

BACKGROUND

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The Baltic States: The United States Must Be Prepared to Fulfill Its NATO Treaty Obligations

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Abstract

The U.S. has a long history of championing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Baltic states dating back to the interwar period of the 1920s. Today, U.S. interest in the Baltic region derives primarily from its treaty obligations in the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty and membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty states that an attack on one is an attack on all. This means that the U.S. is committed to the security of the Baltic cities of Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius in the same way as it is to the American cities of Tallahassee, Raleigh, and Virginia Beach. The U.S. needs to ensure that it has the political will and military capability to live up to its NATO treaty obligations in the Baltic region. Defending the Baltic states and deterring Russian aggression will be far easier and cheaper than liberating them.

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The threat from Russia is real, and the rhetoric from Moscow is only growing worse. In June 2015, a member of the Russian Duma requested that the Attorney General of Russia open an investigation into the constitutionality of Soviet Union's 1991 recognition of the Baltic states' independence.² While the Attorney General's office rejected the request, it is still an insight into the prevalent thinking about the Baltic states among many of Russia's political elite.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3039>

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KEY POINTS

- Due to decades of Russian domination, the Baltic states factor Russia into their military planning and foreign policy formulation in a way that is simply unimaginable in many countries in Western Europe and North America.
- U.S. interest in the Baltic region derives primarily from treaty obligations in the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty and membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Defending the Baltic states and deterring Russian aggression will be far easier and cheaper than liberating them.
- There is a common misconception that the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation (NATO–Russia Founding Act) prohibits the permanent basing of NATO soldiers in the Baltic states. This is wrong.
- NATO is a defensive alliance. As long as Russia does not plan to attack a NATO member, Moscow should have nothing to fear from military bases in the Baltics.

Although some positive steps have been taken since the Ukraine crisis started in early 2014, neither NATO nor the U.S. is ready to defend the Baltic states in the event of a Russian invasion. Czech General Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee, said in May 2015 that “the Baltics could really be occupied in a couple of days.”³

The U.S. needs an enduring presence and a long-term strategy to meet its NATO treaty obligations in the Baltic region. This should include establishing a robust and permanent NATO military presence in the Baltic states, establishing closer cooperation with non-NATO countries like Finland and Sweden, and focusing on countering nonconventional threats in cyberspace, Russian propaganda, and threats to energy security. The U.S. also needs to be a leader inside NATO to convince reluctant NATO members why they should be ready to defend the Baltics from Russian aggression. Finally, the U.S. needs to make it crystal clear to Russia that it is prepared to go to war to defend and, if required, to liberate the Baltic states in the event NATO’s mutual defense clause is ever invoked.

The Baltic States Are Important Allies

The U.S. has a long history of championing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Baltic states dating back to the interwar period of the 1920s. After World War I, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania proclaimed their independence, and the U.S. granted full recognition to all three by 1923. In June 1940, as part of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, Soviet troops entered and occupied the three Baltic countries. A month later, acting U.S. Secretary of State Sumner Welles issued what became known as the Welles Declaration, condemning Russia’s occupation and stating America’s refusal to recognize the legitimacy of Soviet control over these three states. The three states regained their independence with the end of the Cold War and have since been staunch supporters of the transatlantic relationship.

Although small in absolute terms, the three Baltic states contribute greatly to NATO in relative terms. Estonia is the regional leader in defense matters and is currently one of only four NATO countries that spend the required 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. All three countries sent troops to Iraq and have troops fighting in Afghanistan. Estonian troops have even served in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, one of the deadliest areas in the country.

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Unique Challenges in the Baltic Region

Due to decades of Russian domination, the Baltic states factor Russia into their military planning and foreign policy formulations in a way that is simply unimaginable in many Western European countries and North America. Those NATO members that lived under the iron fist of the Warsaw Pact or were absorbed outright into the Soviet Union after World War II, such as the Baltic states, view Russia’s belligerent behavior as an existential threat.

Policymakers need to focus on the Baltic states because a U.S.-led military intervention in the Baltic states would be challenging. The region presents unique military and political difficulties that would need to be overcome. Acknowledging these challenges and planning for them are the first steps in ensuring the U.S. can meet its NATO treaty obligations.

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1. This paper focuses primarily on recent developments in the security situation in the Baltic Sea region, specifically on the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. For a detailed analysis of the history of U.S.-Baltic relations, the military capabilities of the Baltic states, and their important role in transatlantic security, see Luke Coffey, “The Baltic States: Why the United States Must Strengthen Security Cooperation,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2851, October 25, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/10/the-baltic-states-why-the-united-states-must-strengthen-security-cooperation>.
 2. Interfax, “Russia to Review Constitutionality of Soviet Recognition of Baltic States’ Independence,” *Meduza*, June 30, 2015, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2015/06/30/russia-to-review-constitutionality-of-soviet-recognition-of-baltic-states-independence> (accessed July 5, 2015).
 3. Jeremy Bender, “Incoming NATO Military Committee Chairman: Russia Could Occupy the Baltics in 2 Days If It Wanted to,” *Business Insider*, May 28, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/czech-general-russia-can-occupy-baltics-in-2-days-2015-5> (accessed July 5, 2015).
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These challenges include:

- **The Baltic states are geographically isolated from the Alliance.** Militarily speaking, the three Baltic states are isolated from other NATO members. To the north of the Baltic states are non-NATO (but friendly) Finland and Sweden. To the south and east are Russia and Belarus. To the west, Lithuania shares a border with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Only Lithuania shares a land border with another non-Baltic NATO member: a tiny 65-mile border with Poland to the southwest between Kaliningrad and Belarus.
- **The Baltic states are geographically small.** The Baltic states are small in population and size. Combined, the three have roughly the same geographic size and population as Missouri. The Baltic region is probably the only region inside NATO that is too small to depend for its defense on rapid reaction forces based elsewhere. Only a policy of robust defense and deterrence on the ground will guarantee the security of the Baltic countries. Otherwise, NATO would not be responding to a military crisis in the region, but liberating occupied states.
- **Critical dependence on non-NATO countries.** It would be extremely difficult, but not impossible for NATO to respond to an incident in the Baltic region without the acquiescence of non-NATO Finland and Sweden. History has shown that military operations in the Baltic region require access to what is today Swedish and Finnish airspace, seas, and land.
- **Domestic U.S. politics.** Any U.S. military response that placed large numbers of American men and women into harm's way would be politically difficult for any U.S. President. This would be especially true for the Baltic region. As the Cold War becomes more distant, many Americans fail to understand the value of the transat-

lantic relationship and the importance of NATO. This attitude was demonstrated in a recent Pew poll that showed only 56 percent of Americans believe that the U.S. should use military force to defend a NATO ally if attacked by Russia.⁴

- **Russian minorities and shared borders.** Of all 28 NATO members, the Baltic states have the largest Russian-speaking populations. This presents a unique challenge for NATO policymakers, although commentators overstate the threat they pose to the region. All three share land borders with Russia. Estonia is the only country in NATO that does not have an agreed border with Russia. In September 2014, Russian agents crossed the border using communications-jamming equipment, smoke bombs, and stun grenades and kidnapped Eston Kohvar, an Estonian Internal Security Service officer, at gunpoint on Estonian soil and then charged him in Russia with espionage. In August 2015 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison. The abduction came less than 48 hours after President Barack Obama had visited Tallinn just before the 2014 NATO Summit.

Threats to the Baltic States

NATO membership in 2004 made the Baltic states strategic actors overnight. This has never been more the case since Russia's aggressive activities in Ukraine. Russia has taken a number of aggressive steps aimed at destabilizing the Baltic region, including intimidating Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and testing the resolve of NATO.

Russia has dedicated resources to major training exercises involving tens of thousands of troops that many in Eastern Europe fear are directed at them. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that it planned to carry out at least 4,000 drills in 2015.⁵ Russia has also been testing NATO airspace in the Baltics. NATO jets were scrambled 400 times in 2014, a 50 percent increase over 2013.⁶ The number of actual intercepts of Russian planes flying into

4. Katie Summons, Bruce Stokes, and Jacob Poushter, "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid," Pew Research Center, June 10, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/nato-publics-blame-russia-for-ukrainian-crisis-but-reluctant-to-provide-military-aid/> (accessed July 2, 2015).

