

**Proposed Paper:**

**The Unwanted Alliance: the Red Army invasion of the Baltic States (November 1918 - May 1919)**

**Working Group:**

**Military History**

The paper will focus on the invasion of the Baltic States by the Red Army of Soviet Russia after the Armistice of Compiègne in November 1918, when Soviet leaders renounced the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and ordered the seizure of the territory left behind by the retreating German forces.

In the initial phase, the Red Army did not consider the newly created Baltic States as an adversary. The directives only indicated geographical objectives and the main lines of attack were along the railway lines of the former Russian Empire, which did not respect the new borders.

The attack continued successfully until the beginning of January 1919, but then the Red Army Commander-in-Chief Jukums Vācietis, a Latvian by nationality and a colonel in the Imperial Russian Army, changed the direction of the main attack. The Soviet Latvian Army was created and the need to create a Latvian working people's government to eliminate the Germans as the dominant social group in Latvia was emphasized.

The course of hostilities changed with the emergence of a highly political end state. The Red Army now attacked in three directions simultaneously. Two of these directions were opposed to each other, which created a distinct situation of two theaters of operations. When the Estonian army counter-attacked in early January 1919, the Red Army's offensive stalled and completely collapsed within the next five months. As Soviet forces concentrated in the north against Estonia, Latvian, German, Lithuanian and Polish troops launched an offensive exposing strategic mistakes.

The anti-Soviet forces were unable to form a formal alliance; on the contrary, all attacks were uncoordinated. In the summer of 1919 fighting broke out between Estonians and Germans near Cēsis. At the same time tensions started to rise between Lithuanian and Polish armies. Success in early 1919 was dictated by a confluence of circumstances, adherence to basic military principles and Soviet incompetence.

Today, the Soviet invasion of the Baltics is not researched as a single military operation. Each of the Baltic States has its own history of the War of Independence and the successful defeat of the Red Army is seen outside the overall context and military geography of the region.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Baltic States can no longer afford to ignore mobility corridors that dominated the warfare for centuries and plan only for the defense of their own country, defined by political borders. Baltic defense depends on a formalized and functioning alliance.

**Mg.hist. Valdis Kuzmins**

**National Defense Academy of Latvia, Researcher**