

DO SMALL STATES NEED A BALANCED FLEET?

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According to Milan Vego, a renowned naval warfare historian and theoretician from Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Failure to build a balanced fleet has in the past created many difficulties in accomplishing strategic objectives in a war at sea.”¹ However, it is worth asking if this statement also applies to small states.

It is widely accepted that a balanced fleet would benefit a maritime nation; however, the same may not always apply to small states with little ambitions, limited resources, and some specific problems. The current revolution in military affairs and past budget cuts have made it increasingly harder to maintain a capable fleet. This raises the question of whether small states should try to build a balanced fleet or are there any other, better, options.²

1. The importance of the maritime domain

The sea comprises 70.8% of the Earth’s surface. Although people live on land, the maritime domain is important to coastal states. The sea has four historical attributes: it is a pool for resources, a medium for transportation, a medium for exchanging information, and a medium for power projection. Mankind currently obtains 20% of dietary proteins from the sea. Fishing and the fishing industry in general are an important international business³. Essential natural resources can be found under the sea, most importantly oil and natural gas, already half of whose entire supplies are extracted from the sea bottom⁴. Since

¹ **Vego, M. N.** 1999. *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*. London: Taylor and Francis, p. 297.

² This article was originally written in Estonian and first published in the *Estonian Journal of Military Studies* (Sõjateadlane), No. 16, pp. 143–148.

³ **Till, G.** 2013. *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*. Revised and updated third edition. New York: Routledge, pp. 6–7. [Till 2013]

⁴ **Мурашов, Е. А.** 2002. *Основы тактики военно-морского флота*. Санкт-Петербург: Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, p. 10

maritime transport is the cheapest and fastest means of transporting large quantities of goods, over 90% of global trade is operated by sea⁵. Sailors have been mediators of information throughout history, although today this role has been taken over by internet cables in the sea and ocean bottoms. An estimated 90% of all internet traffic passes through these cables⁶. Sea powers can use the sea to invade an opponent or coerce them by limiting their opportunities to use the sea. Such power projection does not have to be an amphibious operation on the shore of another country; it is enough to disrupt or merely threaten to disrupt sea lines of communication. Even sending a capable naval fleet to an area of crisis is considered an extremely powerful political message⁷. Today, the four historic purposes of the sea are complemented by a fifth: the sea is increasingly seen as a natural environment, used for leisure but also requiring protection⁸.

Coastal states cannot ignore the possibilities and threats posed by the sea. The maritime cluster (fishing and shipping industry, shipbuilding, etc.) may constitute a great proportion of the national economy. On the other hand, maritime boundaries may become an avenue of aggression by hostile countries. This is the reason why every coastal state has its maritime interests and each coastal state needs capabilities, e.g., naval forces of some sort, to protect them. Sometimes, however, countries fail to recognise their existing or potential interests⁹. In the naval community, this phenomenon is called sea blindness.

⁵ Till 2013, pp. 7–13.

⁶ Main, D. 2015. Undersea Cables Transport 99 Percent of International Data. – Newsweek, April 2. <https://www.newsweek.com/undersea-cables-transport-99-percent-internationalcommunications-319072> (20.12.2020).

⁷ Till 2013, pp. 14–17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 300–301.

⁹ Urb, T. 2016a. Euroopa mereline julgeolekulõhe. – Sõdur, No. 9. [Urb 2016a]; Mellett, Mark 2014. Adaptive Dynamic Capabilities and Innovation: The Key for Small Navies Protecting National Interests at and from the Sea. – Mulqueen, M.; Sanders, D.; Speller, I. (eds.). Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 68. [Mellett 2014]; Laanemets, Ott 2014a. Eesti merejõudude ülesannete analüüs ja sellest tulenevad laevatüübid. Magistritöö. Tallinn: Tallinna Tehnikaülikool. [Laanemets 2014a]

