Defending the Baltics: Alternative Approaches

Discussion

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TRANSCRIPT

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TOD LINDBERG: It's my great pleasure to welcome today Janis Garisons, who's the state secretary at the Ministry of Defense in Latvia, and Steve Flanagan, a senior political scientist at RAND Corporation. Our topic today is a new approach, a new paradigm for the defense of the Baltics. And both of these gents - the one who's been executing this proposition and the one who's been describing it eloquently in this terrific report - deterring Russian aggression in the Baltic states through resilience and resistance - of which we've got a couple of copies. But you can certainly find it on the RAND website and download it there. And I would certainly recommend it if you're interested in this particular topic.

We have two very capable people to discuss this. I just want to spend a moment introducing the topic. I spent a lot of time going back and forth to the Baltics - going back, really, to the V-10 meeting in Vilnius, you know, at the very beginning of the new millennium, as we were first talking about the possibility of enlarging NATO to include the Baltics, as well as other additional countries, following the first round with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. I - one of the things that I think has been striking over the years is the way in which the perception within the Baltic States - and by the way, we all speak in shorthand and refer to the Baltics. But we also should be mindful, as people in the Baltics will tell you, that they're not triplets...

(LAUGHTER)

LINDBERG: ...You know, they actually are distinct places with distinct personalities and character, et cetera. But there is obviously a regional affinity and a tremendous amount of effort in working together - cooperate - especially. But the perception in the Baltics, I think you could also - you could a little bit say was always one of greater a degree of wariness of the eastern neighbor. And sometimes this actually annoyed Washington, which didn't necessarily share that perception. But I do think that starting in '08, after the Russian incursion into Georgia, those complaints - or those concerns, shall we say, started to be taken more seriously. And there were some questions that one heard when one was in the region. And I think the most important one of which was, what are NATO's plans for the defense of the Baltics? And interestingly enough, that was a pretty good question because there weren't much - there wasn't much in the way of forward-looking planning done on that subject. But this situation, I think, took a very different turn after the Russian incursion into Ukraine. And it was at this point, I think, that we began to see a new set of questions being asked in the Baltics. And they're more or less the subject that we'll be addressing today, which is not only what NATO can do, but what - you know, what can these - what can these states do themselves?

And we are coming up on the 80th anniversary - in November - of the Winter War, the attack of the Soviet Union on Finland. And that was a very interesting sort of piece of the conflict of the mid-20th century. The Soviets demanded terms of the Finns. The Finns refused. The Soviets invaded, and in the course of several months, finally did manage to break through the Mannerheim Line in Finland and increased the terms that they were demanding. And you could say that this was a defeat of a kind for Finland, but not really ultimately a defeat in two senses. One, Finland retained its independence. This was not Comrade Stalin's goal. And the second thing that happened is that, while the Finns suffered horribly in this war with 26,000 killed in action and perhaps 100,000 casualties or so, the Soviets suffered worse in the sense that they suffered 150,000 killed in action during this war and then (unintelligible) multiple. So although they were able to obtain some very nice lakefront real estate on Ladoga, they paid a very, very high price for it. And it is this, I think, thinking that is animating this new defense paradigm in the Baltics, that there is possibly a - with sufficient advanced preparation - a way that the Baltics themselves could escalate the cost of any potential aggression and therefore have a deterrent -
a greater, an additional, a local deterrent effect on that possibility. So these are the issues that I would like to explore today. And I think I'll turn first to Janis and just ask if - tell us a little bit about what's going on in this project.

JANIS GARISONS: Well, thank you, first of all. Thank you, Hudson Institute, for organizing this. And it's interesting that you started actually referring to - with reference to Winter War because that was also my intention.

LINDBERG: I'm sorry.

(LAUGHTER)

LINDBERG: I guess we could have been...

GARISONS: I think I probably have to give a little bit historical background why we react now because there's some historical memories. And one of those historical memories - that in 1940, when Finland decided to resist, the other leaders decided actually to not resist and not to fight Soviets. And the argument was that it would be too bloody and we would lose too much. But as a consequence of that, for those who don't know, we lost almost more than 10% of our population, because when the Soviets came (unintelligible) or KGB killed thousands, then more than around 10 - hundred thousands were exported to Siberia, where a majority of them were killed or died naturally. And actually, then we suffered 50 years of occupation, which was not a pleasant thing, because I myself remember that. And then - but on our other side, we had - actually, all three Baltics we have experience of so-called Forest Brothers for years, which the Russians don't like to recognize now. But, actually, they were at least down to 55.

