemma, abandonment and entrapment can "vary inversely" (Snyder 1987: 467). This means that often times the fears of abandonment for a small state can be explained by the lack of fear of entanglement by a bigger ally. Contrarily, the presence of a risk of entanglement for a bigger state will result in a decreased risk of abandonment for the smaller ally. This is one of the most important dualities of alliance politics, balancing abandonment, and entanglement risks in an alliance relationship. As a general

principle, the risk of abandonment can be reduced by strengthening the alliance's commitment to the ally, but this increases the risk of entrapment.

1.4 Small state alliance engagement

As noted before, the focus of this thesis is on small state alliance engagement models, the following will outline the key aspects from the relevant literature surrounding small states – a definition of a small state, choices of alignment for such a state, and alliance engagement options in detail. In general, there have been many important contributions to studying small state behaviour in International Relations. However, central to this thesis remains a rather less explored aspect in small state behaviour, which is the choices they make within an alliance when an increase in threat is perceived. This means that important to the following engagement with theory is to pin the options a small state has in pursuing increased deterrence within the structure of an alliance. Therefore, the following theoretical discussion will outline the main modes of engagement for a small state in fending for its security and creating its deterrence.

One of the most prevalent ways to define a small state in International Relations theory has been by using the size of the country's population. For example, Steinsson & Thorhallsson (2017: 1) define a small state by those who have a smaller population than 10 million, drawing from the United Nations definition of a small state. Due to its simplicity, this is the most general definition followed in this thesis. This is done to avoid engaging with literature concerning small state definitions and commit more of the resources of this analysis on the concrete options of small state behaviour. Other authors use the factors of the size of state's economy (Archer & Nugent, 2002), or the idea of the nation's size being relative, depending on with whom one compares them to (Wivel & Mouritzen 2005: 4).

A small state is inherently in a disadvantageous position in international relations. Their relatively small size dictates several specific disadvantages compared to bigger states. For example, a small state has difficulties in creating a sufficient military force to ensure their security, their economy's small size determines their vulnerability to outside influences, and their lack of political capital (derived from their small GDP and population) limits their chances of steering the international agenda in their favour (Bailes et al. 2016: 2).

This leaves the leaders of small states with a question – how to mitigate these disadvantages when survival may be put into question, or general threats to state security may be posed in times of crises? Bailes, Rickli & Thorhallsson (2014: 32) argue that this leads to two options – self-reliance or cooperation.

A small state can choose to adopt a defensive stance that focuses on avoiding trouble and seeking autonomy (Bailes et al. 2014: 32). This position, more often called neutrality, has in the last decades lost its prevalence in small state strategies due to the fact that it tends to push states into a position of isolation in which the freedom to act is highly limited for the country. This could be seen true for Finland during the Cold War, when the country's wavering position between the Soviet Union and the West severely limiting the country's options on the international stage. This option risks being marginalised in the system of international relations, also pushing the state towards being abandoned and having to fend for themselves in times of crises (Rickli 2008: 310). This, as addressed before, is not a pleasant scenario to a small state due to the lack of military or other capabilities to ensure security for themselves. For example, the countries of Belgium and Luxembourg sought security through neutrality at the start of the 20th century, hoping that their claimed status would shield them from harm. During the first world war, Germany's Schlieffen plan ignored the countries' claimed neutrality and invaded them. In addition, any allied help against such an invasion was lacklustre due to the previously declared neutrality, and the lack of preparedness against such an action from their side as well.

Due to the policy of neutrality often leading to marginalization, Bailes et al. (2014: 32) find that developed small states tend to seek partnerships and external communication to help fend for themselves. That is, to assume a position of cooperation with other countries, the proactive engagement with others offering both increased influence and essential protection (Bailes et al. 2014: 32). To counter "hard" threats, the authors see that military security can be sought from a large powerful state, or by grouping with a bigger number of partners (Ibid). Both of these approaches have their own benefits, engagement with a larger ally may be more direct and lead to faster commitments while engaging with multiple partners has the benefits of versatility, inclusivity, and confidence of longevity. However, the strict duality of Bailes et al. (2014) is not fully developed, because in theory (but also in practice), multilateral and bilateral engagement within a military alliance at the same time can be possible as well.

In this master's thesis, bilateral engagement within an alliance system involves a scenario wherein a small state chooses to opt for one-to-one engagement with a bigger ally, therefore limiting the need for a multilateral consensus-seeking process and the bureaucracy of engaging within a multilateral fashion. Smaller states may engage bilaterally with a larger state within the alliance system to enhance their security and deterrence capabilities. To highlight this problem, issues of finding consensus in a multilateral alliance have been brought to the fray in the context of Russia's full scale invasion to Ukraine in February 2022. Member states of NATO have found it difficult to agree upon a common practical consensus of providing aid to Ukraine, with states resorting to bilateral engagement with Ukraine to avoid the processes of finding common positions and fighting the bureaucracy of having to navigate the difficulties of multilateralism.

Bilateral engagement has several advantages for small states. First, it can provide small states with a more significant role within the alliance system. Small states may feel marginalized within a larger alliance system and may be overshadowed by more powerful states. Engaging bilaterally with a larger state within the alliance may provide small states with greater manoeuvrability and freedom in making decisions within the alliance system.

Second, bilateral engagement can allow small states to form and tend to their security needs and interests more precisely. Small states can have unique security concerns that are different from those of other states within the alliance system. Engaging bilaterally with a larger state can enable small states to express their security concerns and interests more directly and effectively and receive customised or hand-crafted security assistance. This may come in the form of filling certain capability gaps in the small state's security posture. For example, bilateral engagement can offer the aforementioned benefits of direct and faster engagement leading to the bilateral ally filling the small state's needs themselves, without having to fight for multilateral approval and support. Therefore, small state might want to engage directly with an ally that can help fill the holes in its military capability, therefore avoiding the often strenuous task of coordinating that change across multiple allies.

Thirdly, small states engaging bilaterally with a bigger nation have the added benefit of speed and comfort of communications and planning. This relates to the benefit of precision, with bilateral engagement in international relations offering much increased speed when compared with a multilateral engagement. Furthermore, bilateral communication is in most cases superior to

multilateral engagement due to the tailored relationships such a mode of communication is known to produce. Familiarity in this sense serves as an extra benefit to speed, granting more handmade solutions and modes of bartering with a single ally.

Such approaches by smaller nations to opt for bilateral engagement within a multilateral alliance have lacked thorough analysis in today's literature. This is most clearly expressed through the lack of literature concerning small state engagement in an alliance more generally (for this, see i.e. Bailes et al. 2016). Still, some scholars have analysed small state bilateral engagement in a multilateral alliance in the past. For example, Tarp & Hansen (2013) scrutinize Denmark's attempts to 'punch above their weight' in a multilateral arena by using bilateral communications as an amplifier of their positions in the United Nations, Jakobsen et al. (2018) analyse Danish and Norwegian bilateral military contributions to the US as a tool of increasing their presence in NATO. This shows that the notion of small state bilateral engagement within a multilateral alliance is not unwarranted, the purpose of the thesis is to contribute to the field of alliance theory and small state security behaviour to enhance the understanding of how the two work hand-in-hand in certain instances.

On the other side of this dichotomy is the classical view of the benefits of small states preferring to engage multilaterally in an alliance. The prevalent view of the current day International Relations theories regarding alliances and small states is one of multilateral engagement (Archer & Nugent 2002; Knudsen 1996). As Wivel et al. (2014: 11) show, multilateral organisations can help small states to "escape from smallness" and amplify their own political power. Such an escape is done through cleverly using the equality of members in most votes in such organisations, effectively increasing the political capital and influence of a smaller state (Wivel et al. 2014: 10-12). Multilateral engagement also offers the small state a chance to 'plug the gaps' in its inherently limited organisational and analytical capability. International organisations offer various solutions to the otherwise lacklustre diplomatic and economic capability through their bureaucracy (Steinsson & Thorhallsson 2017: 11-12).

Such a multilateral engagement comes with a few caveats. Most notably, each state in such a multilateral alliance needs to account for the needs and wishes of other states, which might not go hand-in-hand with those of the small state. Another important thing to note about multilateral alliances is the complexity of coming to a common decision. This is also true for the speed and

effectiveness of the common decisions which might suffer when a consensus needs to be reached in the multilateral relationship.

It is important to note that often times for small states in today's security policies, these two options are not mutually exclusive. For a small state, the preservation and security of their sovereignty can be pursued by both bilateral (large powerful ally) and multilateral (grouping of different allies) means. As the authors show: "Lithuania, say, may rely ultimately on US strategic protection against Russia, but qualifies its bilateral dependence by entering the multilateral alliance, NATO..." (Bailes et al. 2014: 35). So, the rationale behind a small state's deterrence creation arrangement is often multifaceted and comprises of elements from both ways of security engagement.

Also, crucial to note is that while the two options of creating security for a small state, its sovereign investment into their own defence can also be a big factor in amplifying the effectiveness and size of any outside support. Bigger states are often times more reluctant to commit their resources to the defence of a smaller ally if the state is not doing their own part of creating a credible deterrent. Such an example of small states being aware of that potential risk can be seen in action in NATO with its smaller allied states. A recent example of that logic working in practice can be seen from the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, in which Western military support was very much reliant on Ukraine's ability to fight back. Only after Ukraine had proved their ability to counter Russia's invasion, did the more extensive packages of military aid to Ukraine start to arrive. The same logic can be expanded to the actions of countries within an alliance. As mentioned before, the staunch commitment to their sovereign defence capabilities through increased expenditure on the military sector is a clear sign of that risk being a part of the calculus of states as well.

As discussed above, small states in the complex world of international relations have broadly three distinct avenues of pursuing extra security guarantees and deterrence in an alliance system – creation and development of a sovereign defence capability, a reliance on multilateral engagement within a defence alliance, and the employment of closer bilateral engagement with a bigger ally within an alliance system. As noted for the latter two, all these three sectors of creating security are intertwined, with the absence of one of these generally resulting in a less-efficient security guarantee.