2. What is a small state?

There is no single widely accepted definition of a small state but, according to consensus, a small state is a country with relatively few resources and/or insignificant or little impact from the perspective of an international system. This is why their security relies on collective defence and international security agreements¹⁰. According to Anders Wivel, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Clive Archer, small states are unable to protect their sovereignty independently, their opportunities to act are restricted, and their impact on international relations is small. Because of that, they rather tend to adjust to the international environment than to shape it and try to achieve any kind of impact through international institutions¹¹. Since small states may have something that large countries would like to obtain—natural resources, a strategic location, support, or voice in the international arena—they have to protect their territorial integrity, political sovereignty, national identity, and freedom to act¹².

Even small states can have a grand strategy¹³. In this case, the navy of a coastal state “will rank among its most relevant peacetime instruments of power, among its most valuable pieces of diplomatic real estate.”¹⁴ Usually, however, they perform their military and law enforcement operations in their own or adjacent waters. Although territorial sea and exclusive economic zones are important to small coastal states or coastal powers, the sea power of small states is limited in both intensity and extent¹⁵.

¹⁰ **Maass, M.** 2017. *Small states in world politics. The story of small state survival, 1648–2016.* Manchester University Press, pp. 220–221, 232.

¹¹ **Wivel, A.; Bailes, A. J. K.; Archer, C.** 2014. *Setting the Scene: Small States and International Security.* – Wivel, A.; Bailes, A. J. K.; Archer, C. (eds.). *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond.* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 5–7.

¹² **Bailes, A. J. K.; Rickli, J.-M.; Thorhallsson, B.** 2014. *Small States, Survival and Strategy.* – Wivel, A.; Bailes, A. J. K.; Archer, C. (eds.). *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond.* London and New York: Routledge, p. 26.

¹³ **Holmes, J. R.** 2012. *Small Navy, Strong Navy.* – *The Diplomat*, December 20. <http://thediplomat.com/2012/12/small-navy-strong-navy/> (13.09.2017). [**Holmes** 2012]

¹⁴ **Børresen, J.** 2004. *Coastal Power: The Sea Power of the Coastal State and the Management of Maritime Resources.* – Hobson, R.; Kristiansen, T. (eds.) *Navies in Northern Waters, 1721–2000.* London: Frank Cass, pp. 273–274. [**Børresen** 2004]

¹⁵ **Børresen** 2004, pp. 250–251.

3. What is a balanced fleet?

Historically, a balanced fleet means an optimal combination of capital ships, cruisers-frigates, and smaller ships. Capital ships (in the contemporary sense, aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and cruisers) give the navy a striking force but a navy cannot be composed only of capital ships because these are too expensive and unable to perform all necessary tasks. Because of that, a perfect navy needs cruisers, frigates, and conventional submarines that are cheaper but fast and with great autonomy and sufficient firepower to operate in less significant sea areas and protect capital ships. In order to perform more specific tasks or operate in specific sea areas, a navy also requires smaller ships such as corvettes, patrol boats, mine warfare vessels, and landing ships.

In the contemporary sense, a balanced fleet is a combination of platforms and weapon systems whose combined effect exceeds the sum of its single elements. A balanced fleet has at least limited capabilities in all principal warfare areas: anti surface warfare, anti-air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and mine warfare¹⁶. From the perspective of coastal power, a balanced fleet must have the units and capabilities to cover the entire conflict spectrum from peace to war. It must be flexible enough to enable a whole spectrum of options from surrender to total war. The navy of a coastal power should not be a miniature copy of a large one, but one specifically designed for local conditions and tasks¹⁷. In addition to vessels, such a “fleet” should also include coastal and air assets which support fleet operations.