So in some places, there were people who were resisting in forests. And, actually, Soviets saw they might - could not do anything about those people who decided to resist them. And I'm putting - and, of course, Winter War is, I think, a good example of what happens if you choose a right strategy - a right strategy because, why United States and allies can't win Afghanistan because there are no divisions there, and nobody fights conventional wars there. But still, we have problems of actually achieving our goals. And that's probably something that we have to look - and be actually looking - as an example. And also, Winter War, where basically Finland used, I would say, asymmetric warfare against conventional Soviet strategy and used the geography and natural causes in their advantage and actually caused enormous damage, where one battalion actually - a battalion in famous Suomussalmi battle, where a battalion of Finns defeated or destroyed completely a Russian motorized division - mechanized - sorry - division. And therefore, it's not always - as Clausewitz would say, it's not the dialectic development of war. It's - you always - you know, it's wrestling. And therefore, if you look now in the current environment, it's very clear that we're facing a different kind of, you know, unfriendly Russian activities on daily basis.

That is information and psychological warfare. And basically, we see that the battle - the primary goal of this battle is about the brains of your - of our people. And we've seen it very strong, you know, developing since 2000 - I mean somewhere in 2000 - starting in 2005, slowly, slowly. And that is a battle. When we - and when we some years ago, 10 years ago that we started talking about, and everybody thought, oh, these stupid Baltics, their use of forests and things like that, but that was basically - when you look, you can devote whatever strong military you like, but if your population actually is brainwashed and doesn't have will and doesn't have willingness to defend or belong, even, to the country, then you will be - you will be defeated anyway. And
therefore, you know, looking at how we can address, also, that environment, and not only preparing for potential military conflict, but also how to survive in that kind of environment when you have, you know, a neighbor who is very pushy and aggressive and use different tools for that and who has a lot of money for those purposes, then we came up to our conclusion that we have to develop a comprehensive defense. And that starts - actually, we don't say that it's a, you know, total defense, as it was in cold years - Cold War years.

But we have to find something new. And that new is, actually, we have to deal with preparedness. And, actually, we have to - and preparedness of whole society and preparedness to society - of society means, also, that it will strengthen resilience of people because if people are - what mean - what does resilient mean? Resilience means that people and society as such is ready for the worst-case scenarios. And they are ready not only to face them, but to also survive. And that gives you psychological resilience. And you can't achieve psychological resilience if you don't talk about that. Basically, you have to - you have to talk - unfortunate and sometimes unpleasant, but you have to talk. And you have to deal with those issues. And therefore, we also, from last year, we introduced - we're starting to introduce into schools a state defense curriculum, basically where we - it's partially based on CODED's (ph) education program. But there's also the more critical thinking, information warfare, cyber things. But it's also the military block in that education. And the volunteers can - voluntarily, those people can also join a boot camp in summer. And I think that is - I aware that that might be very contentious in some environment.

But, you know, what we understood is, basically, if you not deal with those issues and you not - don't prepare special younger generation for that kind of scenarios and your younger generation to play mobile phones. And, you know, on the other side of it - and it's not only about us. It's also about, you know, generally, wherever you're heading, if there are people who are ready to fight for idea - simple ideas and they're not paid. And on our side, we have, let's say, a very materialistic society, which if you don't have - you know, if you're not - we'll not have increase of salaries next day, we don't do anything. And that - I think, that that is a big strategic problem in the future. And it's not only, you know, for Baltics to answer. But the - concluding, I think what we - why we actually are doing a comprehensive defense to strengthen resilience of society and base it to make our core society where the military would play approach part of the whole society and resilience, which is also important in peacetime, not only in the wartime.

LINDBERG: Great. Well, thank you very much. Let me turn to Steve. Steve, you've looked - you and your colleagues at RAND have looked at some level of detail...

STEPHEN FLANAGAN: Yes.

LINDBERG: ...At this. And I, for the - first of all, tell us what exactly this - what exactly we mean by resilience and resistance?

FLANAGAN: True.

LINDBERG: And how far along are these countries in pursuit of that?

FLANAGAN: Sure. Great. Well, thank you. Thank you, Tod. Thanks for the opportunity to join this panel. It's great to see a number of friends and former colleagues in the audience, as well. So we were commissioned at RAND - actually, this began back in the summer of '16 - to take a look by - two offices in the Pentagon asked us to take a deeper look at what some of the three
Baltic - what each of the three Baltic governments, really, were doing in efforts to enhance what they were calling at that time unconventional approaches to their defense, which has a very specific term - meaning in some military terminology. We weren't talking about unconventional warfare per se. They were interested in looking at what these governments were doing in terms of improving their National Guard forces and in strengthening societal resilience to deal with disaster preparation of either civil or a military kind of a crisis and looking at other ways to educate us, as State Secretary Garisons was just saying, you know, educate the population to begin to build.

And also, it measures well short of open conflict strengthening the critical infrastructure, dealing with the daily barrages, as we found in our discussions in the region, the sense that they - all three governments are facing - and countries are facing a daily war of ideas, a war of information that is inflicted upon them by various Russian media trolls, social media, fake news, all sorts of, you know, planted kind of stories, trying to just keep the - all those three, all three countries and a number of the countries, of course, in Central and Eastern Europe a bit off keel, a bit on edge and as a way to potentially prepare the ground to provide for an opportunity to take some action that might compromise their sovereignty or - and, you know, the concern that worries me most that kind of cause a crisis in the alliance through taking some kind of an action. But at the lower level of these activities, the question was, what were some of these? And what we found was, actually, it's a very good news story, particularly in the era of, you know, why don't Europeans do more to enhance their defense? That was not what we set out to answer.