Important to mention as a logical assumption in this analysis is the relationship between threats and security arrangement severity. In this analysis, the basic notion of more threat equals more intent to provide for one's security is employed. This means that for all three of the abovementioned systems of security providing, an increase in threat is hypothesised to increase the willingness to engage in deterrence seeking in general. As to that end, the increase in deterrence posture (or at least a willingness to seek an increase) is indicative of an increase in the (perceived) threat to a small country. This logic applies the other way around as well, with increased threat perceptions being observable in the security posture of a small state. This basic two-sided logic is employed in this analysis to seek the employment of small state alliance-security strategies in the face of an increasing threat.

This means that a small state's security strategy is most often created to employ all three of these modes of deterrence creation: self-sufficiency, multilateral cooperation, and bilateral engagement within an alliance. In a sense, all three of these spheres are interconnected, with the lack of engagement on one front leading to the absence of another. For example, as explained above, self-sufficiency and investment for one's self defence capabilities is in most cases a must for a state to be considered a meaningful part of a military alliance (be that multi- or bilateral). Similarly, a multilateral engagement with allies often times hypothesises the existence of a sovereign military capability from a state as well. The grand questions of this analysis are therefore both about whether these spheres of deterrence creation are employed by small states in practice, and if so, to what extent do the proportions of these deterrence creation spheres alternate in a situation of increased threat perception.

Therefore, the following part of empirical research on a single case study will chart the change and balance of these three approaches in conjunction with time and the changing landscape of threat perception. This is done to chart a causal reasoning to the different strategies employed to explore the intricacies of small state security behaviour in an alliance system in the contemporary field of international relations and security studies.

2 Methodology

2.1 Method, case justification

To explore small states' decisions in creating deterrence and security in a conventional space of international relations this thesis conducts a single case analysis using process tracing as its main analytical approach. The employment of a single case study in this thesis is justified by a couple of factors. First, as George & Bennett (2005: 26-27) show, single case study allows the researcher to get a better understanding of the variables that are placed in an analysis, therefore allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to a change in the outcomes in different circumstances (George & Bennett 2005: 27). Moreover, in addition to the increased focus on the variables, a single case study offers the benefit of thoroughness, especially in the field of security politics, where the reasoning behind a decision is often complex and multifaceted.

A single case study therefore offers this analysis a more multi-pronged approach, that has the advantage of taking into account more variables and sub-categories that might not be present in a multi-case study. Finally, the justification of a single case study is also enhanced by the case chosen for this analysis itself. Since this thesis aims to chart the different methods of small state engagement in an alliance, a standout case of such a state greatly enhances its theory-based expansion potential. Also, the inclusion of only one case study gives this thesis a clear focus and makes its results better interpretable in the context of the theoretical borders of small state research as a whole.

The case in question in this thesis is the Republic of Estonia. Estonia is a small country that has experienced significant geopolitical hurdles due to its location and history. With a population of approximately 1 300 000, Estonia has faced political, economic, and military pressure from Russia, which has driven its foreign and security policy choices toward aligning with the West. Since the regaining of their independence in 1991, Estonia has pursued active cooperation with Western institutions and countries to counteract the legacy of the Soviet Union, most notably Russia's influence in the region. This has led the small state to the accession to both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union in 2004.

The selection of the case is justified by the fact that Estonia is a small state, active in its participation in a multilateral military alliance (NATO), and it has also explicitly stated that the

main threat against the security and sovereignty of the country is the Russian Federation, which in turn gives this research a clear adversarial focus in defining shifts in its deterrence posture (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service 2022). Furthermore, the use of Estonia as a case study in the context of security posturing also aids in creating a clear, time-limited (membership of the country in NATO since 2004) analysis, with clearly observable shifts in its security policy. All these factors are also supportive of the use of the method of process tracing in this thesis.

The country has also been active in pursuing its interests in the security domain, boasting a large reserve force based on a conscription-based military in addition to active participation in NATO's foreign missions and its security agenda more generally. In the last year, since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Estonia has also risen to prevalence in international politics, with their substantial military support to Ukraine facilitating an increased political capital that has allowed the small country to partake actively in the policy creation of the Western bloc, most notably NATO and the EU.

One more important aspect that justifies using Estonia as a near-ideal single case study for this thesis is the fact that the country has been actively engaging with NATO over the past two decades. Furthermore, the small state has also exercised both multilateral engagement (i.e the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative) and bilateral engagement with one bigger ally within NATO. In addition, the state has shown clear initiative in funding for its own defence, creating a reserve-based military system with clear commitments to continuous and sustainable investment. Due to the prevalence of all the three described subcategories, Estonia offers good insight into the employment of either multilateral, bilateral, or sovereign deterrence creation, which, when combined with the increase in threat perception can add valuable insights into the security behaviour of a small state within a defence alliance.

Process tracing is a tool of qualitative analysis that engages with a single case study to chart the case's decision making process and rationale over a series of instances, to provide the researcher with a more in-depth look into the different factors affecting a certain action (Collier 2011: 823). The analysis will be a theory-testing type of process tracing. As Beach and Pedersen (2013: 10-12) show, a theory-testing analysis draws from theoretical insights or gaps a framework of academic knowledge and employs a case study to study causal mechanisms that might be in play to make two variables change (Beach and Pedersen 2013: 11). Here, the studying of a change in

variables aids the researcher in discovering whether the hypothesised causal mechanisms were in play (Ibid). In the context of this analysis, the variables of threat perception and defence creation will be scrutinised in the context of deterrence creation, hypothesised here is that an increase in threat perception results in more bilateral alliance engagement in the case of a small state.

In this thesis, the method of process tracing will be employed along three distinct timeframes in a single case study to chart the changes in the rationale in the decisions taken. Another advantage of using process tracing is the fact that the rigorous testing of theoretical insights in practice can shed some light into the particular processes and decisions behind making decisions that from a layman's point of view might be self-explanatory (Ulriksen & Dadalauri 2016: 226-228). Such a method can therefore aid in creating credible explanations for the rationale behind an actor's choices and provide real life explanations to work hand in hand with a proposed theory.

Such an employment of a single case process tracing can have some limitations too. For example, it leaves some room for research bias due to the single case approach – meaning that in certain instances theoretical insights drawn from a single case study might not be applicable to all other similar states due to the different variables in play for each different country. As opposed to a multi-case study, in which those differences in variables would be accounted for, a single case study needs to rely on methodological and empirical rigor to ensure such oversights will not be included in the analysis.

In this thesis, this risk is partly mitigated with the fact that the case study selected is a clear representative of the characteristics envisaged in theory and by the fact that the case, even as a stand-out example, is still very similar to other similar small states in the region and can therefore offer valuable insights into the rationale behind its decisions. Furthermore, the purpose of this thesis is not to describe the behaviour of all small states in every imaginable scenario but to chart a logic to deterrence and security creation which applies to small states behaving inside an alliance system in the context of heightened threat perception.

To add, the method of process tracing is useful in this analysis because of the gradual shift in the case's behaviour over the last two decades. As mentioned before, process tracing gives the researcher a tool of charting a shift in the country's policies of security and deterrence creation over time. The latter being actively charted in accordance and hand-in-hand with the changes in threat perception and deterrence posture, two of the main variables in this thesis. This duality of

concepts is then explored to seek how a small country might engage within the framework of a military alliance in the instance of increasing threat, does a country engage in multilateral processes or move more towards a bilateral relationship with one or another bigger partner in the alliance.

2.2 Operationalisation, data sources

For the empirical analysis, the thesis will engage with two sides of the equation in question when analysing a small state's efforts in creating deterrence. Those are threat perception and the corresponding change in defence posture, both politically and militarily. These two concepts are interlinked in this study because a change in the first (threat perception) is hypothesised to create a change in the second variable (defence posture). This is due to the theoretical insights explained in the previous chapter, a state's yearning for security can only increase in case that a perceived threat is on the rise as well.

From this logic, two main analytical concepts, threat perception and defence posture, are analysed together, helping create a full image of the rationale behind a small state's intentions in creating security. The employment of only one of these two concepts in an analysis might lead to a one-sided analysis which might misinterpret the intentions and motives behind a certain course of action. As an example, in a vacuum, the employment of a bilateral engagement model with a bigger ally from a certain point might offer little to no analytical insight if not compared to the increase of threat perception. The following discussion will outline the ways in which this analysis operationalises and employs the use of the two concepts.

Threat perception is operationalised in this thesis through the use of the case's elites' speech acts and statements. Threat perception is understood as a discourse-based variable that charts the perceived size and credibility of a threat against a country. In the context of this analysis, the threat of a military intervention from a threatening state is understood as threat perception. Since, in the security realm, real threats are often times hard to chart due to the often classified and non-public nature of relevant security documents, this study engages with a public perception of threat expressed through elites' speech acts. Such a method also benefits from the use of data, which is easily trackable, public, and consistent, helping a researcher chart changes in the variable.

To specify, for the purposes of operationalising threat perception, this thesis employs the use of parliamentary debates on defence, foreign intelligence service representatives' messaging and corresponding reports, a budgetary element of defence expenditure and infrastructure development, and speech-acts performed by high-ranking Estonian Defence Forces chiefs. Such an approach will therefore combine both the political and expert opinions on the threat situation at any of the three chosen timeframes respectively. It also has the benefit of studying threat perception conceptualisation over time, seeking whether a heightened security threat might influence the way such a term is employed.

On the other side of threat perception lies the outcome of such a change in threat perception. This, concrete changes in the creation of deterrence, is judged and operationalised through two wide categories: military and political. The first, military dimension of charting changes in the deterrence posture is seen through the employment and change of composition of both domestic and international (i.e alliance-based) military capabilities in Estonia. This embodies the employment of allied troops to Estonia, the addition of additional military capabilities to the country by allies, and the general posture of the alliance in the region as a whole. On the other hand, this dimension also takes into account sovereign and domestic improvements to the defence structure of Estonia, be that increasing the size of the war-time personnel, the purchase and employment of newer equipment, or the increase of general military exercises organised by the country.