5. "Military Drills Get Underway in Russia with 1,500 Paratroopers Taking Part," *Sputnik International*, February 26, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20150226/1018775269.html> (accessed July 5, 2015).

6. Laura Perez Maestro and Jason Hanna, "UK Jets Intercept Russian Aircraft near British Airspace," CNN, February 19, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/world/uk-russia-aircraft-intercepted/> (accessed June 30, 2015).

NATO airspace also increased in 2014 to more than 100, three times the number in 2013.⁷ As a reassurance measure, NATO has quadrupled the number of aircraft patrolling the Baltic skies since early 2014.⁸ Non-NATO countries, such as Finland and Sweden, have also experienced Russia air incursions. Russia's continued reckless flying poses a risk to civilian aviation in Europe because Russian pilots often do not submit a flight plan or turn on their transponders so that civilian aircraft can avoid them.

Although the likelihood of a conventional Russian attack against the Baltic states is low, it cannot be ruled out. Moscow will continue to test NATO using nontraditional military and security operations, such as cyber attacks, propaganda, abductions, and funding of pro-Russia political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in NATO countries. These acts have become the norm for Russia in Eastern Europe because Moscow knows that NATO is ill-prepared to deal with these sorts of threats.

Russia has a long history of meddling in the Baltic region, but it is a myth perpetuated by Moscow that the region is in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Contrary to Moscow's propaganda, the Baltic states have a long and rich history and culture rooted in Western and Northern Europe. Long before Russian domination, the region was ruled by a succession of Danish, Swedish, Germanic, and Polish kingdoms.

Estonia and Latvia are predominately Protestant countries, and Lithuania is predominately Catholic. Russian Orthodoxy does not play a major societal role in the Baltic states, unlike in other former Soviet Union countries in Eastern Europe. Linguistically, Estonian belongs to the Finnic branch of the Uralic language family, and Latvian and Lithuanian are part of the Indo-Euro-

pean family. None are part of the Slavic language family like Russian.

There is a concern that Russia could leverage political grievances of the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states to stage a Crimea-style takeover from the inside. While nothing can be ruled out, it seems unlikely that Moscow would attempt such a move in the Baltic region. Generally speaking, Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states realize that they are better off living in NATO and the EU than under Russia's rule, and they are unlikely to support such a move. (See "Why Narva Probably Is Not Next on Russia's List," below.) However, even without their support Russia could use the presence of Russian minorities in the Baltic states as a pretext for invasion in accordance with Moscow's longstanding compatriot policy of protecting ethnic Russians outside the borders of the Russian Federation.

Due to its geographical location, Lithuania faces unique challenges from Russia. Russia depends on transit rights through Lithuania to reach the Kaliningrad Oblast. Kaliningrad is a small Russian exclave along the Baltic Sea, bordering both Lithuania and Poland. Kaliningrad is part of Russia's Western Military District, and approximately 25,000 Russian soldiers and security personnel are stationed there.⁹ It is home to Russia's Baltic fleet, which consists of around 50 vessels, including submarines.¹⁰ The fleet has taken part in a number of recent drills, including rocket, artillery, and torpedo exercises in the Baltic Sea in April 2015.¹¹ The Baltic states have expressed concern that Russian drills could be used as cover to move larger numbers of troops to Kaliningrad.

Russian ballistic missiles have been deployed to Kaliningrad since 2012 if not longer.¹² In addition, Russia has previously deployed Iskander missiles to

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7. Thomas Grove, "Russia Starts Nationwide Show of Force," Reuters, March 16, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/16/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MCOJO20150316> (accessed June 30, 2015).
 8. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enhanced NATO Air Policing Patrols Baltic Airspace," January 30, 2015, <http://www.aco.nato.int/enhanced-nato-air-policing-patrols-baltic-airspace.aspx> (accessed June 30, 2015).
 9. Ingmar Oldberg, "Kaliningrad's Difficult Plight Between Moscow and Europe," Swedish Institute of International Affairs *UI Paper* No. 2 (2015), <http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/111799.pdf> (accessed July 29, 2015).
 10. Gerard O'Dwyer, "Nations Respond to Russian Buildup in Baltics," *Defense News*, April 12, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/show-daily/sea-air-space/2015/04/12/russia-baltic-sweden-poland-submarine-high-north-crimea/25368547/> (accessed July 28, 2015).
 11. Sputnik International, "Russian Warships to Enter Baltic Sea for Rocket, Torpedo Exercises," April 6, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20150406/1020522702.html> (accessed July 28, 2015).
 12. Jeremy Bender, "Poland Is Building a Series of Watchtowers Along Its Border with Russia," *Business Insider Australia*, April 6, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/poland-placing-watchtowers-on-russian-border-2015-4> (accessed July 28, 2015).

The Estonian–Russian Border Dispute

In addition to the kidnapping of Eston Kohvar, the long-standing issue of the Estonian–Russian border parameters has come to the forefront. Estonia is the only Baltic country that does not have an officially settled border with Russia. Both sides rely on a de facto border dating back to the Soviet occupation. When Estonia enjoyed a brief period of independence between the two world wars, its border with the Soviet Union was based on the 1920 Treaty of Tartu. In 1945, after the Soviet Union annexed Estonia, Moscow redrew the administrative border between the Soviet Union and the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in a way that transferred 10 percent of Estonian territory, per the Treaty of Tartu, to the Soviet Union. After Estonia regained its independence in the 1990s, officials in Tallinn, for the sake of peace, agreed to drop any territorial claims and keep the de facto border based on the 1945 border, even though this meant handing 10 percent of the country’s territory to Russia.

Due to a dispute between Estonia and Russia over the exact wording, the two countries did not agree and sign a new border treaty until February 2014. While the Estonian parliament is set to ratify the treaty, the Russian Duma’s Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Alexei Pushkov recently stated that he does not expect Russian ratification of the treaty due to current NATO–Russian tensions. While Russia’s failure to ratify the treaty does not affect daily use of the de facto border, it does add another dimension to Western relations with Russia in light of the Ukraine crisis and a potential source of friction for NATO.

Kaliningrad as part of snap exercises, for instance in December 2014 and March 2015.¹³ Iskander missiles can carry nuclear or conventional warheads and have a range of 250 miles, placing Gotland, Riga, Vilnius, and Warsaw within their reach. Russia also has facilities for storage of tactical nuclear weapons at Kaliningrad.¹⁴

Because the enclave is cut off from mainland Russia, Russia moves troops and material overland to Kaliningrad through Lithuania via train, an arrangement that could be viewed by Moscow as a potential vulnerability. In June 2015, Russian media reported that hackers had uncovered an alleged Lithuanian plan to annex Kaliningrad.¹⁵ This is a classic example of how Russia uses propaganda and is perhaps a testament to the exclave’s perceived vulnerability. Russia is modernizing runways at their Chernyakhovsk and Donskoye air bases in Kalinin-

grad, allowing Russia nearby bases from which to fly near NATO airspace.¹⁶ Many of the aerial incidents that cause NATO planes from Baltic Air Policing to scramble involve planes flying from or to bases in Kaliningrad.

The Baltic states also face three main nontraditional threats from Russia: propaganda, energy security, and cybersecurity. To demonstrate their seriousness in confronting these threats, each of the three Baltic states created a NATO Centre of Excellence: Estonia is home to the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, Latvia is home to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, and Lithuania is home to the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence.

Russian Propaganda. Russian foreign policy aggressively uses propaganda and strategic communications to advance its policy objectives abroad and, in

13. Tony Wesolowsky, “Kaliningrad, Moscow’s Military Trump Card,” Radio Free Liberty/Radio Liberty, June 18, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kaliningrad-russia-nato-west-strategic/27079655.html> (accessed July 29, 2015), and Sam LaGrone, “Russian Military ‘Snap Drills’ Include Bomber and Ballistic Missile Deployments to Crimea, Kaliningrad,” USNI News, March 17, 2015, <http://news.usni.org/2015/03/17/russian-military-snap-drills-includes-bomber-and-ballistic-missile-deployments-to-crimea-kaliningrad> (accessed March 17, 2015).
14. Oldberg, “Kaliningrad’s Difficult Plight Between Moscow and Europe.”
15. Sputnik International, “NATO is Ready to Snatch Kaliningrad from Russia—Lithuania Media,” June 11, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20150611/1023226099.html> (accessed July 28, 2015).
16. Bender, “Poland Is Building a Series of Watchtowers Along Its Border with Russia.”