But what we found was that all three Baltic states have done quite a bit over the last several years, particularly after 2014, and, obviously, for the good reasons that Tod noted. But they've stepped up their game on not only defense spending. They've all reached, in the last year and a - so the 2% level. Some had been there already. But they've also taken these steps to become - you know, to improve their investments in, as I said, in the development of these National Guard forces, in the societal preparation and education. And with serious kind of efforts at training - and we could go into that in the discussion a bit, but these - you know, these National Guard units that they have - ZS, they're called in Latvia, and in Estonia the Kaitseliit - they have serious training requirements. They have to go back. They were on call. They have serious plans for enhancing this. So we were asked to look at, well, what could the United States, what could other NATO allies do to help enhance these capabilities that were underway? And, you know, our government was - the U.S. government was very well aware of some of these capabilities. They've been working closely and particularly since 2014 with all three governments and others in the region, even before the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence was put in place - special operations forces, in particular, helping to train some of the units there on the U.S. side, but also regular exercises, so looking at the full spectrum. And so what we looked at was, you know, where each of these governments is going, and I don't mean to grade them, but I can just give you the hand - you know, the sort of the quick thumbnail sketch.

First of all, Estonia has been very committed to this notion for some time in terms of developing their territorial defense forces. And they have a very highly decentralized, by-province sort of approach to regional defense. They've also had done a lot on strengthening resilience and resistance capabilities. And that means, you know, citizen participation, and it can be both nonviolent - just sort of impeding or disrupting any kind of aggression against the country - or it can be violent. We looked at both and what the U.S. and others could do to aid that development. The Latvian government - and, certainly, I'll let the state secretary speak to more
detail on this, but they had prioritized, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008, had prioritized their - maintaining their national armed forces, their standing army, or the professional army. But since 2015, they’ve made significant investments in enhancing their National Guard forces and in also building this comprehensive defense concept, the sense that all of society is responsible for the defense of Latvia. And so I give their government great credit in moving ahead with this, and serious - all three governments taking serious national-level activities from time to time to try to actually test some of these out.

And then the Lithuanians also had been a bit more focused on - partly because of the geography, partly because they don't feel that they have this potential insider threat, if you will, of a large Russian-speaking citizenry, and we should talk a little bit about that more, too, because I don't think it's the threat that some people think it is - but that they have been focused on using their National Guard, and as a reserve force to support their national defense, particularly to help prevent the Baltics from being cut off and the much, you know, discussed Suwalki Gap between, you know, between Kaliningrad and where Lithuania comes - and Poland come between Kaliningrad and Belarus. So they've been more focused on that, but they have done quite a bit on that. And they've really been quite a leader in Lithuania, I think, in civilian education. They have several handbooks. Some of you may have seen them. They're quite impressive and artfully illustrated of what to do if little green men come, how to deal with a civil disaster, and I commend them. Some of them are actually in English, too, on the Lithuanian government websites. So these - and so we talked about these techniques, and some people would say, well, these are kind of last-ditch efforts. These are, you know, the Forest Brothers. You know, after you've already been overrun, these forces can - these forces could do something.

Well, no. What we found and what we argued - and we didn't do sophisticated war gaming on this, although we have at RAND incorporated some of these forces into some of the war gaming we've done, but we did look at sort of scenarios of what - at different kinds of scenarios, how could these capabilities, these forces, including civilian resisters up to armed, you know, resisters, their National Guard forces - what can they do? And what we concluded was they really are a full-spectrum capability, as are their special operations forces. They're not here just to deal with - yes, they can deal with - they can slow down and impede a limited incursion or a provocation that's designed to test national defenses. But they can also serve as an important effort at resisting once there were. And many of those - all three governments want to get the society ready for the notion that a loss of territory doesn't mean the loss of war. I think they have serious plans for national continuity, and they really want to be sure that if there were some effort to test their mettle and to test NATO’s solidarity that they could show that they could hold off for some time.

And, of course, given the time-distance problem, which many of you are probably familiar with in terms of a broad conventional defense of the region, that any kind of time that could be bought for NATO and U.S. reinforcements, other NATO - U.S. and other NATO reinforcements to be brought into play is time that would be well spent and enhance, we think, overall deterrence because if the so-called, you know, smash and grab, the quick, you know, various scenarios people have talked about in Estonia - there's been talk over the years of the Narva grab or the - which is where there's a heavy Russian-speaking population - you know, a quick thing, and then the Russians sue for peace and say, and if you try to reverse this, you know, we might unleash nuclear weapons and all sorts of other things, so just cease and desist your efforts to undo this,
to restore the status quo. Well, we think that all of these capabilities can be helpful. And if there were, God forbid, such a military action, which I don't personally think is likely, but if there were such a broad military action, these forces could also be the core of an act of solo resistance. They could - I mean, the bravery and the skill and cunning of the Forest Brothers would be hard to reproduce in the era of modern surveillance technology. And, in fact, the forest might be the last place you want to hide because of infrared sensors and other things.