The other side of this dimension concerns political and diplomatic engagement vis-à-vis the alliance and separate members of the alliance. Like threat perception, the speech analysis will approach relevant speech acts, official visits, and NATO alliance summit texts to analyse the changes in the political engagement and the creation of credible deterrence through reassurance and the voicing of steadfast commitment.

The data for this will be collected from different publicly available sources. Such sources include the database for parliamentary transcripts (Riigikogu 2023), the reports of Estonian Foreign Intelligence Services and defence-related think tanks (i.e Estonian Foreign Intelligence Agency, International Centre for Defence and Security), and the relevant appearances and speeches covered in the media of both experts and politicians. The combined goal of such a wide inclusion of statements and speeches is not the full analysis of all the sources from the selected time periods

but rather a look into the critical junctures of the increases in threat perception and the corresponding engagement with allies.

Still, it is important to note, that the sources of data used for the purposes of the empirical analysis are designed in a way that makes conducting the analysis feasible. This means, that for the following empirical data, a selection of time- and context-relevant sources will be employed. The focus of the analysis will therefore be on two larger groups of speech-acts. First, the analysis will engage with the speeches and interviews of political and defence sector elites, including the statements given by the President, Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and high-ranking Estonian military officers. It is to be noted that a sizeable proportion of the government's positions (PM, MoD) will be collected using their speeches to parliament (see reference to parliamentary transcripts). Such a restricted selection of sources aids in framing this analysis, gives the analysis clear limitations that go together with the perceived scale and purpose of the thesis, and create a generalisation of the political and military actors' positions on threat perception and the charting of a deterrent.

The second part of the empirical data will concern both domestic and international official documents involving the change in defence posture in Estonia. This will mean the employment of Ministry of Defence press releases, official NATO summit documents and other relevant official documents. Due to the documents' official nature, the research relies on their reliability and will therefore use them based on their relevance both in terms of contents and time.

For this, the methodology will engage with a single case study of Estonia, to explore the processes behind employing different means of deterrence creation within NATO. This is done through the use of three distinct time periods which encapsulate a steady increase of threat perception in the country, such a method has the advantage of setting boundaries to the analysis and helping chart a clear and distinctive change in approach in conjunction with the one of the main analytical variables in this study – threat perception. A corresponding timeline of the engagement with allies will be provided with an emphasis on clear-cut defence commitments and security pledges.

2.3 Employed time frames

The concept of threat perceptions in this study is defined through the three time frames employed and the changes in the security situation around the country. For example, the state-sponsored cyber-attack in 2007 is seen in this study as a clear shift in the perception of the threat against a country. Since the charting of the threats in real terms is troublesome, the research aims to target the perceptions connected to the threats themselves, leading to the changes implemented in terms of both speech-acts and military capability shifts. Operationalisation of the concept will therefore employ the official positions of the country and its respective leaders about the severity and types of threats it is facing.

The research is based on three distinct periods of action in deterrence creation and change in threat perception. The first period, April 2007 – December 2014, is used to describe the aftermath of the Russian cyber and hybrid attacks in the “Bronze night” attacks in late April 2007. This is largely recognised as the first state-conducted cyber-attack on another state (Praks 2015). The second period of interest in this research starts with the forceful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March of 2014 and the Russia-sponsored proxy wars in the Eastern Ukrainian Donbass region up until the start of the latest time frame in 2022. The last timeline this research analyses started with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on the 24th of February 2022 and will limit it up until February 2023 for the purposes of the coherence of the time frame.

In the context of these three time frames, it is also crucial to point out that the focus of the speech acts’ analysis in these windows is employed on the critical junctures of treat perception increase and defence capability enhancement. Such an approach is taken to pinpoint the vital moments in which a change in either of the two categories is observed to aid in the conciseness and precision of this study. Therefore, on the side of threat perception, the use of the critical events mentioned here is employed – the “Bronze Night” attacks, Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in the Eastern Ukrainian regions in 2014, and the events surrounding the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in early 2022.

These periods of analysis encompass three cases of Estonia’s efforts to create deterrence. For all the timeframes, a shift in threat perceptions, and therefore an increase in the need for further deterrence creation can be observed. For the 2007-2014 period, the focus was on countering non-conventional attacks in the Eastern countries of NATO, sign of which was the inclusion of a cyber-defence initiative in its strategic concept (NATO 2010). For the 2014-2022 period, more emphasis

on multilateral engagement between allies started to show signs of emergence (NATO 2016). Lastly, after late-February 2022, efforts began moving in the direction of major-scale deterrence, with the inclusion of bilateral troop contributions in Estonia (NATO 2022a).

3 Empirical analysis

3.1 Bronze Night attacks (2007-2014)

The first relevant time frame of this research is connected with the events surrounding the 2007 so called “Bronze Night” events in Estonia’s capital Tallinn. The decision to relocate a Soviet-era World War II monument in the city by the government was not taken well by the Russian-speaking population in the country, spiking unrest and leading to mass riots on the streets during the last days of April (Kaiser 2012: 1046-1047). The riots and lootings resulted in one dead, close to 200 injured and over a thousand people arrested (ERR 2017b).

Starting simultaneously with the on-site riots and lasting for days after, Estonia suffered a coordinated distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks aimed at key government and bank websites (KAPO 2007: 2). It has later been revealed that both of those, riots on the streets and the subsequent cyber-attacks, were connected to Russia (KAPO 2007: 9). Also important to note, that while a spontaneous “protest” type attack cannot be ruled out, the coordinated effort of such an attack is highly indicative of a nation-state being behind the attack (Ottis 2018: 4-6). The cyber-attacks themselves happened in conjunction and in the following days after the riots. Furthermore, the intensity of the attacks grew significantly in the days after the riots on the streets had died down, reaching their highest point at around the 9th of May mark.

Russian involvement was also quoted by then Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, who said that in the days leading up to the riots, close to 400 Russian citizens crossed the border to Estonia with the intent of spiking unrest (Postimees 2022). In addition to that, a majority of the IP addresses tied to the cyber-attacks were identified as of Russian origin (KAPO 2007: 7-9).

Generally, the events of April 2007 in Estonia have been described as a big wakeup call in terms of the country’s position concerning Russia. Often dubbed the first state-on-state cyber-attack (i.e BBC News 2017), the events sparked a key debate in the country about the actual threat and intentions from the Russian Federation. This threat was amplified further by a crisis appearing around the Estonian embassy in Moscow. During the days of the lootings in Estonia, the Estonian ambassador to Russia Marina Kaljurand’s car was attacked by members of a youth group outside the embassy (Postimees 2007b). This, of course, was an unprecedented attack and violation of the diplomatic procedure regarding foreign dignitaries, since the protection of the Russian escort

during that attack was almost purposefully deemed inadequate to give the ploy a chance of success (Postimees 2022).

As the then Prime Minister Andrus Ansip stated in a speech to parliament: “What we have here is a coordinated and blatant Russian interference in the affairs of the Estonian state. We have appealed to the European Union, and we ask them to respond appropriately, because attacking one Member State is an attack on the whole European Union.” (Riigikogu 02.05.2007). Such a clear wording of a “blatant Russian interference” is a clear indicator of the threat being perceived as major by Estonia. Such a clear attribution of the attack to Russia shows the intent of the government to call out the perpetrator to try to dissuade further attempts to meddle in domestic affairs.

Interesting to note in this context is the lack of action from the military elites in Estonia. The events around the Bronze Soldier were tied to a mostly civilian and law-of-order discourse, with the then head of the Defence Forces Ants Laaneots not making a statement on the subject. Furthermore, Laaneots was isolated from dealing with the domestic riots, most likely an effort to avoid further escalation with Russia. Later, in an interview marking the passing of 10 years from the riots, Laaneots hinted at the chance that a group of the protesters were organised by Russia quoting Spetsnaz involvement as a possible scenario: “[The involvement of] Spetsnaz, a Russian special forces unit, bringing them in from Pskov would not be a problem.” (ERR 2017a). Such a strategy of military non-engagement or lack of attribution was most likely a part of trying to keep the riots local and not risk further military ramp up with the Russian side.

Furthermore, after the declaration of cyber defence as a priority for NATO, Estonia’s efforts towards a Centre of Excellence being established found recognition as well. In May 2008, NATO formally approved the creation of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn (CCDCOE 2023). This is a move directly tied together with the so called “Bronze Night” attacks and the resulting increase of Estonian influence in the organisation as well as the clear push from Estonia to establish such a Centre of Excellence (COE). This was also echoed by then President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who quoted the establishing of the CCDCOE in Tallinn as the “most important outcome of the Bronze Night events” (Eesti Päevaleht 2008). President Ilves also voiced the wish to engage in a policy of ignoring Russia after the

attacks, because in his mind Russia's intentions towards the European bloc are not clear (Eesti Päevaleht 2008).

The focus of the following discussion will be on the use of three distinctive methods of deterrence creation: sovereign capacity, bilateral engagement, and multilateral engagement. The other side of the equation, the creation of a COE in Tallinn will serve as the concrete example of a successful deterrence creation. The analysis will engage with the ways in which the three levels of pursuing increased deterrence were used.

3.1.1 Multilateral engagement

From the side of official statements, the debate of defence was actually quite limited in Parliament in the immediate aftermath of the 2007 attacks. Though, one important distinction rose up when compared to earlier debates on defence and foreign policy. That theme or topic could be summarised as re-emphasising the importance of Estonia's military commitment abroad in the context of joint peacekeeping forces. Both then Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo emphasised the importance of multilateral engagement vis-à-vis Estonia's allies, most notably in NATO.