The constitution and size of a balanced fleet depends on the geographical position, the political and economic situation, recognised threats, and ambitions of a country. If any of these change the fleet must be modified accordingly. The best way to illustrate this logic is with the example of the Republic of Korea Navy. Until 1993, the Republic of Korea Navy was focused on defending the state’s territory against the People’s Republic of Korea. The succeeding so-called Sunshine Policy towards the People’s Republic of Korea, and being freed from army control, enabled the Republic of Korea Navy to widen its perspective and start to develop an ocean-going fleet. But in 2010, the deteriorating relationship between both Koreas brought it back to its

¹⁶ **Murumets, J.** 2016. Eesti merejulgolek. Uuringu raport. – ENDC Occasional Papers, Vol. 5. Tartu: Eesti Ülikoolide Kirjastus, p. 13. [Murumets 2016]

¹⁷ **Børresen** 2004, pp. 253–263.

former role¹⁸. Another example is the increase of the naval ambitions of China that, since 2009, have forced other countries in the region to reshape their navies¹⁹.

4. The tasks of the navies of small states

Even though “a militarily skilful combination of geographic position and asymmetric technology could well make a notionally smaller navy /.../ disproportionately effective strategically”²⁰, small coastal powers generally cannot win wars just by relying on force. Because of this, the main task of a coastal power’s navy is not defence but deterrence. The navy of a small state must focus on presence and situational awareness, but it must also have enough power to avoid *fait accompli* in the situation where an aggressor is using so-called definitive force²¹. The navy of a small state must adequately perform as a tripwire and force aggressors to fire the first shot²². Therefore, naval forces are an important part of threshold defence²³.

Maritime presence is important in time of peace and even more in time of crisis where coastal powers must demonstrate their awareness of whereabouts in the sea area and decisiveness in enforcing sovereignty and the rule of law. It is extremely important for coastal powers to establish, enforce, and, if necessary, defend sovereignty in their own sea area because, otherwise, such an absence would be filled by others²⁴. Somalia and Libya are unfortunate examples of what happens to coastal states unable to protect their interests in their own sea area. From Estonian history, we can think of the sinking of

¹⁸ **Bowers, I.** 2014. The Republic of Korea Navy – a “Big” Small Navy. – Mulqueen, M.; Sanders, D.; Speller, I. (eds.). *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, pp. 95–107.

¹⁹ **McDevitt, M.** 2014. *Small Navies in Asia: The Strategic Rationale for Growth*. – Mulqueen, M.; Sanders, D.; Speller, I. (eds.). *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, pp. 81–83.

²⁰ **Till, G.** 2014. Are Small Navies Different? – Mulqueen, M.; Sanders, D.; Speller, I. (eds.). *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 27. [Till 2014]

²¹ **Murumets** 2016, p. 12.

²² **Børresen** 2004, p. 253.

²³ **Murumets, J.** 2019. Ründekünnise kontseptsioon väikeriigi kaitsestrateegias. – Saumets, A. (ed.). *Sõjateadlane*, No. 12. Tartu: Eesti Ülikoolide Kirjastus, pp. 96–97.

²⁴ **Laanemets** 2014a, p. 25.

the freighter *Metallist* in the Narva Bay in 1939 and subsequent events. The hijacking of the Arctic Sea in 2009 and “unknown submarines” in Swedish waters in 2014 and 2017 convincingly prove that the sovereignty of a country is not granted in its own territorial waters even today and in this region. Russia’s attempts in recent conflicts to act just below the level of a “real” war and to deny its involvement clearly demonstrate that any country has to firmly and visibly establish sovereignty in its entire territory, including the sea area.

5. The problems of small navies

Small navies have some specific problems. Even though big navies can also suffer from a lack of money, personnel and equipment, small navies have lesser sustainability and each cutback may have fatal consequences. The loss of equipment and personnel due to budget cuts may have a disproportionately large impact on small navies because their resources are already spread thin to perform multiple tasks. The loss of only a few units can undercut an entire capability. Since the responsibility for major naval domains will frequently rest with a small cohort of personnel or even a single individual, their retirement or dismissal from service can mean the loss of important knowledge²⁵.