But the - but nonetheless, these forces could be very important in providing, for example, serving as forward air controllers to NATO and allied air systems coming in to try to, you know, drop in paratroopers or take action against Russian military installations that might have been developed in these countries. So they can play a full role, and then even in the post-conflict, they can play a role in - if you had a societal disruption, even in a small part of territory, these kinds of train - having trained citizens who can help to deal on a local level with restoring order, with policing - you know, we've seen this in countries, you know, in the Middle East where you've had violent disruption, and, you know, the whole question of maintaining law and order and restoring peace and disarming potential invaders. Though - so these forces could be very - and these training skills - the training and skills that these individuals might have could be very helpful.

So then lastly I'll just say, well, what did we - what did we suggest that could be done? What could - the U.S. and NATO could do? First of all, that we argued that we ought to expand - the U.S. and NATO ought to expand support for helping these governments with training for crisis management, for civil defense, for countering what's, you know, called, very broadly, the hybrid threat. But these measures short of war, or other kinds of things. And indeed, there has been a fair amount of that going on already. I think it's been strengthened with the European Deterrence Initiative that some people in this room helped to develop, that the U.S. has undertaken in supporting other allies to strengthen their capacity to deal with these limited contingencies, to enhance regional intelligence fusing. And one of the key things we found was, of course, knowing when - you know, being able to detect some of these, you know. If there were, for example, some kind of, what some people call is the gray zone threat that - something that looked ambiguous. Maybe, you know, we use the putative the motorcycle gang from - you know, from Moscow that comes across the border and suddenly starts ripping up a town. Well, are they really just, you know, guns from motorcycle guys who got a little bit out of control, or are they perhaps the advance unit of some Russian special operations forces that wants to try to cause an incident that then will require some kind of intervention? So how do you detect that early on? Well, that means some interaction between police and first responders, dealing with the military, relations between the EU, some of these things. Border frontier is heavy EU responsibility. NATO understands - you know, understanding this. And there are some fusion cells that the European Union has that NATO have that sort of look at all these kinds of information, fusing intelligence with local information as a way to be able to deal with some of these. But we think that some of the connective tissue in those capabilities needs to be - could be strengthened.

And indeed, I think there have been some measures to do so. We looked at additional sensors and training. There's some technology fixes. There's some fascinating things that a number of - including some countries in the Baltics, themselves, that are looking out of unmanned systems, how you can, you know, multiply your ability to monitor your border and, you know, remotely control little mini tanks and all sorts of interesting technology, but even very, very basic kinds of
things - radios, small - you know, small drones; counter drone capabilities to defeat surveillance that you might be under that might be using to target, you know, some of these forces; sustaining these forces; clothing, shelter, medical goods; you know, caches of material that these forces might need if they were in an area that was under some kind of occupation. So all of these things are elements that the U.S. and others could take to help enhance these capabilities, along with the training and the continued effort to work with these National Guard and special operations and other forces that the three countries have been developing, you know, particularly over the last several years. So maybe I should stop there.

LINDBERG: Thanks, Steve. That's terrific. I'll remind everybody that the Hudson Institute was founded by Herman Kahn, who left the Rand Corporation in order to do some thinking about the unthinkable. So maybe we're in the realm a little bit of the unthinkable. But Kahn's argument was always that if you don't think about it, if you just put your head in the sand, you're actually increasing the risk to yourself. And it's only by trying to think through these kinds of problems that you can, in the case of nuclear weapons, develop a meaningful and serious deterrence strategy. Yes. Coming back, tell me about what you're doing, and sort of in concert with your neighbors on this subject. Is it a joint? Is there jointness in the Baltics to this? And also I'd like to know a little bit about how your - what kind of cooperation and assistance you're getting from the U.S. government.