As Minister of Defence Aaviksoo reassures that the country's commitment to NATO countries in the context of military deployment is representative of the expected size of member states. "The size of our deployment, 200-250 personnel, is representative of our commitment to NATO, more than matching the 8% quota of active military personnel deployed abroad" (Riigikogu 19.12.2007). Foreign Minister Paet also noted Estonia's engagement in the multilateral operation in Afghanistan in his annual address to parliament, noting that the country's commitment had increased severalfold, to 130 personnel, in the last year (Riigikogu 20.02.2007).

Meanwhile, in the sphere of multilateral defence creation, Estonia had been pursuing the idea of incorporating their well-known expertise in civil cyber issues into the agenda of NATO. Estonia's high knowledge and reliance on IT systems in their systems of governance had been held in high regard, which is why the country sought to utilize that advantage in the security sphere as well. This led to the small country proposing to establish a cyber-defence related Centre of Excellence in Estonia as early as from 2004 (Kert 2008).

Kert, a prominent Estonian General (and former Chief of the Defence Forces) also quoted the initiative of the Estonian side to start negotiations for establishing a cyber-defence based Centre of Excellence (Ibid). In his words: “It is certainly not true to say that the cyber centre of excellence was initiated by NATO” (Kert 2008). In addition, the relatively low prestige of the newly joined Baltic states in NATO did not help with pushing a new initiative in the big organisation. Often times, such individual initiatives to alter the course of NATO were seen as not proper by such small states.

As a result, these efforts were not highly successful at the start, both due to the newness of Estonia’s membership in the alliance and the relative lack of prevalence of cyber issues in NATO’s agenda up to that point. This all changed with the April 2007 cyber-attacks against Estonia which helped amplify Estonia’s influence in the alliance. For example, after the incident, Estonia’s push towards recognising cyber defence as a priority was rewarded with a public recognition of the field’s relevance in 2007 by NATO defence ministers (NATO 2007). The declaration’s timing and wording clearly link to Estonia’s participation in calling for its need, Estonia finding clear pointing out in the text itself (Blomfield 2007).

In a general sense, the creation of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Estonia is a multilateral step in the creation of a more credible deterrent in Estonia. The Centre had a total of six cooperating founding members in addition to Estonia: Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Spain (CCDCOE 2023). This shows that a multilateral and inclusive approach as employed to create a centre of competencies in the cyber realm to both project Estonia’s own power as a cyber actor and increase the general prestige and prevalence of Estonia in NATO. The pursuit of the creation of the COE, now hosting 25 NATO members as “sponsoring nations” shows the wish to establish a centre with multilateral cooperation potential (Ibid).

Furthermore, Estonia’s efforts in establishing the centre have also been lauded for its skilled employment of multilateralism in an alliance (Gold 2019). As Josh Gold (2019) mentions in a commentary to the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS): “[the 2007 attacks turned out] to be a turning point in Estonian efforts to increase their country’s strategic position in the NATO Alliance”. The framing of the Estonian side of this attack was in his eyes a well-calculated effort to increase the position of Estonia in the alliance and therefore help in increasing the presence of the alliance in the region (Ibid). In addition, the Cyber Defence Centre is also seen

as a mitigator of the fear of abandonment in NATO for Estonia, with multilateral and diverse presence in the region being helpful in that sense (Ibid).

In addition to the formation of the Centre of Excellence, it is important to mention the work done by this newly created institution. The Centre's main goals of improving the cyber-defences and capabilities of NATO member states found their first biggest expression with the introduction of the Tallinn Manual from 2009 (CCDCOE 2023). The Tallinn Manual was contributed to by cyber-law and cyber-defence experts from all of the CCDCOE member states. The Manual's objective was to create a legal framework that would enable the proper definition, identification, and interpretation of cyber-attacks and operations in the context of contemporary international law (CCDCOE 2023).

Estonia's active engagement with NATO member states gradually slowed after the establishing of the Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Such a stagnation can be attributed to a couple of factors. First, as mentioned, the start of the global financial crisis from 2008 greatly reduced the alliance's focus on its eastern members, resulting in a lack of high-level military engagement and deterrence creation. Also relevant was the shift of the focus of the alliance towards Georgia after Russia's annexation of parts of the country in 2008. Despite numerous calls for increased NATO presence in the region by the Baltic states and Poland, NATO's actions of multi- and bilateral security creation in the region did not create any notable new deterrent.

Similarly to the lack of new initiatives from NATO, the participation of member states' troops at Estonia's annual military exercises Siil (Hedgehog) and Kevadtorm (Spring Storm) stayed at a cautious and stable level. The official records of the Estonian Defence Forces show that in the period 2008-2012 NATO partners did not engage in Estonia's organised military exercises (Estonian Defence Forces 2023a). A first sign of increased participation in creation of deterrence through participation in joint exercises came from 2013, which was the first time Estonia's troops trained together with 5 allied nations. These included Great Britain, Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland (Estonian Defence Forces 2023a).

3.1.2 Bilateral engagement

In the period around the events of April-May 2007, Estonia's elites also heavily emphasised the need for bilateral good relations with bigger allies in NATO in a security context. The preference for a bilateral approach was mostly expressed in the context pursuing it with the US and Germany.

The wish for a productive one-on-one partnership was echoed by President Ilves, Prime Minister Ansip, and Foreign Minister Paet. For example, to commemorate the 85th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations with the US, Paet emphasised the country's support during the April crisis (Estonian World Review 2007). In his words, Estonia's commitment to NATO is strongly linked to the partnership between Estonia and the US, with the latter being a mainstay of security creation in the region (Ibid). Bilateral engagement with Germany was also quoted by Prime Minister Ansip, who in a parliamentary inquiry about the facts surrounding the riots told members of parliament about his engagement with Chancellor Merkel during the crisis. He stressed the importance of having a clear line of communication with Estonia's allies and noted that Chancellor Merkel expressed that all 500 million European citizens were behind Estonia (Riigikogu 02.05.2007).

Bilateral engagement can only work if both of the parties are engaged in the relationship. A clear result of the attacks in 2007, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves visited US President George W. Bush in the White House in late June 2007. A rare face to face meeting with the US President was significant for the reason that it showed Estonia's bilateral efforts being met with some reward, a visit to the White House was not (and is not today) considered a regularity for the leader of a small European state. Bush applauded Estonia's military troop contributions in Afghanistan and commemorated the soldiers lost (Eesti Päevaleht 2007). Also, meetings between the Estonian President Ilves and United States President Bush were organised in Washington to lobby for America's support for the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Estonia (Postimees 2007c). At the meeting Ilves also thanked his peer for America's support to Estonia in cyber-related initiatives in NATO (Ibid). As the second bilateral engagement, Ilves also scrutinized the importance of involving Germany to the plan to ensure its proper implementation and support in NATO (Ibid).

Still, even with the intensive engagement with bilateral partners, the efforts of Estonia failed to foster enough support for a troop presence in the country by any of the countries. In addition, the relatively unimpressive level of threat perception, especially in the eyes of Estonia's allies, contributed to the comparable ineffectiveness of Estonia's bilateral engagement. As a clear sign of the country's newness in the alliance, the support for the CCDCOE in Tallinn was garnered with the help of bilateral engagement but did not result in the bigger allies respecting and acting in

accordance with Estonia's wishes. Though, a lack of a higher level and credible security creation in Estonia can also be justified with the aforementioned lack of issue securitization in Estonia, with a majority of domestic elites preferring to engage with the topics of Russian-speaker integration into Estonian society over the security implications of a state-on-state cyber-attack by a neighbour.

3.1.3 Sovereign deterrence creation

In conjunction with establishing a COE on cyber defence in Estonia, the country also set towards bolstering their own defence in light of the increasing threat perception. For example, just months in the months leading up to the attacks in 2007, Defence Minister Jürgen Ligi signed a deal to procure air-defence capabilities to the Estonian Defence Forces. This step, at the time the single biggest defence procurement by Estonia, also signals the Estonian nations self-sufficiency principle in play in conjunction with allied engagement (Postimees 2007a).

As expected, such defence procurements had their effect on the country's defence budget as well. The year of 2007 was a turning point for Estonia's defence sector financial well-being as well since the sector's decreasing funding over the past few years had found a plateau and started to gain speed again – a decrease of defence investment that had been going on since the country's accession to NATO (Kaitseministeerium 2011). As a percentage of GDP, Estonia's military investment accounted for slightly under 1.5% in 2006, which saw a notable increase in 2007, reaching 1.74% (Kaitseministeerium 2011). Furthermore, in the year 2008, the investment increased a further margin, reaching 1.84% (Ibid). Generally though, Estonia's efforts to pursue a major increase in their security creation were not highly pronounced. The small nation's contributions to their defence were proportionally stopped at around 1.8% with the start of the global financial crisis. Such a fiscal pressure was also evident in the defence sector, which saw a steady plateau.

Important to note is also the lack of the parliament's interest vis-à-vis its defence sector. During both 2007 and 2008, only one defence-related parliamentary grand discussion took place. The discussion concerned a constitutional change to the hierarchy of Estonian Defence, with the then President pushing for a less president-dependent structure of war time command (Riigikogu 12.06.2007). Other defence-related discussions concerned mostly the deployment of troops abroad and the longevity of foreign missions and their size from Estonia. Also notable is the general lack

of interest from the governing body against its defence sector, a search from 2007 revealed no mention of the procurement of an air-defence system, as mentioned earlier, the biggest defence investment so far in Estonia's history.

The events of April 2007 were the first significant instance of Russian interference in Estonia's internal affairs after the country's joining of NATO in 2004. The street riots coupled with a coordinated cyber attack were aimed to create a sense of chaos in the small state. Estonia's official response was one of clear attribution of the attack, with then Prime Minister Ansip stating Russia's involvement in organising the events. Estonia's efforts in deterrence creation in the aftermath of the riots was clearly indicative of the country's relatively low prestige in NATO, pushing for the establishment of a Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. The clearly multilateral centre incorporated experts from numerous NATO countries, with the aim of working towards a more coherent cyber defence strategy in the alliance. Estonia's bilateral efforts during this time period were rather limited, with one-on-one engagements not resulting in military deployments in the country and focusing more at procuring the support of the bigger states in the alliance for the CCDCOE.