The current revolution in military affairs has generated a situation where new weapon systems are more powerful but also more expensive than their predecessors. This has caused a certain structural disarmament: although every new platform is more capable, the number of new weapon systems and platforms a state can afford is constantly decreasing²⁶. Even the United States of America is unable to maintain the planned 355 warships²⁷. Great Britain is planning to purchase three Type 26 frigates for 4.16 billion euros²⁸

²⁵ **Mulqueen, M.; Warburton, T.** 2014. Transforming Small Navies by Systematic Innovation: A Framework for Productivity, Efficiency and Effectiveness. – Mulqueen, M.; Sanders, D.; Speller, I. (eds.). *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 55. [**Mulqueen, Warburton** 2014]

²⁶ **Loo, B.** (ed.) 2009. *Military Transformation and Strategy: Revolutions in Military Affairs and Small States*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 6.

²⁷ **Larter, D. B.** 2019. Pentagon proposes cuts to US Navy destroyer construction, retiring 13 cruisers. – *Defence News*, December 24. <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/12/24/pentagon-proposes-big-cuts-to-us-navy-destroyer-construction-retiring-13-cruisers/> (02.02.2020).

²⁸ **Waters, C.** 2017. Type 26 Global Combat Ship: Status Report. – *European Security & Defence*, Vol. 6, p. 68. [**Waters** 2017].

and five Type 31 corvettes for 1.4 billion euros²⁹ but is unable to maintain a surface fleet in its current quantity³⁰. In order to maintain its current capabilities, Great Britain is planning to construct three Astute-class nuclear submarines for 3.9 billion euros but the estimated cost of the project for the new Successor-class submarines is already 35–46 billion euros³¹. The estimated cost of the Finnish Laivue 2020 project is 1.2 billion euros. Within this project, Finland will purchase four new corvettes to replace the four existing missile boats and three minelayers³². In addition, Finland will spend 162 million euros (along with a potential successor contract worth 193 million euros) to purchase new anti-ship missiles within the SSM2020 project³³.

There are, of course, cheaper options: the unit price of the Chinese Houbei-class missile craft is 45 million euros while the price of the Taiwanese Kuang Hua VI class missile craft is merely 9 million euros³⁴. Recently, the Indonesian Navy acquired four Clurit-class missile craft for 4.7 million euros per unit and six Pari-class patrol boats for 3.2 million euros per boat³⁵. The patrol ship Kindral Kurvits of the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board was purchased for 33 million euros³⁶, while the smaller ship Raju was purchased for

²⁹ **Bargain basement Type 31e – the Lidl frigate or an industrial miracle?** 2017. – Save the Royal Navy, October 25. <https://www.navylookout.com/bargain-basement-type-31e-the-lidl-frigate-or-an-industrial-miracle/> (04.06.2020).

³⁰ **Waters** 2017, p. 68.

³¹ **Waters, C.** 2016. British Naval Construction. Current Programmes and Future Prospects. – European Security & Defence, Vol. 5, pp. 50–52.

³² **Squadron 2020. The Finnish Defence Forces' strategic project** 2017. – Ministry of Defence, Finland, p. 3. http://www.defmin.fi/files/3819/Squadron_2020_The_Finnish_Defence_Forces_strategic_project.pdf (06.08.2018).

³³ **Finnish Navy to acquire new Surface-to-surface Missile system** 2018. – Valtioneuvosto, Finnish Government, July 6. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/merivoimille-uusi-pintatorjunta-aohjusarjastelma> (20.12.2020).

³⁴ **Tessmann, W.; Marzluff, D.; Guptill, M.** 2019. Maximizing the maritime: a call for naval investment. – The Alliance Five Years after Crimea: Implementing the Wales Summit Pledges. NATO Defence College (NDC) Research Paper, No. 7, p. 37.