GARISON: Well, I think when it comes to Baltics, the defense cooperation amongst three Baltic countries is probably the strongest one. And there's a permanent framework of cooperation starting from experts. There's the ministers and chief of defense. And most of things, what we're doing, they've been discussed, and they've been coordinated among the Baltic States. There - of course, I think there are sometimes some limits to what extent we can join forces. And I am always very skeptical about, you know, people putting too much emphasis on joint procurements because not - you know, if you look on our operational environment, the joint procurement can deliver only any added value if you basically go for joint maintenance, or things like that. But I mean, now in the operational environment, we will not take our vehicles to Lithuania - or to Estonia to have maintenance in time of war. And therefore, you know, that big saving - somewhere in the - disappears. But I think what's been positive - I think because what is important - to coordinate. If something happens during the time of war, to have - and I've always been emphasizing that those command and control is something what is very important. And I think we moved very seriously by establishing multinational division north. It's now in the process of setting up. And I hope by the beginning of next year, we will have our initial - initial operational capability reached by this - and then full operational capability, basically. Then we will have full ability to coordinate and command our forces in the region. And on the U.S. assistance, I think we've been satisfied with both what is important U.S. presence in the Baltics - we still have helicopter detachment in Latvia - and there's also training on different levels. And, of course, the Michigan National Guard, which is our state partnership program - I think we've had the most model relationship, starting with a joint deployment in Afghanistan, where we also lost together, unfortunately, soldiers. But also, we - they helped us on daily basis. And we are now frequently actually participating in the exercises as well. And there are also financial support from the Congress, which, of course, we want always more. But - and that would be very helpful to have probably a more longer-term perspective on financial assistance, where we would be able to put down on those gaps - big military gaps that we have in the region - and develop most - you know, putting our money, as well.
Therefore, I think that, you know, if you compare it from 2014, there have been - we have a little something that is uncomfortable right now, because before that, it was difficult to get the company of U.S. forces to the Baltics because it was spontaneous and U.S. helicopters didn't fly a hundred kilometers closer to the Russian border, which was also problematic for ambassadors, usually. But now it's different. And with the NATO eFP and the Canadians, this completely different level of integration, which I think we are learning many things because we can learn those things only when you start operating. And, of course, when it comes to military training, we've never had such military - intensity of military training as it happens right now. We even - you know, we're developing three additional training ranges. And it's - still, it's not enough to have everything satisfied.

LINDBERG: Yeah. And Steve raised a subject that is touchy, which is the ethnic Russian - Russian-speaking population in Latvia. I just wanted to give you a chance to address that.

GARISONS: Well, I think I would certainly want to commend you because you're probably a few - one of few who said that it's not a big problem. And I think that is exactly what this misperception that, you know, those Russian - yes, they are Russian, but they are our Russians. They've been, you know, in Latvia for 30 years. And they have even accent right now. And the funny thing - I can tell the story. When, you know, our Russian would go to Russia - and they have cheaper tickets for Russians - and he or she would be recognized as - would not be recognized as Russian because they already have accent. They would - that is...

LINDBERG: Speak a little louder.

GARISONS: But it's - but you can - I think that - and they already know, especially after "Donbass," what happens. It's the best advertising for, you know, what does it mean, what Putin can do for Russians abroad, I think. But, you know, I think - and, always, the talk about our eastern region, Latgale - even this BBC documentary about nuclear - use of nuclear weapons because of Russian incursion in Latgale. You know, the reality is that our National Guard brigade in Latgale is the strongest one. And when we measured, actually, the level of patriotism - and it's even stronger as in other parts of Latvia. Therefore, it's - I think it's - of course, we have to, you know, deal with all those integrational issues, and the National Guard and armed forces are the best tool of integration. But I would not exaggerate, you know, level of - to which, you know, Russia can manipulate these operations.

LINDBERG: Thanks. Steve, I want to first - I don't want to cut you off.

FLANAGAN: Oh, I understand. Sure.

LINDBERG: I just want to get to the questions. But I wanted to ask specifically, what's going on here? I have some other broader lessons for NATO members, and what might those be?

FLANAGAN: Yeah, no. There's - I was just going to add just to what State Secretary Garisons said that - and there's other data - there's survey data both in Latvia that we found. And, actually, there's annual surveys in Estonia that has been looking at this attitude of the Russian-speaking population there and finding exactly what the state secretary was saying - that, you know, first of all, they've seen the "Donbass" movie. There's no - there's no nostalgia for what, you know, what a new Novorossiya in Latvia or Estonia could be. But you know, there are certainly social grievances. And there are things that the Russians might try to play to to cause a crisis or to cause some social harm. So I think that those are, you know, legitimate concerns.
But you know, I think all three governments - and I've been following the Baltics since the early '90s. They've made a lot of progress in their social integration with their Russian-speaking communities, which are very diverse - I mean, from, you know - there are all sorts of people of countries of origin today, not just from Russia. But there is actually a growing interest in this. Some of you probably had seen - in the recent NATO exercise in Norway this fall called Trident Juncture, there was a discussion about - well, this was a stress test of Norway's total defense concept, which is very similar to the Latvian comprehensive defense approach. And the Finns - the Swedes recently - also, the Swedes had a very robust total defense concept, as well, all through the Cold War. It's hard to remember.

But, you know, in the mid-'50s, the Swedes had the seventh-largest air force in the world. The Swedes are doing quite a bit to enhance their territorial defense, their societal resilience. The Finns, of course, we alluded - we started with the Winter War. The Finns have been in that game for a long time and, indeed, were mentoring the Estonians and others in the region, when they regained their independence, about establishing some of these capabilities. So there is a growing interest. And there are - again, within NATO, this issue of societal resilience, national preparations for initial defense is seen as a national responsibility. But there have been encouragements made at recent NATO meetings to exchange best practices. And we have, as well, some of these centers of excellence that NATO has established for those. And there's one with the EU in Helsinki on counter hybrid. You have the strategic communications center of excellence in Riga. The - there's one in Lithuania, too. I forget - well - but in any event, they're all trying to work together - and the cyber one in Estonia - center of excellence. They're all trying to share best practices and see how the governments can work together more effectively and knit together these capabilities. Again, you know, not that they necessarily would be employed all in tandem or in a comprehensive, multi-state way at a given point in time, but nonetheless, if there were a broader conflict - I mean, if there were a full-up regional conflict in northeastern Europe, it would be important to have this connective tissue to have this capacity to work together and to communicate and to be able to seek outside help.

