

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

“Baltic Security after the Warsaw NATO Summit”

Commission Staff Present:

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Participants:

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Inc.**

**The Briefing Was Held From 2:00 p.m. To 3:37 p.m. in Room 340, Cannon
House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Alex Tiersky and Scott Rauland,
Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

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TIERSKY: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of Helsinki Commission Chairman Chris Smith and Co-Chairman Senator Roger Wicker, I'd like to welcome you to our briefing on Baltic security after the Warsaw NATO summit. My name is Alex Tiersky. I'm the political-military affairs advisor for the Helsinki Commission. To your far right is Scott Rauland, who is our senior State Department representative with the Commission. We will be sharing moderating duties for today's event.

I would like to thank you all for coming. I see a number of embassy staff here, who I'm pleased to see, as well as some esteemed colleagues from think tanks, in addition to our usual audience from the Hill. It's lovely to see everybody.

We're very fortunate to have a great panel for you today on an issue that is of great importance to the Helsinki Commission. The Commission is well known, of course, to those of you who have been following its work for decades since it was signed into law in June of 1976. It is, of course, very well known for its work on human rights. I think because of the changing dynamics in European security, you're going to see the Commission increase its activity on the pol-mil security or "first" dimension set of issues as well. This briefing is part of that increased attention to security issues. And it follows on a briefing that we provided in the run-up to the Warsaw Summit on what the expectations might be for the decisions that the allies took in Warsaw.

Let me just point out that Baltic security fits under the Commission's mandate of providing oversight for the 1975 Helsinki Final Act's provisions. There is something called The Decalogue (or 10 principles) guiding relations between participating states that were enshrined at that time by consensus. These include some very topical commitments ranging from refraining from the threat or use of force, inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, I could go on. A number of these principles clearly have been infringed and are under attack in European security in recent times.

Let me quickly turn to introducing our speakers who are going to give us a good overview and a basis on which to have a discussion. We're very much looking forward to the participation of our audience in a question-and-answer session.

We will start with Karl Altau, who is well known to anyone in Washington who follows the Baltic States. He's the managing director of the Joint Baltic American National Committee, or JBANC, since 1997. In this capacity he's helped conduct extensive advocacy on behalf of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian communities in the United States. And he played a key role in the NATO accession of the three Baltic countries.

We will then hear from Michael Johnson, who is a senior defense research analyst at the RAND Corporation. Mike is a very well respected former U.S. Army strategic plans and policy officer, also a West Point grad. But most importantly for our purposes, he is the coauthor of an extremely impactful study of Baltic state vulnerabilities based on the extensive use of wargaming that RAND conducted. The study, which I've been aware of for quite some time, certainly shaped thinking in the run-up to the decisions made at the NATO summit. We're thrilled to be

able to get our version of a briefing on that war-game effort, that study and what RAND is thinking about these issues since the Warsaw decisions.

Finally, to my immediate left, to your right, we'll hear from Magnus Nordenman, an old friend of mine from the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center on International Security. Magnus is also the director of the Transatlantic Security Initiative and a key person, the key person, in Washington on, among a host of other issues, Nordic Baltic defense.

So we have, as I say, three excellent experts to provide us an overview. We'll hear from the presentations and then my colleague, Scott, will moderate a question-and-answer session. So let us start with Karl, please.

ALTAU: So hello. Good afternoon. As you've heard, I'm Karl Altau with the Joint Baltic American National Committee. We go by the acronym, usually, JBANC, which I will do. We represent the primary Baltic American national organizations, the American Latvian – Association, the Estonian American National Council and the Lithuanian American Council. We were founded in 1961 and we're celebrating our 55th anniversary this year.

Also, we represent 1 million Baltic Americans. They're mostly Lithuanians living in Chicago, believe it or not. But we've worked closely with Congress, the administration and its agencies in that half-a-century to enhance United States policy towards Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

And I'd like to thank the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Helsinki Commission, and Alex and Scott for putting together this event, this very important and timely briefing focusing on security and the Baltic countries. We've worked very closely with the Commission on supporting the passage of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act and the Magnitsky legislation. We are also supporting our Ukrainian friends in their time of need.