³⁵ **Barone, M. G.** 2017. Subversion in Indonesian Waters. 'Clurit' Class and its Sub-version: A Staple in Indonesian Maritime Security. – Naval Forces. International Forum for Maritime Power, Vol. 5, pp. 78–79.

³⁶ **Mäekivi, M.** 2012. Piirivalve sai kätte uue reostustõrjelaeva. – Postimees, 3. august.

a little over 16 million euros³⁷ and two even smaller Roland class “force protection vessels” for the Navy were purchased for a total of 3.9 million euros³⁸.

When comparing these numbers, we must realise that different frigates and patrol boats or submarines have very different capabilities and the cost of a new project does not equal the cost of a single ship. There is also a huge difference in whether to calculate the value of a ship merely by the cost of the platform or to also add the cost of sensors, communication equipment, weapons, ammunition, etc. When acquiring new equipment, we should not merely consider its purchase price but the costs during its entire life cycle, including procurement, maintenance, modernisation, adjustments, operation, training, supporting infrastructure, decommissioning, utilisation, and other such costs³⁹. Since the maintenance and modernisation of a weapon system amounts to approximately 60% of all life-cycle costs⁴⁰, it would be reasonable to consider them as integral when planning a procurement. For example, Italy is planning to spend 5.4 billion euros on its fleet renewal program which includes the purchase and ten-year maintenance of one logistic support vessel, seven multifunctional patrol ships, and two fast supply ships⁴¹. Canada is already spending 2.9 billion euros to modernise its twelve Halifax class frigates and is planning to spend an additional 1.5 billion euros to purchase five Harry DeWolf class Arctic offshore patrol vessels and 1.4 billion euros for their maintenance over 25 years⁴².

National budgets are not all equal. The 2017 defence budget of Great Britain was approximately 56 billion euros (2.11% of its gross domestic product, or GDP). In the same year, the defence budget of Singapore was 6.55 billion euros, or 3.16% of its GDP. The numbers for Italy and Canada were 25 billion

³⁷ **PPA võttis teenistusse uue patrull-laeva** 2018. – Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet, 16. august. <https://www.politsei.ee/et/uudised/ppa-vottis-teenistusse-uu-patrull-laeva-130> (26.02.2020).

³⁸ **Randlaid, Sven** 2020. Eesti mereväele anti üle väekaitsekaatrid. – Postimees, 10. detsember. <https://www.postimees.ee/7130407/eesti-merevaele-anti-ule-vaekaitsekaatrid> (20.12.2020).

³⁹ **Schmidt, M.** 2017. Total Cost of Ownership TCO for Assets and Acquisition. – Building the Business Case Analysis, June 10. <https://www.business-case-analysis.com/total-cost-of-ownership.html> (08.10.2017).

⁴⁰ **In focus – the Arrowhead 140 Type 31e frigate candidate** 2019. – Save the Royal Navy, July 5. <https://www.navylookout.com/in-focus-the-arrowhead-140-type-31e-frigate-candidate/> (04.06.2020).

⁴¹ **Peruzzi, L.** 2016. The Italian Navy's New PPA and LSS: First Design Details Emerge. – European Security & Defence, Vol. 5, p. 56.

⁴² **Dean, S. E.** 2017. Canadian Armament Programmes Update. – European Security & Defence, Vol. 3, p. 56–60.

euros and 1.21%, and 23 billion euros and 1.44%, respectively⁴³. Estonia, ever so proud of its 2% military expenditures, spent only 489.7 million euros on national defence in 2017, or 2.03% of GDP⁴⁴ (the budget for 2020 sets aside 615.2 million euros, or 2.11%)⁴⁵. The estimated defence budget of Lithuania for 2017 was almost one and a half times larger, a total of 723.8 million euros, although it amounted to only 1.8% of GDP⁴⁶. Therefore, percentages do not indicate actual monetary numbers. We must also consider that statistics can present the information differently, for example, the aforementioned Laivue 2020 project of Finland is not included in its national defence budget.