**LINDBERG:** Thanks very much. We've got about 20 minutes for questions. And so I would like to open the floor. Yes?

**ASTA BINONES:** OK. Hello. Hi.

**LINDBERG:** Wait. Even though it's a small room, I'm going to ask you wait for a microphone...

**BINONES:** OK.

**LINDBERG:** ...So we get the - we're recording. And this session is on the record.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** OK. That's fine. (Laughter) Twenty-five years ago, 30 years ago, I was one of their lobbyists here in town. (Laughter) I met Steve in those days. So my question has to do with how initial plans for the NATO MAP membership were derailed by well-meaning people in the Bush administration, I suppose, who, Mr. Lindberg, you made reference to that people were, you know, concerned to give Putin a chance. And so they didn't want Lithuania, for instance, having too large a military. The original plan that they submitted to NATO was that they'd try to get a 20,000-man army but a 200,000-man reserve - active reserve built up over the years. And of course, the Bush administration, their hair went on fire, saying don't do this (laughter), which played into the hands of politicians in the country that wanted to stay friendly
with Moscow. So the game was played. All the plans were rolled back. Defense spending hit below 1%.

Luckily, people have woken up since 2014. And I see all of these efforts as sort of, you know, they're trying to make do with what they wasted for 15 years - right? - and that the numbers are so small. So my question is, are the Lithuanians thinking about going - dusting off their original plan, slowly increasing their military - I saw your numbers were 19,000 people in the military forces - and having an active reserve that builds every year so that they can, in fact, create a territorial defense? Because the argument 25 years ago was - the Russians might want to re-invade, but if you raise the cost - if they know there's going to be an increased cost for invasion, they'll think twice.

LINDBERG: Thank you.

GARISONS: Well, I probably can start. I don't know the historical background of who promised whom. But I think that generally, there was this feeling of - which was false that there are no threats and we're facing only asymmetric (ph) problems in Afghanistan and Iraq. And that was not only probably U.S. administration but poor NATO planning because, at one point, we had advice from NATO planners, which nothing to do with the Bush administration. But we had advice, actually, that the National Guard and such (ph) is unneeded and we have to actually abolish it. Happily, we didn't follow NATO advice at that time, and we still have National Guard, which is very useful now for territorial defense. But I think - what we - you know, I think we have to get over those historical grievances. And really, we can put - you know, we can say on many occasions - we told you so, but we don't do that. But on - what all three Baltics are doing, probably in different way, we understands that, yes, we need to actually increase our military force. Lithuania and Estonia had ordered for years conscription.

Lithuania installed conscription. We keep a professional army, but we put enormous emphasis on National Guard. We recruit National Guard in the school education program, where we still believe we'll add - also - number of trained people. And we have renewed all reservist training. We have a big exercise last year. We had an all-national exercise, which actually had 10,000 people for one week called in, which I think for even bigger countries is a bigger number. Therefore, yes, we do. But I think that I would be very cautious to simply put labels, you know, that you have to increase in - you have to have conscription. And I think the - you have to look, what is the goal? The goal is to have more military trained people. How you achieve it is probably left to each of the country. And - because if you would install conscription right now, we would probably have to abolish national guard because we would not be able to finance this. And then you have volunteers who want to do and serve. And then you would - and then you push conscription. And then we decided that we will not do. Reinstall - returning to conscription, as such, will not do anything, you know? But only...

FLANAGAN: Yeah. Asta, were you referring to the George W. Bush administration on delay of the MAP? Yeah?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, yes.

FLANAGAN: Right, no. Because I mean - the - I don't that - I don't recall that as a notion that the MAP was delayed. You know, the sequence was - in the early - in the mid-'90s, the United States was very active in having - going around and having each three - all three countries have a review of their national defense strategy and their development of their armed forces. And that
was led by a wonderful major general by the name of Buzz Kievenaar - General Kievenaar, who - and they all had their Kievenaar plans, which was not a - you know, wasn't meant to be a blueprint but just, you know, some suggestions that were advanced. And that was all supported by the U.S. government at the time. So that was spanning the end of probably Bush 41 and into Clinton, all through Clinton. Then, of course, you know, the Clinton administration, '99, signed the charter of partnership with the Baltics, saying they welcome and expect the Baltics would come into NATO at some point. And then, of course, that was realized in 2004.