Today, however, we need to get back to our Baltic roots and talk about the new reality or the new realities of deterring Russian aggression and dealing with the increasing provocations of Moscow. There haven't really been any Baltic-focused public briefings or hearings for a long time, mainly because the region has been so successful and has been a positive model. Today's briefing also coincides with a coordinated visit of Baltic parliamentarians to Washington and Congress.

I'd like to acknowledge my Baltic-American colleagues who are here today, along with folks from the embassies, along also with board members of the Baltic American Freedom Foundation, an organization doing great work in providing practical work experience in the United States for young professionals from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The Baltics have been doing their job, particularly as NATO allies, since their admission to NATO in 2004. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been eager and active partners in NATO and as partners of the United States. We see these positive relationships mirrored here in the United States daily.

In the past, we've fought for decades to help raise awareness about the Baltic countries and their plight behind the Iron Curtain and to help see the countries of our heritage restore their independence. It can't be repeated enough, one of the key elements for the duration of that time was the Welles Declaration, the U.S. policy to not recognize the Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries. It was a principled and morally correct policy that stood for 50 years.

The Baltic-American communities worked very hard to support the aspirations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to become NATO members. One of the high points was collecting over 25,000 signatures. This was back in the old days when we didn't have computers or cell phones. But we collected those by hand, over 25,000 signatures from all 50 states, plus D.C., plus Puerto Rico, in a year-long campaign to ask the president to help ensure that the Baltics were invited to join NATO at the 2002 Prague NATO summit. Baltic-American representatives across the country came to the White House on September the 10th, 2001, the day before 9/11, to deliver these petitions.

Seeing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania join the Alliance was something we all took great pride in. We are grateful that they have punched above their weight and that they remain strong adherents of the Alliance principles. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are active and capable contributors to our joint defense and defenders of Western standards and democracy.

We've all heard the phrase that freedom is not free. It is something to constantly improve upon with many tweaks along the way. We don't want to see these freedoms, Western values and the framework of the relationship with NATO jeopardized. However, with Russia's revanchist aggression, we are now experiencing the most difficult challenges we have faced in the 25 years of restored independence.

There have been difficult times before with Russia's offensive actions, from energy cutoffs in Lithuania, the 2007 cyberattacks against Estonia, continuing disinformation campaigns targeting Latvia. Russia's war against Georgia in 2008 was more than an omen. The Kremlin's calculations, it appeared, led down a rocky road, which eventually manifested itself again with the events in Ukraine. Soon there will be three years of war there with daily bloodshed and no end in sight.

Crimea is occupied and info wars have ramped up to new heights. Have we done everything to counter this aggression? Has NATO met the challenges? Well, we saw some issues incrementally addressed at previous summits in Chicago in 2012 and Wales in 2014. The response from this summer's Warsaw summit was certainly a more serious adjustment of priorities. There, NATO stated it was fully prepared to defend the Alliance and pledged an increase in military spending in response to Russia's unpredictable and aggressive behavior in the region. I'm sure my co-panelists will give a closer look at the details of all this and how all these moves fit.

So this is a challenge for us, what can we do? Three things. First, we must ensure that U.S. defense funding needs are met. Second is to ensure the transition to a Trump administration that fully understands and supports these goals. Third is to continue to recognize Russia's threats as a whole and to support U.S. efforts to address these threats.

So the first point. Our organization has been urging swift passage of the \$3.4 billion European Reassurance Initiative in the defense bill and we're happy to see additional funding being provided for overseas contingencies. ERI has been a response to increasing Russian aggression and supports increased U.S. investment in five areas: presence, training and exercises, infrastructure, repositioned equipment, and building partner capacity.

We aren't excited about the prospect of a continuing resolution lasting well into spring. We prefer longer-term planning and commitment, but we do see ample evidence that there is overwhelming support in Congress for addressing Russia's rising militarism. It is imperative to send a message that the United States means business and that we will continue to stand against tyranny.