Why Narva Probably Is Not Next on Russia's List

The Estonian city of Narva is often mentioned as being next on Vladimir Putin's to-do list. At first glance, the idea that Narva could be next for Russian military intervention is not completely unreasonable. Narva is Estonia's third largest city and home to a sizable ethnic Russian population. The city is also home to one of the few remaining Lenin statues in the Baltic states. During Russian imperial times Narva was part of the Saint Petersburg Governorate.

However, a closer look shows another story. Ethnic Russians living in Estonia are far better off than their counterparts across the border in Russia. In fact over the last two-year period for which statistics are available, only 37 ethnic Russians moved from Estonia to the Motherland.* Ethnic Russians in Estonia do not want to live in Russia. The people of Narva warmly welcomed U.S. soldiers during Estonia's annual military parade earlier this year.

In January 2014, the Russian-backed separatists occupying the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk sent a letter to Narva—the two are twin cities—asking Narva to provide support to the separatists' government. They even implicitly suggested that Narvians should rise up against the West out of solidarity. Narva's city officials firmly rejected the request.

* Paul Goble, "Another Defeat for Putin's 'Russian World'—Very Few Russians in Estonia Want to Leave," *Window on Eurasia—New Series*, July 2, 2015, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2015/02/another-defeat-for-putins-russian-world.html> (accessed July 2, 2015).

the case of the Baltics, to stir up internal dissent and degrade support for the governments in the region. Due to their proximity and the large ethnic Russian populations in Estonia and Latvia, the Baltic states are at heightened risk from Russian propaganda.

In Latvia, one-fourth of the population is ethnic Russian.¹⁷ The First Baltic Channel, which rebroadcasts news from Russian state-sponsored television, is the second most popular television station.¹⁸ Neighboring states have ethnic Russian populations who also rely on Russian language television and websites. According to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "Russia has shown a willingness to modernize Soviet-era tools and adapt them to today's complex information environment. Critically, it has been willing to afford information-based activities primacy in operations, using more conventional military forces in a supporting role."¹⁹ The U.S. should

be wary of Russian propaganda inciting ethnic Russians living in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania with false narratives. Russia could use such a scenario as a pretext for invasion of NATO territory under the name of "protecting Russian citizens" or sending in a "peace-keeping force."

To counter Russian propaganda, in 2014, Latvia established the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which was accredited by NATO in September 2014. The center seeks "improved strategic communications capabilities within the Alliance and Allied nations."²⁰ In April, the center and the Baltic Defense College agreed to expand their partnership further, with the aim of ingraining strategic communications education in a new generation of military leaders.²¹

Sensitive to the danger posed by Russian strategic communications, in October 2014, Lithuania

17. Damien McGuinness, "Crimea Crisis Sharpens Latvia Ethnic Tensions," *BBC News*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26720549> (accessed June 30, 2015).

18. Eleonora Tafuro, "Fatal Attraction? Russia's Soft Power in Its Neighbourhood—Analysis," *Eurasian Review*, May 27, 2014.

19. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine," 2014, p. 3, http://www.stratcomcoe.org/~media/SCCE/NATO_PETIJUMS_PUBLISKS_29_10.ashx (accessed July 27, 2015).

20. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "Welcome to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence!" <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/> (accessed June 30, 2015).

21. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "NATO Stratcom COE and the Baltic Defence College Will Cooperate on Research Projects," April 15, 2015, <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/lv/NewsandEvents/News/2015/4/15.aspx> (accessed June 30, 2015).

banned a Lithuanian TV channel that had been rebroadcasting a Russian news channel.²² However, in a democratic society banning television stations is not the best strategy. Long-term success in countering Russian news propaganda depends on offering a truthful news alternative. At a cost of \$4 million, Estonia is launching a Russian-language channel in September 2015 to serve as a counterbalance to television broadcasts from Russia.²³ Latvia also plans to create its own Russian-language television channel, slated to begin broadcasting in the middle of 2016,²⁴ although internal political issues may hamper the effort.

The two countries are expected to work together on some aspects of forming the new channels including training, marketing, and program exchanges.²⁵ The Kremlin achieved high viewership of Russian news in the Baltics by placing news bulletins before and after popular sitcoms. Therefore, creating Russian-language news will not be enough. The Baltics are working on providing entertainment programming as well to attract audiences and keep them engaged, while interspersing news. In April, Germany announced that Deutsche Welle would provide Russian-language content to the new Baltic channels, including entertainment shows and news programs.²⁶ The Nordics have offered programming that the Baltics can dub into Russian, possibly with an NGO coordinating. The U.S. has reportedly been trying to broker similar offerings from American movie companies.²⁷

Energy Security. The Baltic states heavily depend on Russia for energy. In 2014, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania imported 100 percent of their natural gas from Russia.²⁸ Gazprom was once the sole provider of natural gas to the Baltic states, which paid some of the highest prices for gas in Europe. For instance, Lithuania paid 36 percent more for Russian gas in the first four months of 2014 than Germany paid.²⁹

Russia could use natural gas as a geopolitical weapon, as it has in the past.

The Baltics are aware that Russia could use natural gas as a geopolitical weapon, as it has in the past, and are aggressively seeking ways to end Russian state-owned Gazprom's monopoly on their gas supply. Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine in 2006, 2008–2009, and 2014 and threatened to do so again in early 2015. Estonia also has firsthand knowledge of Russia cutting off its gas, which happened briefly in 1993.

One significant development is Lithuania's 10-year lease of an offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) vessel that accepts LNG imports. It is docked year-round in the port of Klaipeda.³⁰ The terminal has broken Gazprom's monopoly. The new LNG vessel also benefits Estonia and Latvia. At full capacity,

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22. "Lithuania May Block Two More Russian TV Channels for Biased Coverage," *The Moscow Times*, January 6, 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/lithuania-may-block-two-more-russian-tv-channels-for-biased-coverage/514084.html> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 23. Anton Troianovski, "West to Woo Europe's Russian Speakers Through Television," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/west-to-woo-europes-russian-speakers-through-television-1434326429> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 24. Ott Ummelas, "Estonia Must Counter 'Hostile' Russian Propaganda, Adviser Says," *Bloomberg Business*, March 25, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-03-25/estonia-must-counter-hostile-russian-propaganda-adviser-says> (accessed June 30, 2015).
 25. Anton Troianovski, "Germany Seeks to Counter Russian 'Propaganda' in Baltics," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-seeks-to-counter-russian-propaganda-in-baltics-1429294362> (accessed June 30, 2015).
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. Troianovski, "West to Woo Europe's Russian Speakers Through Television."
 28. David Yanofsky, "The EU Countries That Depend the Most on Gazprom's Russian Gas," *Quartz*, April 22, 2015, <http://qz.com/388148/the-eu-countries-that-depend-the-most-on-gazproms-russian-gas/> (accessed June 23, 2015).
 29. Milda Seputyte, "Lithuania Grabs LNG in Effort to Curb Russian Dominance," *Bloomberg Business*, October 27, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-27/lithuania-grabs-Ing-in-effort-to-curb-russian-dominance> (accessed June 23, 2015).
 30. Kounteya Sinha, "Lithuania to Now Survive Without Russian Gas," *The Times Of India*, October 27, 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/Lithuania-to-now-survive-without-Russian-gas/articleshow/44950490.cms> (accessed June 23, 2015).

the terminal could supply 80 percent of the natural gas needs of all the Baltic states.³¹ Lithuania began supplying natural gas to Estonia in January 2015.