Furthermore, the entire defence budget is not invested in the navy. The “naval share” of the defence budget of smaller NATO member states is usually 25–30% (in Estonia, at least up to very recent years, it has never amounted to more than 5–7%)⁴⁷. In addition to that, small states tend to cut their military expenditures during a crisis to a larger proportional extent compared to big countries. Over the period from 2003 to 2013, smaller European states cut their defence budgets by 20% on average, whereas the medial indicator in Europe was 15%, and only 10% for larger states⁴⁸.

Reducing the number of hulls with the purpose of saving money would increase the specific personnel problems of small navies and make it more difficult to gain sufficient navigation and command experience⁴⁹. This, in turn, means that there would be fewer professional and experienced mariners able to influence and assist policy development at a governmental level. Without their respective professional input, policy would probably not support maritime objectives but, instead, the navy would merely be told what the policy is⁵⁰.

⁴³ **The World Factbook**. – Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/> (26.02.2020).

⁴⁴ **Faktileht 2017. aasta riigieelarvest**. – Rahandusministeerium.

⁴⁵ **2020. aasta riigieelarve seaduse seletuskiri**. 2020. – Tallinn: Rahandusministeerium, p. 134.

⁴⁶ **Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017**. 2017. Vilnius: Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania.

⁴⁷ **Laanemets, O.** 2014b. Sõjaline riigikaitse merel ja riigilaevastik. – *Sõdur*, No. 2, pp. 29–30. [**Laanemets 2014b**]

⁴⁸ **Urb** 2016a, pp. 36–37.

⁴⁹ **Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace 2014**. Speller, I.; Sanders, D.; Mulqueen, M. (eds.). Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 9. [**Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace 2014**]

⁵⁰ **Till** 2014, p. 8.

Because of their specific tasks, small-state navies should seek quantity over quality: prioritise higher quantities of cheaper platforms over few very expensive platforms⁵¹. Buying cheaper equipment “from the shelf” or second-hand may be a viable strategy. However, cheaper solutions may be suboptimal for local geographical conditions or for some navies⁵².

6. The relevance of a balanced navy and possibilities to solve problems

It is sometimes suggested that small states cannot afford a balanced fleet (or any fleet) and, therefore, it would be more reasonable to give up having a fleet entirely and protect the sea area with coastal surveillance radars, shore based anti-ship missiles, or aircraft. At least for now, however, it is not possible to identify, stop or control an unknown ship at sea without leaving the shore. Without a fleet, a country would be unable to show presence at sea. Discarding a fleet would also cause all the aforementioned problems resulting from a lack of maritime personnel and knowledge. In order to understand maritime issues, a navy has to sail. Although it may seem cost-efficient to invest in a large infantry instead of a few ships, neglecting the maritime domain could cause severe problems for a coastal state. In order for a navy to be able to perform its tasks, it needs “its fair share” of the defence budget.

According to Basil Germond, the role of a navy is power projection. Small navies can do it in cooperation with larger navies if they focus on niche capabilities⁵³. Geoffrey Till also recommends specialisation and adopting a collaborative strategy: contributing to multinational naval operations without independent operational and strategic level capabilities⁵⁴. From the perspective of the United States of America or NATO, specialisation may be appealing since small, balanced navies cannot build a capable striking force, reinforced with niche capabilities, such as that of a large fleet,⁵⁵. On the other hand, such focus can evolve into niche navies—very capable and interoperable in some

⁵¹ 50 Børresen 2004, p. 254; Holmes 2012.

⁵² **Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace** 2014, p. 8.

⁵³ **Germond, B.** 2014. Small Navies in Perspective: Deconstructing the Hierarchy of Naval Forces. – Speller, I.; Sanders, D.; Mulqueen, M. (eds.). *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*. Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 49.

⁵⁴ **Till** 2013, pp. 29, 41.