While our NATO allies, Britain, Canada and Germany, are establishing high-readiness combat battalions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, respectively, it is vital to continue showing the U.S. flag in the Baltic countries as well with ongoing increased forward presence, regular rotational deployments, operations, exercises and more. We can't forget the key National Guard relationships. We can't forget our relationships with the Nordic countries, and other relationships.

As we reach out to the new Trump administration, this is point two, we are reminded about statements made, which questioned the purpose and existence of NATO and the commitment of its members. JBANC stands firm in its belief that NATO and America's commitments to its NATO allies are fundamental to ensuring the U.S. and European security and urges the next administration to continue to support all NATO allies, including the Baltic countries, and reaffirm commitment to the treaty's Article Five.

The Baltics are undeniably strong in their commitments to NATO and fully understand what is at stake. Although challenged in fully rebuilding their militaries over the past 25 years, they have worked to fulfill their NATO obligations. Estonia spends over 2 percent of GDP on pledged offensive expenditures. And while currently just under 2 percent, Latvia and Lithuania have been increasing their military budgets more rapidly than any other NATO members over the past few years and will be reaching that threshold soon. There has been rock-solid commitment and engagement by the Baltic countries in supporting NATO and U.S.-led actions.

The Alliance faces increasing unconventional threats. It is imperative for allies to share their collective knowledge in key security areas, whether cyber, strategic communications or the energy security sphere. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania make substantial contributions in all of these areas. The United States cannot allow any weakening of resolve or commitment to our allies. The ironclad, long-lasting friendship of the United States in NATO is critically important. Baltic Americans particularly understand the importance of effective U.S. leadership in supporting these alliances.

And I'll add that, together with our partners in the Central and East European Coalition, we represent not just three, but 13 communities in the U.S. and more than 20 million Central and Eastern European Americans. Together, we all strongly back the United States' continued,

unconditional commitment to upholding the NATO treaty, as well as U.S. support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all Central and Eastern European nations. The organization stands firm in its belief that America's close cooperation with all NATO allies and partners is fundamental to ensuring U.S. and European security.

We are reminded of the words of then NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Philip Breedlove who stated at a hearing of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee in February this year that Russia has chosen to be an adversary and imposes a long-term existential threat to the United States and to our European allies and partners. You can't get much clearer than that.

Earlier this year, the CEEC sponsored a policy forum on NATO's stance on Russia on Capitol Hill. The major theme of the discussion characterized Russia's increasing aggression since 2008, not only in terms of fanning regional conflicts, but a fundamental assault on the post-World War II international order.

And then the third point, the bigger picture. Russia's ongoing wars are of the greatest concern. I personally feel that the Putin and Assad regimes should be investigated for war crimes in their bombing campaigns in Syria. However, Moscow's crimes against Ukraine are also horrible and must not be ignored. Having Russian missiles deployed to Kaliningrad within striking distance of capitals in Poland, Germany, the Baltics and Belarus is very worrisome. Russia's actions have the potential to escalate into a wider European conflict. Our efforts to deter such threats now are critical. In addition, Russia's unrelenting disinformation campaign and other hybrid threats of destabilization put all of our allies at great peril.

While the legislation to support military funding is finalized or being finalized, we must also remember to support efforts to stymie Russian disinformation, to support sanctions against the Putin regime, and also against individuals through the Global Magnitsky Act, and to support Ukraine, particularly now via H.R. 5094, the Stability and Democracy, or STAND, for Ukraine Act. This helps push for sanctions against Russia and supports Ukraine's territorial integrity, particularly the nonrecognition of Crimea's annexation.

So we look forward to working with all of you in the coming year to ensure the continued security, stability and well-being of the Baltic countries as NATO allies and partners. And thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

TIERSKY: Thanks very much, Karl.

We'll now move to Mike Johnson.

JOHNSON: All right. Good afternoon. Thank you very much for inviting me here today.

The United States and the NATO alliance have adopted a dual-track strategy consisting of dialogue and defense with respect to Russia. But what exactly does that mean?