So I don't think that there was any delay. Garisons, you know, pointed out the fact that, of course, many countries in Europe were - first of all, the U.S. was encouraging the, you know - asking repeatedly, what have you done for us lately in the war on terrorism? So get your forces ready to go. And it wasn't just the Balts; it was the Danes, others that did away with important parts of their conventional defense capabilities in order to support expeditionary counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. So that was a big shift. And NATO was beginning to make the turn even as I had the good fortune to be involved with Secretary Albright and the group of experts in 2009, '10 who were helping to develop the new NATO strategic - the current NATO strategic concept. And that was in 2009, '10, when everybody thought - well, you know, the risk of war in Europe is still very low. But there was a marker laid down. And that was, of course, because of Georgia that it was not - we could not rule out what many people thought was, you know, never - it would not happen, at least some time, the use of force in Europe - in European territory itself. And so that was - you know, there was a marker laid down there. 

So I think there was a gradual beginning of turning the ship. But you know, like any big organization, you know, it takes time for NATO and for individual allies and, of course, defense plans that take 10 or 15 years to be fully realized. You know? So that was the situation. But yeah, no, I believe - and then to the direct comment - question you had on Lithuanians, I do believe - as I understand, their current national planning is they do see using their national guard force as a reserve - as an operational reserve, not just as a territory - as both a territorial defense but as an operational reserve and as an - in a capacity to support their front-line forces to keep lines of communication open and to defend the various regions of the country. That, I think, is probably enough said on that it.

LINDBERG: Yes, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good afternoon. Can you hear me? I'm afraid of microphones. I don't know how to use them. But...

LINDBERG: You're doing well so far.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: ...Thank you very much for the lecture. I would like, if I may, to go back and ask a very precise question in regards to the ethnically Russian and Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic States as a potential threat from Russia. I keep thinking of the Ukrainian example back in 2014 as I recall that was precisely - that was precisely the justification that the Kremlin used in order to justify the incursion. And I wonder how, in your view, the situation in the Baltic States differs from that in Ukraine and, therefore, why this scenario might not be played again. Thank you.

LINDBERG: Well, thanks. Could you expand a little bit about - on that?
GARISONS: Well, I think it's a completely different situation if you compare situation by 2014 in Ukraine where actually there was no, I would say, governmental policy of integration, both social and, you know, as a political integration of the nation. We put, since the beginning of regaining of independence, enormous efforts in integrating all society. And we see those results that also - if you want to poll now our citizens - poll society, 99% of the population speaks Latvian compared to 55% to 60% in '90 when we regained independence. And we - therefore, we regarded the language as the most important tool of integration. This is advancing. Another important difference is that Ukraine in 2014, unfortunately, was lacking any executive authority because there were no police who would take care because - and the Russians that used this kind of - because there was a vacuum of power and they used the - this kind of situation, actually, to advance. And I think, also, we - what we learn from your situations borns (ph) in Crimea and then Donbas that we will not, certainly, wait until, you know, everything will develop, and then it will be too late.

If you need to react, you need to react at the beginning, not after 10 - two weeks or whatever it takes. And I understood that that is also the problem because I believe that all ambassadors and all presidents will call and they'll say, keep calm and don't do anything. Don't escalate. And that is how Russians misuses our perception of strategy as they strategies escalate as much as possible at the beginning, and then they grab, and then they start escalation. And our strategy always is Western strategies. We consider that that is all linear and that will develop, you know, these diplomatic negotiations and therefore, we always, if we pursue such kind of different strategy, we always will lose. But we certainly not in a situation like Ukraine in 2014. We are capable of taking care of our country and our citizens. That's - and can fully responsible for that.

LINDBERG: Steve?

FLANAGAN: No, I agree with that.

LINDBERG: OK. Please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was in Latvia in - 18 months ago in Riga and also, I was in Lithuania. And my question in the wonderful presentation - a couple of things that were missing, and I don't know if you could talk about them. The first is intelligence. Obviously, the three Baltic States are very small. Russia is huge. So I'm thinking about the Israel example - small versus large - how important intelligence is to them, what the enemy or prospective enemy is thinking or doing or planning and, secondly, air capability. So, you know, if the Baltic States are threatened, should they have an offensive capability so the Russians feel some stress on their own borders within maybe 500 kilometers of those borders to keep them off balance that there might be a preemptive strike? Thank you.

GARISONS: Well, on intelligence, I won't take a - that is not a subject that normal discussed very publicly, but what I can say is that we have sufficient intelligence and - including U.S. agencies are feed (ph) by our intelligence. Therefore - and that is one of - if, you know - one of our priority, of course, is early warning and situation awareness because we quite well understand that once - what we don't want to be in a situation where we are surprised because - and therefore, what we are doing, we trying to have as much as possible information from our sensors that we are developing and also from our analysis what is going on in Russia. And, of course, when it's - something indicates problems, then we have to start be prepared with actually - because we believe that there is something that Russia can be - can have only
strategic advantage if it - if Russia surprises us. That is - and we don't want to be in that kind of situation.