In February 2015, a Lithuanian natural gas import company signed a memorandum of understanding with an American company, which is building a liquefaction and export facility in Louisiana.³² However, export of American LNG has not yet received regulatory approval, and the new American LNG export terminal is not expected to start construction until 2019.³³ Still, the signed memorandum indicates a level of interest in U.S. LNG exports. In August 2014, Norwegian Statoil signed a five-year contract to supply LNG to the Klaipeda terminal with six to seven deliveries per year.³⁴

In 2014, Latvia announced plans to increase capacity at its Incukalna gas storage facility by 2.8 billion cubic meters by 2025.³⁵ Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland are planning the Gas Interconnection Poland–Lithuania (GIPL), a natural gas pipeline between Lithuania and Poland, which is expected to be completed in 2019.³⁶ Poland expects its new LNG terminal on the Baltic coast to receive its first shipment in fall of 2015.³⁷ Additionally, Finland and Estonia plan to build two LNG terminals connected

by an underground pipeline, further integrating the region's natural gas market. The Baltic Connector project is planned to be completed by 2019.³⁸

Electricity is another area where the Baltics are seeking alternatives to Russian supplies. In 2009, Lithuania closed the last operating nuclear power plant in the Baltics, which had supplied 80 percent of the nation's electricity needs.³⁹ In April 2014, Lithuania and Sweden began laying an underwater high-voltage direct-current cable to connect the two nations, opening up the electricity market in Lithuania. By June 2015, laying of the underwater cable was complete. When the entire project is completed at the end of 2015, the Baltic states will increase their ability to import energy from the Nordics by 70 percent.⁴⁰ The project has been dogged by frequent interference and muscle flexing by Russia. The Russian Navy intruded on the project four times in 2015 alone, often shadowing the ships laying the cable and occasionally hosting exercises directly in the area where the cable was being placed.⁴¹ On one occasion the Russian Navy ordered a Dutch vessel charged with guarding the cables to leave the area for 10 hours, an incident that occurred in Lithuania's exclusive economic zone.⁴² The LitPol Link is set to begin operating in early

31. Ibid.

32. Reuters, "Lithuania Moves to Replace Russian Gas with U.S. Supplies," *The Moscow Times*, February 27, 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/516655.html> (accessed June 23, 2015).

33. Ibid.

34. Kjetil Malkenes Hovland, "Statoil to Supply Gas to Lithuania in Five-Year Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/statoil-to-supply-gas-to-lithuania-in-five-year-deal-1408637833> (accessed June 24, 2015).

35. Nerijus Adomaitis, "Latvia Plans to Boost Gas Storage Capacity to 2.8 BCM by 2025," Reuters, October 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/03/latvia-gas-idUSL6NORY2TE20141003> (accessed June 24, 2015).

36. "GIPL Pipeline Facing Problems in Poland," *New Europe Investor*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.neweuropeinvestor.com/news/gipl-poland-lithuania-problems-10403/> (accessed June 24, 2015).

37. Agnieszka Barteczko, "Poland Expects First LNG Delivery to Baltic Sea Terminal in Autumn," Reuters, June 17, 2015, <http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFW8N0YH02M20150617> (accessed June 24, 2015).

38. "Estonia and Finland Agree on Construction of Two LNG Terminals," *The Baltic Times*, December 3, 2014, http://www.baltictimes.com/estonia_and_finland_agree_on__9__9__9_construction_of_two_lng_terminals/ (accessed June 24, 2015).

39. BBC News, "Lithuania Shuts Its Only Nuclear Power Station," December 31, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8435628.stm> (accessed June 24, 2015).

40. DELFI, "NordBalt Cable Laying Works in Baltic Sea Finished," *The Lithuania Tribune*, June 9, 2015, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/energy/nordbalt-cable-laying-works-in-baltic-sea-finished.d?id=68196132> (accessed June 24, 2015).

41. Andrew Higgins, "Increasingly Frequent Call on Baltic Sea: 'The Russian Navy Is Back,'" *The New York Times*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/11/world/europe/intrusions-in-baltic-sea-show-a-russia-challenging-the-west.html> (accessed June 24, 2015).

42. Christina Zander, "Undersea Electricity Cable Generates Friction Between Russia and Baltics," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/undersea-electricity-cable-generates-friction-between-russia-and-baltics-1430931797> (accessed June 24, 2015).

2016, connecting the Lithuanian and Polish electricity transmission systems overland, helping to integrate the Baltic and European electricity grids.⁴³

Cybersecurity. Baltic citizens are tech savvy and digitally connected. Ninety percent of Estonians and 80 percent of Latvians and Lithuanians use the Internet.⁴⁴ Latvia and Lithuania rank as world leaders in household Internet speed.⁴⁵ Estonia has been leveraging public-private partnerships to improve digital infrastructure. In Estonia, every citizen has a digital identification with which they vote, obtain government services, and pay taxes. Thanks to its digital identification program and the interconnectivity it fosters, Estonia saves 2 percent of GDP. As Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas observed, the “digital signature pays for our defence.”⁴⁶

However, connectedness comes with risks. Like the rest of NATO, the Baltic states are susceptible to cyber attacks. NATO’s cyber defense is only as strong as its weakest link. In 2007, Estonia came under concerted cyber attacks from Russia after a war memorial honoring Soviet soldiers was removed from the Tallinn city center. During the 2013 Steadfast Jazz Exercise, one of NATO’s largest joint training exercises since the end of the Cold War, the Baltic states were hit with numerous cyber attacks.⁴⁷

The Latvian armed forces and the Information Technology Security Incidents Response Institution⁴⁸ lead cybersecurity in the nation. In 2014, the Latvian Ministry of Defense established a cyberdefense unit as part of its National Guard to supplement the nation’s existing cyberdefenses. The unit will be composed of 94 “cyberguards.”⁴⁹ Lithuania, the target of more than 25,000 cyber incidents per year,⁵⁰ created a National Centre of Cyber Security in 2015 within the Defense Ministry to coordinate the nation’s cyber defense.⁵¹

In Estonia, the volume and type of cyber attacks in 2014 was similar to 2013. However, Estonia’s Information System Authority noted that “upon assessing the nature of incidents, it appears that there were more smartly and accurately targeted attacks that aimed to damage the services and/or reputation of the state.”⁵² The Estonia-based NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence was established in 2008 to enhance the Alliance’s capabilities and interoperability against cyber attacks. The center organizes Locked Shields, an annual cyberdefense exercise. In 2015, more than 400 people from 16 nations and the NATO Computer Incident Response Capability participated.⁵³

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43. Reuters, “Lithuania Need Not Be Compensated for Power Link—EU Regulator,” April 27, 2015, <http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL8N0XO4WU20150427> (accessed June 24, 2015).
 44. “80% Latvian and Lithuanian Residents Use Internet, in Estonia Even 90%,” *The Baltic Course*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/analytics/?doc=106113> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 45. Ookla, “Household Download Index,” 2015, <http://www.netindex.com/download/allcountries/> (accessed July 6, 2015).
 46. Thomas Tamblyn, “Estonia’s Prime Minister Explains Why a Digital Government Is the Future,” *The Huffington Post UK*, June 5, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/05/06/is-the-uk-dragging-its-digital-heels-estonias-pm-explains-why-a-digital-government-is-the-future_n_7213776.html (accessed July 2, 2015).
 47. “Cyber-Attacks Witnessed During NATO Exercises in Latvia Came from Russian IP Addresses,” *The Baltic Course*, February 12, 2014, <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/Technology/?doc=87601> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 48. CERT.LV, “About CERT.LV,” 2011, <https://www.cert.lv/section/show/12> (accessed July 6, 2015).
 49. LSM (Public Broadcasting of Latvia), “National Guard Opens Cyber-Defense Center,” January 15, 2015, <http://www.lsm.lv/en/article/societ/society/national-guard-opens-cyber-defense-center.a113832/> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 50. ELTA, “Lithuania Launches National Cyber Security Centre,” *The Lithuania Tribune*, January 2, 2015, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/defence/lithuania-launches-national-cyber-security-centre.d?id=66804362> (accessed July 2, 2015).
 51. News release, “National Centre of Cyber Security Will Start Functioning as of Next Year,” Ministry of National Defence, Republic of Lithuania, December 11, 2014, http://www.kam.lt/en/news_1098/current_issues/national_centre_of_cyber_security_will_start_functioning_as_of_next_year.html (accessed July 2, 2015).
 52. Republic of Estonia, Information System Authority, “2014 Annual Report Cyber Security Branch of the Estonian Information System Authority,” 2014, p. 7, https://www.ria.ee/public/Kuberturvalisus/RIA-Kyberturbe-aruanne-2014_ENG.pdf (accessed July 6, 2015).
 53. NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, “Locked Shields 2015,” <https://ccdcoe.org/locked-shields-2015.html> (accessed July 6, 2015).