For NATO to decide the next steps to take after the Warsaw summit, I think it's important that we understand the strategic implications of the operational vulnerability that still exists. NATO should try to cooperate with Russia to advance mutual interests where possible and avoid a zero-sum mindset of a new Cold War. Yet because the consequences of miscalculation, war and escalation would be enormous, NATO cannot afford a failure of deterrence. Therefore, NATO should not rest its collective security entirely on an assumption about Putin's intentions, hopes for more constructive cooperation or uncertain operational concepts.

To inform U.S. and NATO decisions about defense strategy, deterrence and posture, RAND has conducted 24 wargames with representatives from all military services, U.S. commands in Europe and our European allies. Our aim was to provide a realistic assessment of NATO's military capabilities as well as the risks that policymakers have accepted with NATO's current posture and plans.

To set the strategic context quickly, Russia has a long history of providing for its own security by occupying or dictating terms to its neighbors. Russia has invaded Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania multiple times and occupied these Baltic States for half of the last century. In 2008, Putin sent Russian forces to Georgia to support the separatists, but he was also signaling all of Russia's neighbors that opposition to Moscow's interests could be punished by force. Putin's stated objective is to roll back NATO's influence from Russia's borders.

Then Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea. This was the first time military force was used to redraw the borders of a European state since World War II. This act of aggression sent a shockwave through Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Will the Baltics be next? It seems unlikely, but in Crimea's wake the probability should no longer be considered zero. We should, therefore, evaluate Russia's military capabilities and the consequences of any potential conflict.

Unlike Ukraine, the Baltic States are NATO allies who sent their forces to fight with us in Afghanistan after 9/11. Consequently, President Obama assured them, with NATO you will never lose your independence again. Yet Mr. Putin responded to the president with a harsh assessment, quote, "If I wanted, Russian troops could not only be in Kyiv in two days, but also in Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn, too." So who is right?

We had competing predictions within RAND, so we designed a wargame to answer this question. Given NATO's current posture, can Russia seize the Baltic States in a rapid fait accompli, in a short-warning attack? Unlike debates about intentions, that's a testable hypothesis. Sixty hours or less, that's the longest it took any Russian player in the wargames to defeat NATO forces and surround the Baltic capitals. This was our consistent finding across 24 games in which the players were free to develop their own innovative concepts of air, land, sea, special and cyber operations. And should Russia seize the Baltic States, there are no good military options to reverse aggression by a great power with nuclear weapons.

But it is possible to prevent a quick win at relatively modest cost if NATO has the political will. Here's how we arrived at this bottom line. Geography clearly favors Russia.

Taking a look at Latvia, for example, it's only 135 miles from Pskov to Riga. There is simply not enough time and space for airpower to significantly delay or degrade Russian forces before they reach their objectives.

The American supply chain is much longer and slower. The United States has only nine armor brigades left in the regular Army, fewer than the number of aircraft carriers, and all of them are permanently based in the United States. Russia's long-range surface-to-air missiles, submarines, and anti-ship missiles would make it too dangerous to deploy forces directly to the Baltics. This means U.S. forces would have to alert, mobilize, train, move by rail from fort to port, embark, move 5,000 miles by sea and disembark in channel ports, like Bremerhaven. This takes time.

The second problem would be getting from Germany to the battlefield. The transport trucks, rail cars, ramps, bridges and other infrastructure necessary to move main battle tanks are insufficient, especially in Eastern Europe.

The third problem is the thousand miles from the logistics hubs for fuel, ammunition, spare parts and medical services. These are still located in Germany, designed to sustain combat only 100 miles away during a Cold War. This means NATO forces would quickly run out of supplies.

So given these relative distances and challenges, what forces can Russia and NATO quickly bring into battle? Even with the conflict in Ukraine and a 33 percent poor readiness rate, Russia has proven it can still generate 26-battalion tactical groups in their Western Military District on three to seven days' warning. Twenty-six battalions is not a very large force, as one commander said, it's not that the Russians are 10 feet tall again, they're only five-foot-five, but very fast. The problem is NATO is much smaller and slower by comparison.