LINDBERG: Steve, the second part of that question was in the sort of a classic of the security dilemma of anarchy, which is, what is the point at which your self-defense looks like an aggressive move against a neighbor?

FLANAGAN: Yes, right. Well, I think none of the things that the Baltics are doing nor even, you know, what NATO has done in terms of this enhanced forward presence of these three - well four - three battalions in the Baltics, one in Poland - are hardly an invasion force, and the Russians certainly know that. I think that's - or even the precursor for an invasion force, they'd need a lot more support. There are definitely some things that the three Baltic countries and Poland, that region could do. Some of my colleagues have looked at this in some of the war-gaming they've done. They could certainly use some enhanced short-range air defense systems. Control of the airspace would, in fact, be very critical to the defense of the Baltic and all of northeastern Europe, really. But, you know - and there's certainly - NATO has a significant air - capability in offensive air. Right now, the only regular operations in the Baltics are, of course, the so-called air police, which is really - which is that. It's not even - it's not designed to be countering an offensive. It's meant to secure and maintain the - it's been going on for it - what is it? - 25 years now or 20.

GARISONS: Since...

FLANAGAN: Is it...

GARISONS: ...2004.

FLANAGAN: Four, yeah? Oh, so 20, yeah? So yeah, almost 25 years. So I mean, anyway, the - so 15 years anyway. Yeah, so that the - that is a rotating thing where NATO air forces contribute to small groups. They operate from fields in Lithuania and in Estonia now, I believe. I don't think they're operating regularly in Latvia, but they operate over Latvian airspace, certainly, to keep surveillance and defense. So they're part of the early warning system, but they're not there primarily to prepare for offensive action if need be or countering an air attack. But NATO certainly has, you know, robust capabilities, you know, deployed and U.S. air forces in Germany and England and elsewhere in the region and, of course, other NATO air forces that are pretty sizable, you know, various countries that are buying F-35s in sizable numbers. So there's lots of NATO air capability. And I think it's important to - you know, there's been a lot of talk about the notion that, well, Russia has this tremendous air - it's called, in militaries, you know, (unintelligible) is the A2 area denial, air defense capability.

But, you know, I've heard a lot of senior military commanders in the NATO side say we ought not to talk about this as denial. It's contested. There's no doubt about it that, you know, if there were a major war in Europe, it would be very, very dangerous, and it would be a dangerous operating environment. But it's not Iron Dome. It's not as if the Russians don't have some vulnerabilities, and they know it. And so the idea that, you know, the differences in capabilities, that could be part of a deterrent. And again, not on the idea that - the U.S. and NATO certainly is made clear they don't want to use these. But if push comes to shove, if there is aggression, we have fairly robust capability to defend the territory and the airspace of all the member states.

LINDBERG: Thanks. Let me just - yeah?
AUDIENCE MEMBER: The White House stripped money out of the European Deterrence Initiative. Have you looked at any of the numbers and have the Senate committees - have the approps (ph) committees put money back?

GARISONS: I'm not aware of it.

LINDBERG: I think we've hit the level of granularity that we're not...

FLANAGAN: Well, no - I've seen the list. No, I mean, actually, I've - no, I have seen the list, and I was in another discussion on Monday about some of it. I mean, some of the projects are quite sizable. They were initiatives under the so-called European Deterrence Initiative. It's all military construction funds. I think $750 million, I think, is the total. A lot of projects but some pretty sizable, including ammunition storage facilities in Poland that would be part of supporting the U.S. forces there, DOD schools, the rebuilding of the DOD school in Spangdahlem, which is one of the largest U.S. air bases in Germany. So again, as I understand, the administration is claiming these are not permanent withdrawal of the funding, but that deferral, it would - they were listed. The sheet I saw said deferrals. But, you know, these things can be difficult, and there are some people in the room that probably could speak to this better than I. But anyway, I won't put them on the spot. But the - this is, you know, probably not what - I'm sure it was not welcome in a number of the countries in the region.

LINDBERG: I will never again refer to the possibility of having exhausted the level of granularity which Steve Flannigan can speak to a subject.

FLANAGAN: That's right.

LINDBERG: Yeah. I got to say - one more thing to mention, I think, about the Winter War, is that Finland was alone, and there were some conversations about - with the French, with the U.K., with others. But it was really - there was - much of that diplomacy was cynical in the sense that there was no real intention actually ever to deliver any kind of assistance. The Baltics are not alone, and what we're talking about is something that I think is an enhancement of the Article 5 commitment on the part of NATO. And that's the context in which we should also think about this. And so with that, let me thank State Secretary Garisons, Dr. Flanagan. Always a pleasure to see you. And let me thank you, and please join in a hand for the crowd.

FLANAGAN: Thank you. Thanks.

(APPLAUSE)

FLANAGAN: Thank you.

LINDBERG: Thanks. That's good.

GARISONS: Thank you.

LINDBERG: Yeah.

FLANAGAN: Thanks.