U.S. Treaty Obligations to the Baltics

After the Baltic states joined NATO in 2004, the Alliance quickly lost interest in the region. In fact, NATO did not even draw up contingency plans to defend the Baltic states until at least 2008.⁵⁴ There was a concern that such planning would upset Moscow. After Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, these concerns dissipated.

The U.S. and many of its Western European allies share the blame for relegating Central and Eastern Europe to a lower priority for the Alliance. After the Baltic Air Policing mission was established in 2004, there was difficulty finding political support inside the Alliance to maintain it. The U.S. and the U.K.—both traditional leaders inside NATO—made decisions that indirectly affected Baltic security. In 2010, the British government announced that it would withdraw all 10,000 British troops, including a sizeable amount of the U.K.’s armor capability, from their permanent bases in Germany.⁵⁵

In 2009, the U.S. cancelled the “third site” of Europe’s ballistic missile defense (BMD) in Poland and the Czech Republic with little prior consultation with allies. This cancellation took place after the Obama Administration’s Russian “reset” in order to address Russia’s ill-founded concerns about the system. In 2013, the Pentagon announced that it was cancelling Phase IV of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) missile defense program.⁵⁶

Phase IV was the part of the EPAA that experts said could be used against Russian missiles and that Moscow opposed.⁵⁷

By 2013, the U.S. had removed two heavy brigade combat teams, all of its main battle tanks, and an A-10 squadron from Germany. In April 2015, the U.S. announced that it would restructure the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade in Europe eliminating 1,900 more U.S. soldiers in Europe and moving 24 Apache combat helicopters and 30 Blackhawk transport helicopters back to the U.S.⁵⁸ These cuts and force reductions have sent the wrong message to friend and foe alike in the region.

Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014 caught the U.S. and NATO off guard. Instead of being prepared for Russian aggression in the Baltic region, the U.S. and NATO needed to quickly reverse a number of policies:

- After refusing for years to use Ämari air base in Estonia as part of an expanded role for Baltic Air Policing, NATO finally agreed to do so in May 2015.⁵⁹ (However, starting in September 2015 NATO’s Baltic Air Policing was cut in half from 16 planes to just eight.⁶⁰)
- After removing all main battle tanks from Europe in 2013,⁶¹ the U.S. Army is now returning tanks to be prepositioned across Central and Eastern European countries.⁶²

54. Ahto Lobjakas, “NATO Commander Seeks Defense Plans for Baltic States,” October 7, 2008, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, http://www.rferl.org/content/NATO_Commander_Seeks_Defense_Plans_For_Baltic_States/1294790.html (accessed July 2, 2015).

55. U.K. Government, “Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: 2011 Strategic Defence and Security Review,” October 21, 2010, pp. 4 and 28, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf (accessed July 6, 2015).

56. Chuck Hagel, “Missile Defense Announcement,” speech at the Pentagon, March 15, 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1759> (accessed July 6, 2015).

57. David M. Herszenhorn and Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Cancels Part of Missile Defense That Russia Opposed,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/world/europe/with-eye-on-north-korea-us-cancels-missile-defense-russia-opposed.html> (accessed July 2, 2015).

58. Michael Cochrane, “Is U.S. Draw-Down in Europe Encouraging Russian Aggression?” *World*, May 11, 2015, http://www.worldmag.com/2015/05/is_u_s_draw_down_in_europe_encouraging_russian_aggression (accessed July 2, 2015).

59. Adrian Croft, “NATO to Triple Baltic Air Patrol from Next Month,” Reuters, April 8, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/08/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSBREA371WH20140408> (accessed June 30, 2015).

60. “NATO to Cut Baltic Air Patrols by Half,” Deutsche Welle, August 4, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/nato-to-cut-baltic-air-patrols-by-half/a-18628128> (accessed August 5, 2015).

61. John Vandiver, “US Army’s Last Tanks Depart from Germany,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 4, 2013, <http://www.stripes.com/news/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977> (accessed July 2, 2015).

62. Michael S. Darnell, “American Tanks Return to Europe After Brief Leave,” *Stars and Stripes*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/american-tanks-return-to-europe-after-brief-leave-1.264910> (accessed July 2, 2015).

- After removing the A-10 squadron from Germany in 2013, the U.S. regularly rotates A-10s to Central and Eastern Europe.⁶³
- After cancelling 45 percent of military-to-military training events with European partners in 2013, the U.S. is now increasing its training in Europe and the Baltics.⁶⁴
- After removing two brigade combat teams from Europe, the U.S. is routinely rotating a battalion from the U.S. to Europe for training and is prepositioning the equipment for a second brigade combat team in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Funding for improving military infrastructure, such as ground and air training and staging sites in the Baltic region. For example, in Lithuania, the United States will be funding military construction projects in Klaipeda, Pabrade, Rukla, the Siauliai Air Base, and Mumaiciai.⁶⁵
- Establishment of the six NATO Force Integration Units in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania. These multinational command and control centers will facilitate the rapid deployment of Allied forces to the region as required. In terms of manpower they will be small.

In addition to these embarrassing but necessary reversals in policy, the U.S. has taken a number of welcome, albeit modest steps to boost the defenses of NATO's eastern members through the auspices of NATO's Operation Atlantic Resolve and the U.S. European Reassurance Initiative. Some of the more noteworthy policy decisions include:

- Continuous deployment since May 2014 of a U.S. Army company (around 150 soldiers) in each of the three Baltic states and Poland.
- An increase in U.S.-led and NATO-led training exercises in the region.
- Creation of a pre-positioned European Activity Set, which includes 250 tanks, infantry, fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery—about a brigade's worth of equipment—to be placed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.

NATO has agreed to create a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The VJTF is expected to consist of 5,000 troops, which can be ready for action within a week. The lead VJTF element is expected to deploy to a crisis area within 48 hours.⁶⁶ While the VJTF looks great on paper, its practical value in either defending the Baltic states or deterring Russian aggression is questionable. If Russia invaded one of the Baltic states, the VJTF would be too small and too slow to deploy to have any serious impact.

Whether these measures will help to deter Russian aggression is debatable. While 150 soldiers in each of the Baltic states and Poland might have a strategic communications effect, they would have little tactical impact opposing a Russian invasion. The one battalion that will rotate from the U.S. to train in Europe is clearly no substitute for the two brigade combat teams that were removed from Europe in 2013. Prepositioning dozens of tanks in storage across the region is no substitute for having two brigades of tanks—and the soldiers to operate them—on the ground in Europe as the U.S. did before 2013.

63. Brad Lendon, "Air Force Sending 'Tankbuster' Jets Back to Europe," CNN, February 13, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/12/world/a-10-jets-to-europe/> (accessed July 2, 2015).

64. Andrew Tilgham, "NATO Bases Critical for U.S., Leader Says," *Army Times*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130819/NEWS/308190010/NATO-bases-critical-for-U-S-leader-says> (accessed July 2, 2015).

65. News release, "European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners," Embassy of the United States Vilnius (Lithuania), June 18, 2015, http://vilnius.usembassy.gov/press_releases/2015/06/18/2016--european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-u.s.-efforts-in-support-of-nato-allies-and-partners (accessed July 6, 2015), and news release, "EUCOM Provides Update on the European Reassurance Initiative," U.S. European Command, April 20, 2015, <http://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/33026/eucom-provides-update-on-the-european-reassurance-initiative> (accessed July 6, 2015). Other notable military construction projects include airfield improvement at Graf Ignatievo, Bulgaria; airfield improvement at Āmari, Estonia; improvement of airfield infrastructure at Lielvarde, Latvia; improvement of support infrastructure at Lask, Poland; improvement of airfield infrastructure at Campia Turzia, Romania; and cargo ramp, multi-modal, and fuel storage capacity improvements at Mihail Kogalniceanu, Romania.