We assumed a best-case deployment of NATO's 2015 posture in the original wargame. On top of the three brigades that the Baltic States themselves would contribute, we assumed two U.S. airborne infantry brigades, one Stryker brigade and two NATO or European airborne brigades could deploy in time. Still, these light forces are outclassed. Russia would have 480 tanks on short warning, while NATO would have none that could deploy in time. The 1st Armored Brigade from the United States would need 30 to 45 days to arrive in Europe and be ready to fight.

The situation with artillery would be even worse. NATO artillery would be significantly outnumbered, outranged and outgunned by Russia. These arrows give you a sense of the volume of fire that would fall on our light infantry because NATO lacks an effective response. The effect would be devastating. Again, it's not that U.S. and other European armored forces are not capable. It's just that they're not ready and they're not in the right place to respond rapidly. There is no U.S. Army in Europe anymore that can quickly ride to the rescue. There is no headquarters above brigade capable of planning and conducting operations, no aviation, fire or engineer brigades to support combat, no logistics capability to sustain that.

Assuming Russia was our partner, we have either cut or brought back all of our armored forces to the United States. In fact, there are more police officers in New York City than there are American soldiers stationed in Europe today.

What about airpower? We assumed maximum use of NATO airpower in the wargame. This included a Naval carrier battle group and access to airbases in Sweden, which avoid the air defenses in Kaliningrad. While Russia cannot equal our new fifth-generation aircraft, Russia can still generate 24 squadrons of fighters and eight squadrons of attack helicopters on short warning, or about one-third of their total air force. This is a qualitatively and quantitatively much different problem than the U.S. has faced in recent conflicts with regional powers, like Iraq, that have no capable air force and could launch only a few Scud missiles.

But the even bigger threat to all of NATO's fourth-generation aircraft is the increasing range and accuracy of Russia's air defense network that exceeds NATO countermeasures. As one planner at U.S. Air Force Europe said, we have fifth-generation fighters, but we are still using missiles designed in the 1970s to suppress enemy air defenses; meanwhile, Russia has steadily modernized their systems to exceed our range. Thus, there would be a limited supply of strike sorties for interdiction and close-air support versus Russian ground forces in the opening weeks of any conflict.

Due to the lack of sufficient aircover, U.S. Army forces would also suffer significant losses from enemy air attacks for the first time since the early days of World War II. Thus, Russia can achieve an overwhelming advantage in a short-warning attack, overrun the Baltic defense forces and rapidly exploit (the situation) to surround the capitals. NATO light infantry in the Baltics would quickly become hostages, prisoners or casualties. Then Russia would have six months to prepare a deliberate defense, manipulate the risk of escalation to deter a counteroffensive, freeze the conflict and shift NATO's response to economic sanctions. Would Putin ever take this risk in the Baltics? Again, it appears unlikely. But historically, states have begun wars they believed would be quick.

NATO's current strategy of assured response relies on a tripwire that would launch an automatic counteroffensive by the entire alliance to liberate the Baltics. This is essentially applying the Desert Storm model of reversing aggression by regional powers, like Iraq, to a great power with a large nuclear arsenal, like Russia. Yet many people do not fully appreciate the risks of reversing Russian aggression if deterrence fails. In fact, the American president and NATO leaders would be left with a terrible choice of really bad options.

First, the consequences of war would be felt most immediately by the free people of the Baltic States if they choose to defend their freedom. Because their capitals would quickly come within range of Russian artillery, the Russians could do to Riga what they did to Grozny during the Chechen War. Current airstrikes against humanitarian convoys and civilians in Aleppo suggest the Russians would not be reluctant to destroy the Baltic capitals if they resist.

Second, NATO could take at least six months to deploy armored forces and supplies from the United States and other NATO countries and threaten to launch a counteroffensive if Russia

does not withdraw. But will policymakers really be willing to follow through with this threat? It's not that simple.

First, attacking a prepared defense in-depth against the overwhelming Russian advantage in air defense and long-range fires would be bloody. The U.S. should expect to suffer more casualties in the first week of a war with Russia than during the last 15 years of war in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. And that's if the conflict remains conventional.