Also important to note is that during the analysed time frame, the threat perception was perhaps most pronounced in the field of cyber attacks, with conventional military threats remaining low and only expressing themselves in a series of riots lasting a couple of days. From this, Estonia's efforts in creating deterrence were indicative of the threats presented, the establishment of the CCDCOE in Tallinn serving as a great indicator of the fact. Furthermore, the lack of any military personnel contributions from a bigger member of NATO or the whole alliance also expresses the lack of Estonia's political capital in that sphere.

3.2 Annexation of Crimea (2014-2022)

The second time frame employed in this thesis concerns the crucial junction of Estonia's deterrence and threat perception change after 2014. The events of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the corresponding conflict in Eastern Ukraine between Russia-sponsored rebel groups and the Ukrainian government forces were the trigger for the change in threat perception, acting as a reminder of Russia's intentions of conquest in the region. The events of 2014 are largely seen as a major wakeup call for the West, who were avoidant on dealing with the threat posed by Russia. Estonian elites expressed their serious concerns about regional and national security in the aftermath of the events, calling for an increase to both allied and domestic military capabilities to counter Russia's actions.

For Estonia, the events of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 were largely ignored by major NATO powers, leaving the small state in a situation of semi-abandonment in terms of deterrence creation. As indicated with in the analysis of the previous timeframe employed in the thesis, Estonia's calls of deterrence creation were answered in the aftermath of the 2007 April crisis, but due to the global financial crisis and the general lack of threat perception on the Western side, creating security for the Baltic region was not on top of the agenda. With Russia's clear invasion of another sovereign European country, the reaction of NATO was more pronounced than ever and helped along by the MH17 tragedy killing close to 300 people, a large part of whom were Dutch citizens. The West's unwillingness to let such an action go and calls for increased wariness of the Russia threat was first strongly voiced by then Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans (i.e NL Times 2014).

From Estonia's side, the first reactions to the annexation of Crimea were relatively intense and quick. In early March of 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Urmas Paet called for a discussion on the Ukraine crisis in Riigikogu. In his address to the parliament, the minister voiced his support for both supporting Ukraine in the crisis internationally and the idea of maintaining the 2% spending base for Estonia's defence domestically (Riigikogu 05.03.2014). Still, Paet maintained the position that there is no immediate threat to Estonia from Russia even though in his mind there should be a heightened state of readiness for Estonia nonetheless (Ibid). Paet also stressed European lack of sovereignty in terms of security policy, citing the continent's heavy reliance on the United States in the face of rumours of American withdrawal from Europe. The Minister for

Foreign affairs called for dialogue with allies that might not be as steadfast in pursuing this agenda, a step that might help persuade other less-convinced allies in Europe about the need for extended deterrence (Ibid).

Similarly, a speech on foreign and defence policy of 2014 was given by Defence Minister Urmas Reinsalu to the parliament on 19th March 2014. Reinsalu asked the parliament permission to host a separate discussion on defence and security related questions and offered to deliver a speech to help steer the following discussion. In the address given to the parliament, Reinsalu stressed the severity of the current security situation after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine more generally. Reinsalu noted the need for both multilateral and sovereign defence capability increase to ensure survival in the “most pressing field in Estonia right now – defence” (Riigikogu 19.03.2014).

In his speech, the Minister outlined two broad strokes of creating a deterrence and defence for Estonia. First, he stressed the importance of increasing Estonia’s commitment and investment in its defence, urging the parliament to set up a multipartisan agreement on the continuation of the 2% defence spending in Estonia (Riigikogu 19.03.2014). Furthermore, he cited ongoing defence contracts procuring infantry fighting vehicles from the Netherlands, a number of self-propelled artillery systems, and the increase of Estonia’s anti-tank capability as concrete steps the country has taken to be prepared in case of an attack (Ibid). In terms of allied engagement within NATO, the Minister voiced his wishes that the upcoming summit in Wales would redefine the alliance’s main goal as collective defence (Ibid). The shift from a peace-keeping focus in the Middle East was deemed insufficient in the light of the recent developments in Europe and calls for a more-intense defence posture both doctrinally and in practice was called for. Furthermore, Reinsalu cited NATO’s and Estonia’s heavy reliance on America and called for more of a multilateral approach to diversify the creation of deterrence in the face of the Russia threat (Ibid).

From both the speeches given in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis a common theme is expressed. It is the vision of both the Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers that for tackling the new security situation in the region after Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, a more inclusive approach to procuring deterrence creation in the alliance must be pursued. Both of the speakers quoted the alliance’s heavy reliance on the US in terms of creating security for its members and called for a

multilateral dialogue with partners to explain the country's positions and help in strengthening defence and deterrence posture in Estonia and NATO's eastern flank more generally.

3.2.1 Multilateral engagement

The most crucial and significant outcome in terms of multilateral security creation in Estonia vis-à-vis NATO was the establishment of the so called Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative in the alliance's Warsaw summit in 2016 (NATO 2016). The initiative was quoted as a clear response to Russia's aggressive steps in the region and was set up to bolster the deterrence postures of the easternmost NATO member states Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. In essence the Enhanced Forward Presence is an allied formation of troops deployed to the easternmost members of the North Atlantic alliance, combining the capabilities of multiple allies in an effort to create a more sizeable and multifaceted deterrent in the Baltic-Polish region.

The establishment of the eFP can directly be linked to Russia and its destabilizing actions in Ukraine in 2014. As the then Defence Minister Hannes Hanso said at the NATO Warsaw summit in 2016, "for us, paradoxically, life has been made much easier by Russia - easier in quotation marks. What we are doing here today is still a very clear reaction to what Russia has done to its neighbours in the recent past." (ERR 2016). Estonia's goals at the summit were to link together the previously made promises by allies to establish a credible forward-facing deterrence element comprising of locally deployed allied troops. Each of the established eFP battalions were formed by a multilateral mix of allied troops, which for Estonia would combine the troops of the leading nation United Kingdom, and two supporting nations of France and Denmark (Ibid).

Such a multilateral approach has a basic logic: the inclusion of many allies of different size and geopolitical power makes the article 5 commitment of NATO more steadfast. The presence of British troops in Estonia, integrated into the defence of the country, will make a potential adversary doubt their decision to attack since the political and economic capacity of the United Kingdom carries much more weight internationally than Estonia's. Therefore, the fact of having a multifaceted defence force acts as a deterrent by itself.

In terms of troop numbers, the contribution was the most significant bolstering of NATO presence in the region up to that date, with UK pledging a contingent of 500 troops to complement the 200 and 300 troops deployed by Denmark and France respectively (Ibid). The troops' goal on the deployment was set out to integrate with Estonian Defence structures and act as a mobile

manoeuvre battalion to complement Estonia's first brigade. As proof of such engagement, the head of the Defence Forces Terras engaged in talks with the British to ensure the deployment of an armoured element in Estonia as a part of the eFP battalion even before their official deployment (Postimees 2016). Terras also voiced his support for clear and structured cooperation with allies, saying that it's a relief to have the number of allies in the region increase (Ibid). Also important to note is the size of the deployed military personnel, totalling close to a thousand troops. For a country the size of Estonia, such a capable battlegroup holds much also in the way of clear-cut military capability. Even though the basic premise and purpose of the eFP is to be a tool of deterrence, the fact of its considerable capacity is also a factor in the case of an actual conventional conflict.

In terms of the duality of bilateral and multilateral deterrence creation, the Enhanced Forward Presence battalion in Estonia has elements of both in the idea behind its inception. From the one side, the creation of a multi-state military unit in Estonia is a multilateral initiative, bringing together different allies with varying capabilities and political influence in the alliance. For example, the added political influence with three NATO members who are a part of the eFP, United Kingdom, France, and Denmark, has increased Estonia's influence in the alliance. The deployed troops from the mentioned states offering closer political cooperation possibilities and resulting in a bigger political capital in the alliance due to the closer communication with the allied countries. Similarly, the merger of different units can offer a chance of military diversification of the battalion, with the UK offering up an armoured unit and the French deploying their specialised alpine units, neither of which only one of the allies could not muster up as easily.

The other side of the creation of the eFP is also quite bilateral by its nature. The choice of allies in the eFP was quoted with having in mind Estonia's prior military relations with nations. For example, the leading country of the battlegroup, Great Britain, has been involved with Estonian troops in Afghanistan's Helmand province (i.e Delfi 2008), and Estonia was one of the few countries deploying troops to their mission in Mali (i.e Õhtuleht 2022). To add, such a clear-structured composition of the battlegroup in Estonia also offers unique opportunities for one-on-one engagement in the future, with the countries already a part of the battlegroup having more experience with local circumstances and with the communication between them and host-country Estonia.

3.2.2 Bilateral engagement

As seen from the analysis on multilateral engagement with countries, calls for multilateralism were not immediately met with a multilateral response. In the following part I will scrutinise Estonia's bilateral engagement with allies in the period after 2014 to see how it may have differed from multilateral efforts. A crucial part of Estonia's bilateral engagement and creating a credible deterrent for the small state was the unprecedented visit of then US President Barack Obama to Estonia in September 2014, the first visit of a sitting US President to Estonia. During the two day visit Barack Obama met with both the President and Prime Minister of Estonia and held a speech and a press conference with President Ilves with the intent reassuring Estonia as a NATO member of the US's support.

Barack Obama met all three of the Baltic heads of state in Estonia, in his address to the people, the President of the US reaffirmed the state's commitment to the protection of Estonia. "So if, in such a moment, you ever ask again, 'who will come to help', you'll know the answer – the NATO Alliance, including the Armed Forces of the United States of America, right here, [at] present, now! We'll be here for Estonia." (Obama White House 2014).