66. News release, "NATO's Readiness Action Plan," NATO, May 2015, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_05/20150508_1505-Factsheet-RAP-en.pdf (accessed July 6, 2015).

One area that remains controversial inside the Alliance is the question of permanently stationing NATO troops in the Baltic states. The decisions to create the VJTF and preposition some equipment in the region were a poor compromise at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit between those Alliance members wanting permanent bases and those who do not.

The inadequacy of the VJTF demonstrates why permanently basing troops in the Baltic region is important. The only way to guarantee the security of the Baltic states against a conventional Russian military threat is by having robust troops and military capabilities on the ground. The Baltic states are too small to rely on a strategy of defensive depth that could buy NATO enough time to mobilize and deploy a sizable force to the region.

The Baltic states are too small to rely on a strategy of defensive depth that could buy NATO enough time to mobilize and deploy a sizable force to the region.

There is a common misconception that the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation (NATO–Russia Founding Act) prohibits permanently basing NATO soldiers in Central and Eastern European countries. This is not true. Regarding the question of permanent bases, the act states:

NATO reiterates that *in the current and foreseeable security environment*, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than

by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces. Accordingly, it will have to rely on adequate infrastructure commensurate with the above tasks. In this context, reinforcement may take place, when necessary, in the event of defence against a threat of aggression and missions in support of peace consistent with the United Nations Charter and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] governing principles, as well as for exercises consistent with the adapted CFE [Conventional Armed Forces in Europe] Treaty, the provisions of the Vienna Document 1994 and mutually agreed transparency measures. Russia will exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe.⁶⁷

When reading the phrase “in the current and foreseeable security environment,” it is important to remember that Russia and NATO agreed to this act 18 years ago. Russia’s commitment to Euro-Atlantic security has changed since the days of goodwill in 1997:

- In 1999, Russia agreed to remove all of its troops and weaponry from Moldova by the end of 2002.⁶⁸ Today, 2,000 Russian troops are still based in the breakaway region of Transnistria.⁶⁹
- In 2001, the U.S. State Department raised concerns with Moscow about the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad.⁷⁰ Since then, there have been repeated accusations that Russia has deployed tactical nuclear weapons there.
- In 2006, Russia temporarily cut natural gas supplies to Ukraine which had a knock-on effect of reducing gas supplies to other European countries, including NATO allies.⁷¹

67. Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation, May 27, 1997, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm (accessed July 6, 2015) (emphasis added).

68. Wade Boese, “Dispute over Russian Withdrawals from Georgia, Moldova Stall CFE Treaty,” Arms Control Association, September 1, 2004, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_09/CFE (accessed July 5, 2015).

69. David Kashi, “Russia Conducts Military Exercises in Moldova’s Breakaway Region of Transnistria near Ukraine’s Western Border, Escalating Tensions,” *International Business Times*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/russia-conducts-military-exercises-moldovas-breakaway-region-transnistria-near-ukraines-western> (accessed July 5, 2015).

70. “U.S. Yet to Query Moscow on Nukes,” *The Washington Times*, January 4, 2001, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2001/jan/04/20010104-020454-1623r/> (accessed July 5, 2015).

71. BBC News, “Ukraine and Russia Reach Gas Deal,” January 4, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4579648.stm> (accessed July 5, 2015).

- In 2007, Russia was behind a cyber attack against Estonia in retaliation for removing the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn, a Soviet war memorial.⁷²
- In 2007, Artur Chilingarov, a member of the Russian Duma, led a submarine expedition to the North Pole and planted a Russian Flag on the seabed. Later he said, “The Arctic is Russian. We must prove the North Pole is an extension of the Russian landmass.”⁷³
- Russia invaded the Republic of Georgia in 2008 and continues to occupy 20 percent of the country.
- In 2010, Russia started upgrading, expanding, and increasing the number of troops and armaments at its Gyumri base in Armenia, which borders NATO member Turkey.⁷⁴ Today, an estimated 5,000 Russian troops with dozens of fighter planes and attack helicopters are based in Armenia.
- In 2013, two Russian bombers and four fighter jets took off from St. Petersburg and carried out what was thought to be a simulated nuclear strike against two targets in Sweden.⁷⁵
- In 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea and invaded part of the Donbas region of Ukraine.
- In 2015, Russian Ambassador to Denmark Mikhail Vanin said during an interview, “I don’t think that Danes fully understand the consequence if Denmark joins the American-led missile defence shield. If they do, then Danish warships will be targets for Russian nuclear missiles.”⁷⁶

Judging from Russia’s track record since the NATO–Russia Founding Act, the “current and foreseeable security environment” in Europe has dramatically changed since 1997. This alone justifies permanently basing NATO troops in the Baltic region. NATO is a defensive alliance. As long as Russia does not plan to attack a NATO member, Moscow should have nothing to fear from military bases in the Baltics.

One of the best ways to keep the Baltic states secure and free is for NATO to return to the basics. NATO’s mission in 1949 and throughout the Cold War was to deter and, if required, defeat the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, to protect the territorial integrity of its members, and to stop the spread of communism in Europe. Although the nature of the threat has changed, the threat itself has not gone away.

NATO does not need to be everywhere in the world doing everything all the time, but it does need to be capable of defending its members’ territorial integrity. Article VI of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty is clear that NATO’s area of responsibility is “in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.”⁷⁷

The Nordic Dimension

The countries in the Nordic region⁷⁸ have direct and indirect roles in guaranteeing the security of the Baltic states. Historically, the Baltic states have had a very close relationship with the Nordic countries. Denmark and Norway played an important role in developing Baltic military capabilities since the end of the Cold War, and Sweden and Finland, although not members of NATO, also have a close security relationship with the Baltic states.

72. Ian Traynor, “Russia Accused of Unleashing Cyberwar to Disable Estonia,” *The Guardian*, May 16, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/17/topstories3.russia> (accessed July 5, 2015).

73. Paul Reynolds, “Russia Ahead in Arctic ‘Gold Rush,’” BBC News, August 1, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6925853.stm (accessed July 5, 2015).

74. Armen Grigoryan, “Russia Increases Military Capacity in the South Caucasus,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 2, 2015, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=43732](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=43732) (accessed July 5, 2015).

75. Hans M. Kristensen, “Nuclear Exercises Amidst Ukrainian Crisis: Time for Cooler Heads,” Federation of American Scientists, May 16, 2014, <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2014/05/nuke-exercises/> (accessed June 24, 2015).

76. Julian Isherwood, “Russia Warns Denmark Its Warships Could Become Nuclear Targets,” *The Telegraph*, March 21, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/denmark/11487509/Russia-warns-Denmark-its-warships-could-become-nuclear-targets.html> (accessed July 5, 2015).

77. The North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949, art. VI, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm (accessed July 6, 2015).

78. For this paper, the Nordic region is defined as Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Although Iceland is normally considered a Nordic country, it has no immediate role in the defense and security of the three Baltic states.

The Nordic region is also home to overlapping alliances, which adds another level of complexity to Baltic security. Norway is in NATO, but not in the EU. Finland and Sweden are in the EU, but not in NATO. Denmark is in both the EU and NATO, but has an opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. In addition to bilateral cooperation and engagement through NATO, the U.S. is also active in the region through the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) program. Created in 2003 to improve U.S. engagement in the Nordic-Baltic region, e-PINE is now mainly a talking shop.

The Nordic region is also home to geographical spots of strategic importance for Baltic security. History has shown that most military operations in the Baltic region require access to what is today Swedish and Finnish air, sea, and land. For example, during the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War (1918–1920), the Swedish fortress of Viapori (today known as Suomenlinna in Finland) and the Åland Islands played a crucial role. During both World Wars, the Skagerrak and Øresund Straits—both of which border Swedish waters and serve as a gateway to the Baltic Sea—were highly contested. During the Cold War, Denmark's Bornholm Island was an area of contention between the Soviet Union and NATO. In the 21st century these considerations have not disappeared.