⁵⁵ **Urb** 2016a, p. 37.

areas but lacking capabilities and knowledge in others. One suitable example is the Estonian Navy that has, until now, specialised only in mine countermeasures. Navies like this are unable to pose a credible deterrence or make a sufficient contribution to the independent defence capabilities of a state. Even while receiving the support of allies, a state with such a navy might not understand what kind of help it actually needs or know how to take full advantage of the received support, simply because it is lacking the relevant knowledge. It also has little chance to influence operations in its own or adjacent waters, even in the context of an alliance. In peacetime, it can get into situations where it does not have the capacity to respond to a variety of challenges in its own waters. To avoid degenerating into being a mere client of a larger naval power, a coastal state has to retain a spread of naval capabilities⁵⁶. Especially during peacetime, a country cannot delegate certain maritime tasks (e.g., sea surveillance, presence, and maintaining maritime security) without partially giving up its sovereignty⁵⁷.

Cooperation between countries still enables one to save money and increase capabilities. Cooperation would allow cheaper procurements, training, and maintenance. The best example is probably cooperation between the navies of the Netherlands and Belgium. Under the command of the Admiral Benelux and in close cooperation in terms of training and maintenance, they have essentially become a single fleet. From the 1990s until the early 2000s, the Baltic States' navies also cooperated very closely. At the time, there existed the Baltic Naval Squadron BALTRON, the communications school in Tallinn, divers' training centre in Liepāja, and the maintenance centre in Klaipėda, but cooperation between the Baltic States has significantly decreased since then and the inability of the Baltic States to organise joint procurements is notorious. Nevertheless, the Commander of the Estonian Navy proposed the so-called "BALTRON 2.0" project a few years ago. Since the navies of all three Baltic States will have to replace their naval ships by the 2030s, it would be reasonable to acquire common platforms that would provide the basis for each country to specialise in a different warfare area and provide situational awareness and presence in its sea area. Cooperation would help to establish a combined fleet capable in all principal warfare areas⁵⁸. On 8 January 2020, in Klaipėda, the commanders of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian navies signed

⁵⁶ **Børresen** 2004, pp. 256–257.

⁵⁷ **Laanemets** 2014b, p. 30.

⁵⁸ **Saska, J.** 2017. Estonian Navy. Esinemine Balti Kaitsekolledži õppuritele mereväebaasis, 27 October.

the 3B Naval Vision 2030+ plan which is the first step towards realising this project. Finland and Sweden joining NATO in the near future could reinforce the project or give it a new direction.

Jointness, i.e., cooperation, understanding, and mutual support between branches and services is another option for saving on expenses and increasing capabilities⁵⁹. This is especially important for a coastal power that does not have enough resources to develop all the necessary capabilities separately in each service⁶⁰. First of all, it would mean avoiding duplication but it would also serve as a capability multiplier by increasing situational awareness, mutual understanding, and flexibility⁶¹. In the maritime domain and especially for a small state, there is no clear separation of internal and external security. This is why it is advisable to unite the navy and coastguard, or at least establish close cooperation between the two, along with a joint command structure, situational awareness, training system, and logistical base⁶².

One option for achieving jointness is capability-based (defence) planning. In order to avoid the expenses incurred in developing and maintaining duplicate or unnecessary capabilities and the risk of not developing important capabilities, capability-based planning is focused not on organisations but rather on the capabilities that support national policies and needs. This means that the capabilities of other state agencies can be utilised in national defence, saving the military from having to develop these on its own, but also that military capabilities can be used for more than just national defence⁶³.

Michael Mulqueen and Terry Warburton recommend a systematic innovation, “a quest to stimulate and accelerate innovation among the many rather than the few” as a means for maintaining the capability of small fleets⁶⁴. The innovation of the Irish Naval Service and their cooperation with other state authorities has not only helped to save on national expenses but also to bring significant returns to the national economy⁶⁵. Geoffrey Till also sees a solution in innovation but warns against applying novel solutions too quickly

⁵⁹ Till 2013, pp. 113–114.