Such a clear and strong commitment to the security of Estonia was not only expressed in discourse. Later that day, Prime Minister Rõivas of Estonia announced plans to create a training base for US airmen in Ämari, Estonia (Delfi 2014). More specifically the airbase signifies and increases American troop presence in the Nordic-Baltic region and offers training facilities for both US and European Air Forces (Ibid). This step was of crucial importance to Estonia, since the development of such a training facility in Estonia would also result the deployment of United States airborne assets to the country, especially important since Estonia lack a formidable air force themselves. In addition, the resulting betterment of the Ämari air base in Estonia was also a big step towards increased allied presence in Estonia due to the development of local infrastructure of the air base.

Increasing the significance of Estonia and Ämari air base has both bilateral and multilateral preconditions and results. One the one hand, this is clearly a bilateral security arrangement, with the US's initiative of a training base being received and built by Estonians on their territory. A clear and strong message is also the resulting increase of American airborne assets in Estonia, a side-benefit of the training centre. On the other hand, the development still has a multilateral aspect, the incorporation of both Baltic, Nordic, and American training programmes. Clearly the

visit of Barack Obama was meant to carry a discursive message to Russia about the steadfast nature of the alliance and its members' equality, the message's reinforcement was the allocation of resources for the establishment of a military training base in Ämari, Estonia.

A clear difference between bilateral and multilateral deterrence creation emerges from this analysis as well. When looking at the relative time it took for either bilateral engagement with the US and the creation of a multilateral battlegroup in Estonia, bilateral engagement was clearly the faster alternative. Obama's visit to Estonia just a couple of months after the crisis in Ukraine serves as a clear indicator of the relative ease of bilateral engagement when compared to the time-consuming nature of establishing a multilateral and inclusive deterrent in the region. This is not to say that Estonia's clear goal was to prioritise bilateral engagement with the US as an immediate step over multilateral engagement with European allies within the context of the eFP. Most likely, the hierarchical importance was similar for both engagements, a clear distinction being the differing amount of time it takes for either of the two options to materialise in concrete deterrence creation.

3.2.3 Sovereign deterrence creation

From the side of the defence creation at home, leaving aside the abovementioned outwards facing deterrence creation modes, Estonia saw a sharp increase in both military investment and military training activities. The first, military investment increase, expressed through the active pursuit of new defence contracts can be charted through the employment of new capabilities to the Estonian Defence Forces. As mentioned earlier, the procurement of the Dutch owned infantry fighting vehicles CV9035EE was a major increase to the sovereign defence capability of Estonia. The contract of purchase was signed in December 2014, procuring a total of 44 of the new IFVs (Kaitseministeerium 2014). In a questions-and-answers format in front of the Estonian Parliament, the defence minister Hanso described the CV90 procurement as a "completely new capability", that offers the Estonian Defence Forces an armoured manoeuvre capability that it completely lacked before it (Riigikogu 21.10.2015). In addition, Estonia also pursued the addition of a new capability, self-propelled howitzers to their arsenal, signing into contract for a South-Korean system in 2018, with the intent being publicly vocalised as early as late 2016 (Postimees 2017).

The other side of the domestic deterrence creation was to drastically increase the intensity and number of personnel involved in yearly military exercises. In the period from 2007, the size of the defence exercises was stable around 3000-4000 participants annually (Estonian Defence Forces

2023a). From 2014, the size and scope of the exercises increased exponentially, increasing 50% in 2014 to 6000 participants, and reaching a high on 13 000 participants and 15 000 participants in 2015 and 2018 respectively due to a new training exercise “Siil” (“Hedgehog”). Since 2015, a more enhanced version of the exercise has been held with a period of every 3-4 years – “Siil”. In essence, the two exercises are similar, the only major difference in their organization is their scale, Siil exercises are usually held with a larger proportion of reservists and allied forces (Estonian Defence Forces 2023b). This is also indicative of the increased severity of threat perception by the defence elites themselves, opting to increase both the amount of allied and domestic troops in annual military exercises.

Estonia’s actions in creating deterrence in the aftermath of Russian illegal annexation of Crimea were definitely more pronounced and geared towards a military troop deployment into the small country. This expressed itself through a multilateral engagement of implementing the Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia, with the group comprising of British, French, and Danish forces. The decision of establishing eFP came with a considerable delay though, with the final decisions taken after a relatively long period of 2 years, in 2016. Estonia’s bilateral engagement with allies was most intense with the country’s relationship with the US, President Obama’s visit in September 2014 showcasing both the speed and intensity of bilateral engagement when compared to multilateral efforts. Obama’s visit to Estonia also resulted in the establishment of an airborne troop training base in Ämari, comprising of not only the US, but other allies’ personnel and equipment. Another sign of actively combining multi- and bilateral engagement in pursuing defence arrangements was the creation of the eFP battlegroup in Estonia, the leading nation of which Great Britain being quoted as a priority ally by then head of the Defence Forces Terras.

3.3 Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022-2023)

The third relevant time frame of this thesis concerns the events starting from February 24th, 2022, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. For the purposes of this analysis, the time frame employed will be limited to a year after the start of the invasion due to the limited capacity of this analysis to engage with later documents. Since the focus of the study is on the deterrence creation in Estonia, the following discussion will note the reverberations of the war in Ukraine and avoid dealing with the complexities of the war itself, its political or economic implications, or any other factors. Therefore, the following analysis will employ the time frame of early 2022 to February 2023 to graph the response of Estonia in terms of creating deterrence and using different models of creating security for themselves.

Estonia's reaction to the start of the invasion in Ukraine was one of shock and fast condemnation. As a coincidence, the outbreak of the war occurred on the day of Estonia's Independence Day, for which the President Alar Karis held his annual speech to the nation. In the speech, Karis said that Russia has again chosen the path of violence and that the only guarantees Estonia has for not following Ukraine's sad fate is its membership to both NATO and the EU (President of Estonia 2022). Similar addresses were also held by the Prime Minister and the Chief of the Estonian Defence Forces, both putting strong emphasis on allied relationships as a guarantee of the events of Ukraine not repeating in Estonia (Valitsus 2022, ERR 2022b).

From the side of the Estonian Defence Forces, daily briefings on the situation in Ukraine and its implications to the security of Estonia were also organised with the purpose of keeping the public in the loop about current events. The briefings served as a reminder of the severity of the threat perception increase in the country also due to the fact that such military press conferences were not held prior to 2022. The main message of the press conferences was to reassure the public of Estonia about the security situation around Estonia and to quote the lack of any immediate threat against the state's sovereignty at present. Even though the messages from the press conferences were mostly with the purpose of calming the people, the significance of the war and the resulting change in the threat perception around Estonia still echoed out. Later on, after the first few weeks of the conflict, the frequency of the press conferences decreased to a weekly event.

In addition, the response of the Western bloc was unusually aggressive as well, with economic sanctions enhanced by strong military support to both Ukraine and its eastern NATO allies as well.

The invasion was harshly condemned by all major western leaders, including Presidents of the US, France, Germany, United Kingdom. This step also led the Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg to reassure NATO members of the article 5 policy coining a term “every inch of NATO will be protected” (i.e PBS 2022).

In Estonia, the reaction and expectation was of an increased allied presence in the region. Estonia’s elites were one of the few in Europe that had expected the war to break out, delivering military support to Ukraine even before the start of the Ukraine invasion (ERR 2021). When talking to an extraordinary parliamentary session about the increasing tensions around Ukraine, the Prime Minister reassured the legislators that there’s no imminent threat to Estonia’s borders from Russia but doubting that a peaceful solution to the escalation would be likely (Riigikogu 14.02.2022). In the light of such an escalation, Kaja Kallas also praised the importance of maintaining communication with close allies, highlighting an upcoming visit by the Belgian Prime Minister to visit their rotating airborne troops at Ämari air base (Riigikogu 07.02.2022).

3.3.1 Multilateral engagement

In Estonia, the alliance’s efforts were multilaterally not very strongly felt at the start of the invasion. The first days of the war proved to be geared more towards staunch words than quick actions, with NATO’s material response coming with a slight delay. Important to note in this context is the location of Ukraine in terms of NATO, bordering with the southern members of NATO in Europe. This meant that the initial response of the alliance was focused towards the more southern allies, extending the 2016 eFP initiative to Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, establishing a similar battlegroup-based deployment cycle in those NATO allies closest to the ongoing war in Ukraine (NATO 2022b).

The other NATO-wide change in stance came with a bit of a delay in summer 2022, before the Madrid summit, with the alliance increasing the size of its NATO Response Force (NRF) (ERR 2022a). The size of the Response Force was expanded from 40 000 personnel to 300 000, marking an over seven times increase in its capacity when compared with time before the fully-fledged invasion of Ukraine by Russia (Ibid). Such a dramatic increase of capabilities to the NRF also signalled the alliance’s change in posture, with bigger members in the bloc committing more troops to the inclusive deterrence creation capabilities of the alliance.

In the precursor to the 2022 Madrid Summit, scheduled to be held a couple of months after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Estonian unhappiness with the relative lack of multilateral action by NATO resulted in a rare voice of discord. More specifically, just days before the summit, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas gave an interview to Financial Times in which she was quoted as saying that Estonia would be “wiped from the map” in current NATO plans (Financial Times 2022). Such a bold tone was clearly voiced towards the bigger allied states in NATO, calling for increased allied presence in the region. What was unorthodox about the interview though, was the intensiveness and boldness of Kaja Kallas in expressing her deep disappointment in the current behaviour of bigger allies. The domestic reaction of Kallas’ address was quite hostile towards such a dramatic step, with notable security experts criticising her words, marking that publicly talking about NATO plans might be illegal (ERR 2022c). A notable reaction also came from the President of Estonia, Alar Karis, who did not agree with negotiating over the media instead of doing that in person (ERR 2022e). Such a statement was a clear sign that the heads of the Estonian state unhappy with both the speed and effectiveness of multilateral engagement in NATO at the time of high security threats in Europe.