The Danish Straits consist of three channels connecting the Baltic Sea to the North Sea via the Kattegat and Skagerrak Seas. These straits are particularly important to the Baltic Sea nations as import and export routes. This is especially true for Russia, which has increasingly shipped its crude oil exports to Europe through its Baltic ports.⁷⁹ Approximately

125,000 ships per year transit these straits, compared with only 31 ships that successfully transited the Arctic's Northern Sea Route in 2014.⁸⁰ If the U.S. needed to intervene militarily in the Baltic states, access to the Danish Straits would be vital.

Three important geostrategic islands impact Baltic security. Only one is part of a NATO member:

1. Åland Islands. The Åland Islands are a group of Finnish islands, where the primary spoken language is Swedish. They have always been considered the most important geostrategic piece of real estate in the Baltic Sea. During the Crimean War, Sir Charles Wood, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, said "Those islands [Åland Islands] hung over Stockholm as much as Sebastopol hung over Constantinople."⁸¹ Ever since the 1856 Treaty of Paris, which ended the Crimean War, the Åland Islands have been demilitarized. For the victors this was considered a major achievement of the Crimean War. British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston told the House of Commons in 1856 that demilitarization of the islands "placed a barrier between her [Russia] and the north of Europe."⁸²

2. Gotland. The island is strategically located halfway between Sweden and Latvia in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Sweden maintained a permanent military garrison on the island for hundreds of years until 2005. Due to increased tensions with Russia in the Baltic Sea, the Swedish government has announced plans to base 150 soldiers on the island.⁸³ There is also talk of naval assets being stationed there in the near future.⁸⁴ Due to its central location in the Baltic Sea, there is a concern

79. U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Transit Chokepoints," November 10, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.cfm?RegionTopicID=WOTC> (accessed July 28, 2015).

80. Danish Ministry of Defence, "Facts & Figures," September 18, 2014, <http://www2.forsvaret.dk/eng/About/Facts/Pages/FactsFigures.aspx> (accessed March 18, 2015), and Liz Ruskin, "Arctic Shipping Chills in 2014," Alaska Public Media, December 31, 2014, <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/12/31/arctic-shipping-chills-in-2014/> (accessed July 28, 2015).

81. House of Commons, "The Treaty of Peace," debate, HC Deb, May 5, 1856, vol. 141, col. 2111, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1856/may/05/the-treaty-of-peace#column_2111 (accessed July 6, 2015).

82. Ibid., and HC Deb, May 6, 1856, vol. 142, c. 128, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1856/may/06/the-treaty-of-peace-adjourned-debate#column_128 (accessed July 6, 2015).

83. Richard Milne, "Sweden Sends Troops to Baltic Island amid Russia Tensions," *The Financial Times*, March 12, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/660d038c-c8bc-11e4-8617-00144feab7de.html> (accessed July 5, 2015).

84. Gerard O'Dwyer, "Sweden Invests in Naval Capacity, Baltic Sea Ops," *Defense News*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/03/20/sweden-invests-in-naval-capacity-and-baltic-sea/25093841/> (accessed July 5, 2015).

MAP 1

Three Islands Key to Baltic Security

The location of the Åland, Gotland, and Bornholm islands are strategically important to security in the Baltic Sea. Russia has long recognized the value of these islands and has even carried out military training exercises that simulated capturing them.



Source: Heritage Foundation research.

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that Russian troops based in nearby Kaliningrad would occupy the island and deploy anti-aircraft and anti-shipping weapons platforms in the event of a war with NATO.⁸⁵

3. Bornholm. This island is strategically located at the mouth of the Baltic Sea. At the end of World

War II, the Soviet Union briefly occupied the island, but returned it to Denmark in 1946. At that time there was an unofficial agreement between Denmark and the Soviet Union that the island would not be used by NATO, although Denmark maintained a military presence there during the Cold War.⁸⁶ In June 2014, Russia carried out a sim-

85. Elizabeth Braw, "East-West Tension Puts Baltic Sea Island on Its Toes," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 26, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-tensions-put-swedish-baltic-island-on-alert/27038119.html> (accessed July 5, 2015).

86. Vojtech Mastny, "NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars *Working Paper* No. 35, March 2002, p. 48, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB01.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2015).

ulated strike against Bornholm during an annual political festival with 90,000 attendees including most of the country's political elite.

It would be naïve in the extreme to think Russia did not factor the importance of these three islands into their Baltic Sea contingency planning, and it would be just as irresponsible for the U.S. not to do the same. In March 2015, Russia carried out a large-scale training exercise with up to 33,000 soldiers, which included the capture of these three islands as part of its scenario. As Edward Lucas highlighted in his report on Baltic security: "If carried out successfully, control of those territories would make it all but impossible for NATO allies to reinforce the Baltic states."⁸⁷

A lot has been written about U.S. dependency on non-NATO Sweden and Finland to mount a credible defense or liberation of the Baltic states.⁸⁸ While any U.S. intervention in the region would be challenging without Swedish and Finnish support, this should not be overblown. The U.S. intervened and then sustained large-scale combat operations for more than a decade in Afghanistan—a landlocked Central Asian country several thousand miles away from the continental United States. The U.S. did this with questionable and at times wavering support from neighboring countries and poor regional infrastructure. Therefore, Moscow should not interpret Sweden and Finland's non-NATO status as a green light to intervene in the Baltic states because the U.S. cannot come to their defense. Conversely, until they decide to become full-fledged members of NATO, Stockholm and Helsinki should not expect the Alliance to come automatically to their assistance if they are attacked by Russia, and NATO members should not give this impression.

What the U.S. Should Do

In order to improve U.S.–Baltic security the U.S. should:

- **Show America's gratitude and appreciation.** The Baltic states have done a lot for transatlantic security and they deserved to be thanked. President Obama's visit to Tallinn in 2014 was very positive for U.S.–Baltic relations. Senior officials in the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, and Congress should regularly visit the region.
- **Establish a permanent military presence in the Baltic region.** The U.S. and NATO need to show an enduring commitment to the region by permanently stationing armed forces in the Baltics. Contrary to popular belief, nothing in the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act prevents this. The compromise at the 2014 Wales Summit resulting in rotational forces and prepositioned equipment to the region is only one part of ensuring the security of the Baltic states.
- **Consider establishing a Baltic Sea Rotation Force.** The U.S. Marine Corps operates a Black Sea Rotational Force that consists of a special-purpose Marine air-ground task force (SPMAGTF). The U.S. should consider establishing a similar task force for the Baltic Sea region. Such a task force would offer more opportunities for joint military training for the Baltic states as well as for Poland, Finland, and Sweden. Furthermore, such a task force would demonstrate U.S. commitment to transatlantic security.
- **Maintain a robust maritime presence in the Baltic Sea.** In March 2015, the U.S. released "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower," a global maritime strategy document.⁸⁹ This detailed 48-page document devoted only one paragraph to the threat that Russia poses to NATO and made no mention of the Baltic Sea. As

87. Edward Lucas, "The Coming Storm: Baltic Sea Security Report," Center for European Policy Analysis, June 2015, p. 9, <http://www.cepa.org/sites/default/files/styles/medium/Baltic%20Sea%20Security%20Report-%20%282%29.compressed.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2015).

88. For example, see Lucas, "The Coming Storm Baltic Sea Security Report," and Eoin Micheál McNamara, Magnus Nordenman, and Charly Salenius-Pasternak, "Nordic-Baltic Security and US Foreign Policy: A Durable Transatlantic Link?" Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 24, 2015, http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/515/nordic-baltic_security_and_us_foreign_policy/ (accessed July 6, 2015).

89. U.S. Navy, "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower," March 2015, <http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2015).

long as the U.S. is obligated by treaty to defend the Baltic states, the U.S. must do a better job of factoring the region into its maritime strategy.