⁶⁰ Børresen 2004, p. 257.

⁶¹ Terve, M. 2011. Soovitusused mereturvalisust tagava riigilaevastiku ülesehituse muutmiseks Eesti näitel. Magistritöö. Tallinn: Sisekaitseakadeemia.

⁶² Murumets 2016.

⁶³ Tulin, D. 2016. Võimepõhise planeerimismetoodika kasutatavus riigi mereliste ülesannete täitmise näitel. Magistritöö. Tallinn: Tallinna Tehnikaülikool.

⁶⁴ Mulqueen, Warburton 2014, pp. 57, 65.

⁶⁵ Mellett 2014, p. 79.

because technology in the first stage of innovation is expensive, unreliable, and ages fast. Because of this, he advises navies with limited resources to let new technologies mature before using them⁶⁶.

Another option for saving on expenses is unifying platforms. At a meeting of European naval commanders in 2016 in Tallinn, Captain Benigno González-Aller Gross advised to confine to one larger multifunctional and one smaller and cheaper surface ship class. Using different sensor and weapon system modules would enable these two ship classes to perform a wide spectrum of tasks in a cost-efficient manner⁶⁷.

Unmanned systems are also considered a cost-effective alternative to “manned” fleets. Although there are other views⁶⁸, unmanned platforms are generally considered cheaper and are seen as a way to cut on personnel costs. On the other hand, unmanned systems are, at least for now and mostly for technical and legal reasons, unable to perform most of the tasks of manned ships. Additionally, reducing the number of mariners would cause the aforementioned personnel problems. Nevertheless, we can assume that new technologies would allow a significant reduction in the amount of required personnel on ships.

Sometimes a wealthier ally may be interested in supporting the navy of a smaller state because it might be beneficial to support a weaker partner operating in its areas of interest and not try to control the area with its own naval forces. In an extreme case, a wealthier country may acquire platforms but let a less wealthy partner man and operate them. European countries supported the construction of the Baltic navies in the 1990s. The German Navy effectively moved one of its mine hunter squadrons (due to be decommissioned) to the Baltic States, giving them ships, organising crew training, and supporting in-ship maintenance.

7. Conclusion

The maritime domain poses great opportunities but also threats that coastal states cannot ignore. In order to protect its sovereignty and interests at sea, a small coastal state needs a navy that can at least show a presence at sea and

⁶⁶ Till 2013, pp. 139–143.

⁶⁷ Urb, T. 2016b. Euroopa mereväeülemate kohtumine Tallinnas. – Sõdur, No. 3, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Drennan, J. E. 2015. How to Fight an Unmanned War. – Jackson, J. E. (ed.). The U.S. Naval Institute of Naval Innovation. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, p. 124.

function as a tripwire against definitive force. This is especially important in the grey area between war and peace. For a small state, there is no clear difference between internal and external security in the maritime domain and the line between wartime and peacetime has also become vague. A balanced fleet capable of operating in the entire conflict spectrum and having capabilities in all principle warfare areas is the best solution for a country to maintain sovereignty and protect its interests at sea.

In order to maintain a balanced fleet, the navy needs its share of the (defence) budget. Although small states have specific problems regarding the construction and maintenance of a navy—mostly monetary and human resources but also a lack of knowledge—abolishing a navy or turning it into a niche navy are not advisable options. It may seem like an efficient solution, but it would preclude the protection of national interests and the establishment of a credible deterrence on national sea areas, and fail to support states' independent defence capability. Avoiding duplication and disjunction as well as achieving cooperation within a country and internationally, along with jointness and deliberate innovation, should make building a balanced navy feasible even for a small state. In conclusion, developing a balanced navy is the only credible option that a small coastal state possesses.

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