Similarly with the changes of posture in the southern parts of the alliance, NATO’s change of posture in Estonia came with a bit of a delay as well. More specifically, the multilateral aspect of NATO’s deterrence creation in Estonia was quite limited in the latest time frame, with the inclusion of a division command structure capable of employing the use of up to ten thousand military personnel. This meant that NATO would establish a division-level command structure in Estonia, that would facilitate the increasing presence of allied troops (Kaitseministeerium 2022). This means that a higher level command structure would be created in Estonia with the aim of integrating the military capabilities in Estonia, both domestic and allied brigades into one coherent unit (Ibid). Even though the decision to create a division headquarters in Estonia was established in a multilateral agreement, the troops and expertise to man that command structure is of British origin, highlighting the impact and importance of bilateral communication tracks established before within the frameworks of both eFP and other one-on-one defence agreements.

When it comes to multilateral engagement efforts by Estonia to enhance their deterrence and security posture due to the high threat perception in the country, the lack of multilateral defence pledges stands out. When it comes to the multilateral decision of establishing division-capable

command structures in the country, the practical output of it was still envisaged as a bilateral engagement with the British. This clearly moves away from the logic of multilateral deterrence creation in the earlier time frames of the study (i.e the Centre of Excellence and the eFP initiative), with increased threat perception seemingly allowing less room for engagement with more than one allied state in the context of creating a new deterrent. Also notable is the staunch public criticism of NATO's current defence plans by Prime Minister Kallas which also enhances the country's reluctance of multilateral cooperation in times of crises.

3.3.2 Bilateral engagement

When compared with the multilateral defence creation after the start of the war in Ukraine, the bilateral deterrence creation was of a much shorter time schedule, resulting in a fast and determined reinforcement of allied troops in Estonia. As one of the main defence partners of Estonia, Great Britain doubled the number of their military personnel in the country even before the start of the war (ERR 2022d). The decision to reinforce Estonia's defence with over 900 additional troops by the UK was taken on the 16th of February 2022, days before the start of the war to show both commitment and resolve in the face of a potential aggressive step by Russia in the region (Ibid). The troops were committed as a pledge from the leaders of Great Britain to support Estonia's growing concerns about Russia's actions of amassing troops on the Ukrainian border and calling for the withdrawal of NATO troops from the eastern European region.

Prime Minister Kaja Kallas mentioned the British intent to heighten the security posture in Estonia as early as the 7th of February, quoting increasing concern from the Baltic states about Russia's future actions (Riigikogu 07.02.2022). Kallas welcomed the thought of Great Britain reinforcing the deterrence posture in Estonia, talking about the need for a stance of deterrence to be amplified with an increase of on-ground troops (Ibid). Just days after the start of the war in late February, Estonia was also visited by both Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO (Estonian World 2022a). The dignitaries inspected eFP troops along with the new contingent of 900 British troops at Tapa military base and reaffirmed Great Britain's and NATO's willingness and commitment to Estonia's defence (Ibid).

In addition to the bilateral engagement with the British resulting in the increase of allied presence in Estonia, the country's defence was also bolstered by the addition of United States troops. Firstly, on the evening of the 24th of February, a group of American F-35 fighter aircraft landed in Estonia,

as a direct result of Russia's war against Ukraine (Estonian Defence Forces 2022a). The step was justified with the outbreak of full-scale war in Europe and the commander of US Air Forces in Europe was quoted as this deployment "enhancing NATO's defence posture in the region" (Ibid). Furthermore, in the later part of the year, the US also deployed an additional infantry company and the famed HIMARS rocket artillery system to Estonia as a part of a larger bilateral commitment (Estonian Defence Forces 2022b).

Similarly to the deployment of F-35 fighters in early 2022, this stationing of troops in Estonia was a ground-breaking step since this was officially the first time that a sizeable unit of US troops have been permanently deployed to Estonia. Moreover, the inclusion of a HIMARS platoon in the deployment also signifies the bilateral engagement between the US and Estonia, with the latter also procuring the same system from the US. This means that one part of the HIMARS platoon in the country is also designated as a training unit for quicker adaption of the system into the military forces of Estonia.

When comparing the employment of bilateral and multilateral defence engagement of Estonia in 2022, a clear difference of speed emerges. When it comes to the start of the war in early 2022, both the troops of Great Britain and the United States showed very high level of readiness both from the political and military points of view, enabling their rapid deployment in the face of a potential conflict and increased threat perception. In the case of British troops, their deployment happened even before the start of the war in late February 2022, indicating a close bilateral cooperation and understanding between Great Britain and Estonia, also highlighted by the visit of Prime Minister Johnson to Estonia just days after the invasion to reaffirm their support. Estonian elites were highly wary of the imminent Russian threat and worked actively in the months before the full-scale invasion to procure an increased allied commitment in Estonia.

3.3.3 Sovereign deterrence creation

Increased sense of threat also left its mark on the domestic modes of deterrence creation in Estonia. Most importantly, the changes happened in two fields of deterrence creation: the procurement of capabilities, and the increase of military exercises and their size. Firstly, even before the start of the war in early 2022, Estonia's defence spending found a significant boom through the procurement of extra ammunition and capabilities to the amount of 380 million euros (Riigikogu 19.01.2022).

The procurement of ammunition was supported by a later 476 million euros in mid-March, showing the country's position on the importance of increasing defence spending in the situation of increasing threat perception. Estonia's defence spending reached a level of 3% in 2022, with all the major parliamentary parties agreeing on a consensus to sustain defence spending at that point, a significant increase from the earlier 2% threshold (Riigi Kaitseinvesteeringute Keskus 2023). To add to that, Estonia also allocated a further 435 million euros in September to create a capability of mid-range air-defence in Estonia (Riigi Kaitseinvesteeringute Keskus 2023).

The significant increase in defence spending in 2022 expressed itself in the capability procurements of the Estonian military in the analysed time frame. During the year after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Estonia signed a contract of acquiring a long-range artillery system HIMARS, which hugely increases the country's ability to deter any possible aggression (Riigi Kaitseinvesteeringute Keskus 2022). Furthermore, a political pledge to procure a mid-range air defence system by the end of 2025 was also established, with the money allocated in September intended for that purpose (Riigi Kaitseinvesteeringute Keskus 2023).

From the side of Defence Force exercises and the growing of their intensity, the aggression in Ukraine was met with a series of increased flash exercises in Estonia, culminating with the biggest-ever defence exercise "Siil 2022" ("Hedgehog 2022"), combining size of which exceeded 15 000 military personnel from both Estonia and allied countries (Estonian Defence Forces 2023b). For 2023, the Chief of Defence Forces General Martin Herem also pledged to call up as much as 27 500 reservists for the purposes of training exercises during the course of the year (Delfi 2022).

Significant changes took place from the structural side of Estonia's defence from as early as summer 2022. This meant the increase of war-time personnel in Estonia by a quarter, to 36 000 (Äripäev 2022). This coincides with General Herem's pledge of involving a record-number of reservists in training exercises in 2023 in an attempt to meet the ambitious goal of an extra 10 000 troops capable of acting in war-time scenarios (Ibid). Such a significant change in war-time personnel allocation and the pledge to involve a major part of them in annual military exercises also shows Estonia's commitment to improving their self-deterrence measures in the event of increasing threat perception.

Overall, Estonia's reactions to the severely worsened security situation in Europe after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were significantly more pronounced when compared to

previous time frames analysed. This meant a high reliance on bilateral security engagement with its main NATO allies Great Britain and United States. Most efforts of the small country were directed towards communication with the former, resulting in a doubling of British ground troops in Estonia (an increase of 700 personnel). Moreover, the engagement with Great Britain also resulted in a visit of Prime Minister Boris Johnson in just days after the start of the invasion to reinforce British military support with political assurances. Multilateral efforts of deterrence creation were not highly successful in the first weeks after the war, with NATO's actions vis-à-vis Estonia not strongly felt. Moreover, Prime Minister Kaja Kallas' statement on the inability of NATO to protect Estonia in times of war signified Estonia's elites' disappointment of multilateral deterrence creation effectiveness. Still, perhaps aided by the PM's critical statements, the NATO Summit in Madrid resulted in a division-level command structure in Estonia, with the aim of combining British and Estonian capabilities into one. This signifies the importance of bilateral engagement in times of crises and resulting increase in threat perception, with Estonia's clear focus on engagement with Great Britain serving as a clear example of such behaviour in small state alliance engagement.

3.4 Discussion

Estonia's positions as a small state in creating deterrence over the three distinct time periods of differing threat perception were certainly distinguishable in many aspects. As the empirical analysis showed, Estonian elites' expression of the increasing threat perception were not very strongly expressed in their public statements, with most public speeches and comments used to address the lack of imminent military threat from Russia.

Furthermore, a strong discursive attribution of the threat perception increase vis-à-vis Estonia was perhaps most elaborate in the first time period surrounding the 2007 April attacks. This could both be explained by Estonia's need to grab political attention with a strong message and also trying to decrease the chances of escalation through public means. This could also be closely tied to the fact of Estonia's quite low international profile at the time, with the country only being admitted to the North Atlantic alliance three years prior to the events. A strong message of a state-on-state attack from the political elites could have been used to improve the country's position in NATO, with stronger political rhetoric lending itself to the purposes of increased influence. The political noting of an increase in threat perception was later expressed more through the recognition of Estonia's membership in NATO and its close cooperation with member states to ensure stability. This also hits at the increased role of NATO in the security calculus of Estonia, showing both affirmation and credibility of the security guarantees of NATO.