- **Work with the Nordic countries to improve relations with the Baltics.** Good U.S. relations with the Nordic countries will mean closer relations with the Baltics. Historically, the Baltic states have had a very close relationship with the Nordic countries. Although not members of NATO, Sweden and Finland have a close security relationship with the Baltic states. Access to Swedish and Finnish territory and airspace will be important if NATO is called on to defend the Baltic states.
- **Be prepared to reinforce Europe quickly.** During the Cold War, the U.S. conducted an annual military exercise called Operation Reforger (Return of Forces to Germany). Operation Reforger was designed to prove that the U.S. could move conventional military forces rapidly from the U.S. to Germany in the event of a war with the Soviet Union. The U.S. should consider holding a similar exercise focused on defending the Baltic states.
- **Encourage Finland and Sweden to join NATO.** Ultimately, the Swedish and Finnish people will decide whether to join NATO, but the U.S. should pursue a policy that encourages NATO membership for these two Nordic countries. Until they join NATO, they will not benefit from the Alliance's security guarantee.
- **Prepare contingency operations to defend the Baltics that do not include support from Finland and Sweden.** The U.S. should plan and rehearse defending the Baltic states without the cooperation of Finland and Sweden. However unlikely this might be, until Finland and Sweden become full members of NATO, it would be irresponsible for U.S. military planners not to plan for this scenario. This should include scenarios in which Russian forces capture the Åland Islands and Gotland.
- **Breathe new life in the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe program.** In addition to improving bilateral relationships with the countries in the Nordic-Baltic region, the U.S. should devote more energy and resources to improving the role of e-PINE in regional security.⁹⁰
- **Work closely with Poland.** Since Poland is the only NATO country that shares a land border with the Baltic states, it would play a key role in defense of the region. The U.S. should invest in improving Poland's Host Nation Support, which will be vital if the U.S. needs to send large numbers of troops into the region to intervene in the Baltic states. Poland has not only capable armed forces, but strong political will to be active in NATO.
- **Pay attention to Belarus's role in regional security.** Belarus is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, but democratic governance remains poor, and the government in Minsk is closely aligned with Moscow. Belarus is home to Russian military assets and plays an important role in helping Russia resupply Kaliningrad via Lithuania. Belarus has also participated in a number of high-profile joint military exercises with Russia in recent years. In the event of a Russian military intervention against the Baltic states, the U.S. should make it clear that it would not turn a blind eye to any Belarussian support provided to Russia.
- **Make a long-term commitment to joint training exercises.** An old military adage says that you should train like you fight. Training exercises with allies are invaluable opportunities to improve interoperability, camaraderie, and success in simulated battle conditions. The U.S. should prioritize training missions in the Baltic region and ensure that defense cuts and sequestration do not weaken U.S.-Baltic relations.
- **Reiterate America's commitment to NATO's Article V.** Even with all the hype surrounding the European Reassurance Initiative, there is a perception in parts of Europe that transatlantic security is a lower priority for the Obama Administration than for previous Administrations. The Obama Administration should regularly demonstrate its commitment to transatlantic security by its actions, not just words.

90. For the benefits of closer Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the Baltic region, see Lucas, "The Coming Storm."

- **Continue special forces cooperation.** During NATO-led combat operations in Afghanistan, the Baltic states placed themselves on the map in special operations, and allowing the U.S.–Baltic special forces relationship to cease now that combat operations in Afghanistan have ended would be a waste. The U.S. should work with the Baltic nations to find new areas of cooperation in special operations. This might include allowing a liaison officer from each Baltic state in the U.S. Special Operations Command.
 - **Commit to a speedy and robust ballistic missile defense in Europe.** BMD-capable ships will likely operate in the Baltics someday as part of NATO’s missile defense system. The Baltic states view NATO’s ballistic missile defense system as a fundamental part of the Alliance’s defense.
 - **Enhance cybersecurity cooperation with the Baltic states.** An increased American contribution to the Estonian Centre of Excellence on cyberdefense is welcome, but it represents only a small portion of existing and potential U.S.–Baltic cooperation in this area. The U.S. should explore ways to broaden cooperation in cyberdefense with the goal of sharing experience; expanding contingency planning, training, and exercises; and developing capabilities.
 - **Ensure that NATO remains a nuclear security alliance.** NATO’s 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review stated that the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance provide the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies. The U.S. should not underestimate how important this issue is to the Baltic states. As long as the West could face a nuclear threat from any part of the world, NATO needs to remain a nuclear alliance.
 - **Facilitate U.S. LNG exports to the Baltic region.** The security of energy supplies is a serious concern of the Baltic states. It also affects military readiness, which is why the U.S. and NATO should be concerned. Along with regional pipeline and LNG infrastructure projects, U.S. LNG exports would allow policymakers in the Baltics greater freedom to pursue geostrategic aims, namely preservation of Baltic security, with a lessened impact of energy considerations.
- The sooner restrictions can be lifted, the stronger NATO and the Baltic states will become.
- **Ensure robust U.S. participation in the Energy Security Centre of Excellence.** The U.S. has extended experience in energy security, and the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Lithuania could benefit greatly from increased U.S. participation. U.S. participation would also provide an opportunity to influence the energy security debate inside NATO.
 - **Lift the ban on crude oil exports.** The Baltic states still rely on Russian oil imports. The U.S. government can pursue multiple avenues to lift the ban on crude oil exports. Lifting the ban and helping to achieve a more efficient global oil market would benefit American consumers as well as assist allies by easing their reliance on Russian oil.
 - **Promote the export of battle-tested U.S. defense equipment.** The U.S. should work closely to determine how U.S. military hardware can best meet the defense needs of the Baltic states. When a government buys U.S. military equipment, it not only receives battle-tested equipment, but also gains a deeper military relationship with the U.S. The U.S. should also consider gifting excess military equipment being removed from the force structure to the Baltics.
 - **Ensure robust U.S. participation in the Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communications.** The aim of this center is to help to counter Russian propaganda abroad, especially in the nations most susceptible to its effects. This new center of excellence could benefit greatly from U.S. participation. U.S. participation would also provide an opportunity to influence the debate inside NATO on strategic communication.
 - **Forcefully condemn Russian disinformation.** The State Department should follow the lead of the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office by doing a better job of immediately and forcefully rebutting Russian propaganda and disinformation with factual evidence. This is particularly important in social media.

- **Continue to send students to the Baltic Defence College (BDC).** American officers already attend the BDC. The U.S. should not view American participation in the BDC as low-hanging fruit for budget savings. U.S. student enrollment in the BDC allows U.S. service personnel to learn more about NATO allies in Eastern Europe and allows U.S. service personnel to share their experiences from more than a decade of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in an institutional setting. This benefits both the U.S. and its NATO allies.
- **Facilitate better coordination between the local and national level government in the Baltic states.** In the event that Russia stirs up trouble with the Russian-speaking populations, local authorities and national security forces will make the first response. The U.S. should assist the Baltic states in establishing good practices and standard operation procedures across all levels of government to deal with such situations. An incident of this nature would not require a military or NATO response unless Russian troops crossed the border or an armed insurgency commenced.
- **Leverage the U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship in the Baltics.** The U.S. and the U.K. are more effective actors in transatlantic security when they work together. For historical reasons, the U.K. has very close relations with the Baltic states, especially with Estonia and Latvia. The U.S. should work with the U.K. to identify areas of deeper defense and security cooperation with the Baltics.

Conclusion

It is often said that NATO needs to be global because the threats are global and that defending at the goal line is not a sensible policy. The problem is that NATO does not even seem to defend the goal line in the Baltic region.

The U.S. needs to make it very clear to Russia that there is a line on the map that Russia cannot cross without serious consequences—with countries that are in NATO and countries that are not. The U.S. is obligated by treaty to defend NATO countries. Any response that NATO makes to reinforce its members' territorial integrity would be a responsible defensive measure designed to defend the Alliance, not to provoke a war with Russia.

If the U.S. works with its allies and takes the appropriate measures to defend the Baltic states, Putin will not be tempted into attacking. Russia will do what it knows it can get away with—no more and no less. From a military and diplomatic point of view, it makes no sense not to have robust capability in Central and Eastern Europe. Defending the Baltic states and deterring Russian aggression will be far easier and cheaper than liberating them would be.

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