In terms of deterrence over the observed three critical junctures, all three proposed main avenues of security creation were employed. In terms of their intensity, the first period of observation (2007-2014) shows the use of both multilateral and bilateral engagements through elites' speech acts and statements. When it came to the concrete development of new deterrence elements, multilateral cooperation prevailed in the form of establishing the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Bilateral engagement was in this period mostly utilised to seek one-on-one support in NATO, with the goal of gaining powerful supporters within the alliance from main partners (USA, Germany). Such a lack of close (i.e expressed in practical military outlets) bilateral engagement can also partly be attributed to the lack of political capital of the small state in the first years of its tenure in NATO. Also, the pursuit of a new type of defence initiative (cyber defence) could also been a factor contributing to the preference of multilateral

tools since such an arrangement could garner higher levels of specialisation on the topic due to the multitude of partners involved in creating the Centre of Excellence.

For the second time frame employed around the annexation of Crimea by Russia (2014-2022), a clear sense of increased belief and political capital in NATO could be sensed. This can mostly be attributed to Estonia's commitment to supporting NATO allies in their various military missions abroad. Also, a clear reliance on multilateral initiatives was pursued by the country, citing the need for a more inclusive approach to security creation. The resulting deterrent created was the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative, established in 2016. The battalion consisted of a multilateral mix of countries, led by Great Britain, and was created in the country to function in close cooperation with the Defence Forces of Estonia. Bilateral engagement was also employed in the second timeframe, most notably through the official visit of US President Barack Obama in 2014, just months after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The visit also resulted in a US-led air-training base in Ämari, Estonia. Important to note, is also the employment of both bilateral and multilateral defence creation around this time, a model of action not utilised in 2007, with the country's position, and the surrounding overall threat perception being much lower than in 2014. The combination of multilateral and bilateral pursuits of deterrence combined with the increase in threat perception also helped create a stronger political will for security enhancement in Estonia, with bilateral engagements with key allies (Great Britain) facilitating the multilateral deployment of a NATO unit in Estonia.

The last time frame analysed in the thesis (2022-present) was in its essence quite similar to the period around the annexation of Crimea, with both of the frames seeing the employment of both multi- and bilateral deterrence creation. What was significant about the latest time frame, was the intensity of bilateral aid requested by Estonia, and the timing of the assistance. As mentioned, Great Britain's efforts to double their troop presence in Estonia in early 2022 were significant due to the fact that they came before the start of the war in Ukraine as a response to the potential of heightened security risk. Such a bilateral concentration of efforts on one country clearly signifies the imminence of the threat due to the bilateral engagements trumping multilateral engagements in terms of speed. In addition, the use of a bilateral deterrence creation measure might have been preferred due to the already existing good relations with the United Kingdom (less risk of denied assistance), and the presence of an already established infrastructure in the country. Similarly, the

commitment of the US in supporting Estonia was also quick in its nature, bringing airborne assets to the country on the day of the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

From the side of multilateral defence arrangements, Estonia's Prime Minister Kallas demonstrated an unexpectedly harsh stance on NATO's actions in terms of Estonia's defence, quoting the alliance's inability to protect Estonia from an attack. The statement was linked with the NATO summit in Madrid, with it coming just days before its start. Furthermore, the desired multilateral agreement with NATO was actually in essence more of a bilateral contribution and cooperation effort with the British. The established division-level command structure was set to integrate the two Estonian brigades with one British brigade to establish a fully manned division in Estonia, set to start regular rotations to the country. This means that even though the proposed division-level headquarters was officially accepted as a part of the 2022 Madrid Summit, the employment and development of the initiative was almost unequivocally bilateral in nature.

In terms of domestic deterrence creation, Estonia's behaviour was in most instances in accordance with expectations, with an increase in threat perception resulting in a more-pronounced military investment and training exercises. This meant that an increase in threat perceptions resulted in a more intense commitment to the betterment of Estonia's defence. One sign of the increased importance of NATO's troops in Estonia can be seen from the steadily growing involvement of partner countries in Estonia's military exercises. This, along with the increase of military investment clearly indicates that self-sufficient security creation was held in high regard from the Estonian elites' side. Such an approach is most likely taken due to recognising the need for deterrence creation for the purposes of both maintaining allies' support to their security and creating a credible domestic deterrence in the eyes of the potential adversary.

It is clear from this analysis that Estonia's deterrence creation methods have not been static over the analysed time frames. Conversely, a clear change of deterrence creation methods can be seen when looking at the strategies employed by the small state over the past decades. The initial focus of Estonia in this field was on multilateral engagement with NATO, relying on bilateral relations as a political cover in the first time period. Estonia's lack of political significance limited the country to pushing for a multilateral a semi-military Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, focusing on cyber issues. The following period after the annexation of Crimea saw the dual employment of both multi- and bilateral defence cooperation, to establish a multilateral battlegroup headed by a

bilateral partner, Great Britain. The battlegroup was established as a first measure of significant on-ground allied troops in Estonia, whose task was to integrate with the Estonian Defence Forces to aid in the protection of the country.

The final time frame, encompassing the highest sense of threat perception in the charted time frames saw the country's employment of a nearly universally bilateral defence agreements, with the country's actions in creating deterrence coming mainly with engagement with Great Britain. Furthermore, country's elites' displeasure was also expressed in publicly voicing Estonia's fear of abandonment in the days leading up to the 2022 NATO Summit. From this, a clear sense of the importance of bilateral relations in small state security arrangements arises. Estonia's actions in deterrence creation clearly show the advantages of speed and effectiveness of bilateral engagements over multilateral ones, with an increase for the need for additional security guarantees resulting in a more bilateral approach to deterrence creation. Multilateral engagements with the alliance were still used to in times of heightened threat perception within NATO, albeit with the results of the multilateral decisions expressed in a bilateral outcome.

The research puzzle formed hypothesised the use of bilateral security arrangements over multilateral engagements with the expected outcome of such action being increased intensity and speed. The case presented in the analysis clearly indicated a small state's willingness to employ the faster tools of bilateral engagement in the case of increased threat. Furthermore, the analysis depicts a scenario of a gradual increase of threat perception in Estonia's risk calculus, giving the analysis clear, time-limited focus and the ability to identify and analyse the shifts between bilateral, multilateral, and sovereign deterrence creation.

Conclusion

The goal of this master's thesis was to chart small state deterrence creation measures in a situation of increased threat perception. For a small state, the main goal of its existence is ensuring its own survival. This task of ensuring survival is generally much more difficult to achieve for such states than for bigger states, for whom the issues of lack of economic, geographical, or political size are not as relevant. To help in ensuring a small state's survival, military and political alignment with other states is typically seen as the preferred option, with it offering both an enhancement of domestic abilities and the potential for allied assistance in times of crises.

This master's thesis used a single case study of Estonia to explore the ways in which small states engage within a military alliance to create deterrence. Traditionally, small state security engagement has been seen as mostly multilateral in the context of a security alliance. This master's thesis proposes bilateral security arrangements within an alliance as a less-explored framework of creating deterrence for a small state, hypothesising the increased speed and intensity of such arrangements over multilateral engagements as the main reasons for such action. Important to mention is that in most cases bilateral engagement is seen as working hand-in-hand with both multilateral and sovereign deterrence creation measures, forming a unified trifecta of efforts aimed at creating favourable security arrangements in the country.

For the purposes of the analysis, this thesis employed elites' speech acts and relevant security documents to determine the different extent and models employed in Estonia's deterrence creation. The analysis was conducted over three critical time periods/junctures of increased security risk for Estonia. First, the events around April-May 2007 were analysed, which saw the increase of threat perception due to Russia-led cyber attacks against Estonia and the additional on-street riots in the capital Tallinn. The second time frame concerned Russia's actions in annexing Crimea in 2014 and encompassed Estonia's efforts in creating deterrence in that window. Last of the analysed time frame is the most recent, starting with the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, resulting in an unprecedented change in Europe's security architecture, pushing small states around Russia to pursue highly active models of defence engagement. Across these time frames, a three-way model of creating deterrence was employed, which analysed multilateral, bilateral, and sovereign deterrence creation.

For the three time frames employed, the threat perception steadily increased over time, with more recent time frames proving an increased sense of threat. Additionally, the measures employed to create deterrence in Estonia also differed across the frames, with the increase in threat imminence and perception pushing the small state more towards bilateral engagements. Crucial to mention though, is that the use of all the three methods of deterrence creation were present in all time frames, employed in conjunction with each other. The difference in the time frames occurred in the differing intensity and proportion of the models employed, with bilateral engagement rising in prevalence in cases of higher threat perception. Same can be said about domestic deterrence creation, which was also amplified by the increase of threat perception, though the employment of that strategy played more a facilitating role for the use of models of outside engagement (both bi- and multilateral).

This therefore leads this thesis back to the original research question, what strategies of intra-alliance engagement does a small state pursue in cases of increased threat perception. As indicated above, small state alliance engagement is prone to the preference of bilateral security arrangements in times of crises. The increases in risk assessment leading the small country to resorting to a faster and more effective one-on-one engagement, mitigating the risks of excess time consumption and extensive bureaucratic hurdles in the cases of multilateral engagements. Furthermore, as the results of the analysis show, in extreme cases of threat perception, multilateral engagements can be sought to facilitate and justify the use of bilateral security assurances, the most striking example of that being the establishment of a British-Estonian joint division level headquarters with the NATO summit of 2022.

This master's thesis rather aimed to explore the field of small state bilateral security arrangements within an alliance. The case offered presents a compelling case of employing bilateral security assurances in times of increased risk of war. This in turn opens up the academic field of small state alliance engagement to further questions of what happens in the case of decreasing threat assessments, does this logic of increased bilateral communication function in other small state security arrangements, and finally, to which extent does the rationale of bilateral engagement efficacy extendable to other cases of small state security creation outside of Europe and NATO. Still, the case of Estonia presents a strong case for the support of employing bilateral security measures in times of increasing threats, a concept not thoroughly explored in earlier International

Relations fields. This thesis opens up the way for future works on small state alliance engagement, which can seek the presence of bilateral engagement models within an alliance.

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