Moscow will most likely threaten to use nuclear weapons if NATO launches a ground offensive, initiating the uncertain process of vertical escalation. Russia has already rattled the nuclear saber in Crimea and again in Syria, which has effectively curtailed American military options to support the opposition in Aleppo. Would NATO policymakers really be willing to risk Washington, London, Berlin and Paris? We haven't had to face hard questions like that for 25 years.

Instead of launching World War III to recover sunk costs, policymakers might weigh the future benefits of liberating the Baltics against the enormous costs if the conflict spirals out of control. Thus, Putin may have doubts about NATO's political will to follow through, especially when NATO apparently lacks the will to prepare a credible defense in the first place.

The third option is even less credible. NATO could return to the early Cold War strategy of massive retaliation and threaten a nuclear strike to prevent defeat. No one finds this option credible because of the obvious global catastrophic consequences that would ensue. Nuclear weapons have more utility as a deterrent nested within a strategy of flexible response by local conventional forces than as a threat to coerce Russia to withdraw its forces.

If these risks proved too much for policymakers to accept, the last option would be to tacitly concede Russian control of the Baltic States and accept a new Iron Curtain in Europe. NATO would impose severe economic sanctions to be sure and try to rejuvenate the defeated alliance to defend Poland. But this strategic defeat can hardly be described as a good outcome, especially when it could be deterred at a relatively modest cost.

To avoid these outcomes, NATO needs to put more time on the clock by preventing a Russian quick win followed by brinkmanship. Putin should see the realistic prospect of a much longer war with NATO that makes any potential gains not worth the costs of aggression. So how do we arrive at our recommended forces?

We conducted a second iteration of the wargame with the players to determine the changes in NATO's defense posture necessary to prevent a quick win by Russia. We experimented with all different force sizes, types of units and new capabilities, like extended-range munitions, to suppress air defense networks. We also increased the size of the Russian invasion force to 55 battalions to constitute a more realistic stress test.

Here's what we found. The best way to improve NATO's chances is to give it some armor. Specifically, we found that adding three armor brigades in addition to the four infantry brigades that can fight on short warning can change combat outcomes. If based in Europe, these

mobile armored forces can delay the Russian advance and then fall back to defend the capitals. With pre-stocks of fuel and ammunition, they could hold out for two to four weeks. That buys more time for more NATO reinforcements to quickly come to their aid.

To get counterattack forces there in time, the U.S. should add more pre-positioned equipment sets in Europe so we can quickly fly in personnel from the United States. Our European allies would also need to provide six to nine armor brigades to support a rapid counterattack as there is no unilateral American solution to this time-distance problem. This requires improving European readiness and infrastructure to move units quickly. And we've got to improve air-ground synergy, beginning with all services and countries working together to develop the capability to suppress air defense networks.

If NATO takes these steps to add armor, expedite reinforcements and get more airpower in the fight faster, our wargames show that Russia could seize some territory, but they could not quickly seize the capitals in a knockout blow and would eventually lose a longer war with NATO. We're not suggesting a war-winning strategy to defeat Russia with minimum risk, which would be impossible. Rather, this is the minimum defensive force to remove any theory of quick victory that might tempt Putin to attack.

So how much would it cost to restore credible deterrence in Europe? Policymakers should first realize that the costs of reinforcing deterrence pale in comparison to the enormous costs of war with Russia. The question is, where would the three armor brigades come from? We've outlined three options here with a rough order of magnitude cost estimate.

First, DOD could grow three new armor brigades, a division headquarters and the support forces in Europe with all new equipment for 13 billion (dollars). It would also cost 2.7 billion (dollars) to own and operate these forces in Europe every year thereafter. This would preserve a vital deterrent in Europe, even if the U.S. must respond to a crisis in Korea, for Mr. Putin is nothing if not opportunistic.

The second option would be to grow three new armor brigades, but use existing equipment in the National Guard and in exchange for Strykers. This would save 9 billion (dollars) in costs of new procurement, but it could be difficult to implement.

The third option would be to move three existing armor brigades in the active component to Europe. This would cost 716 million (dollars) to move and 216 million (dollars) in additional operating expenses in Europe.

The administration and Congress decided on a fourth option to continuously rotate one armor brigade and establish a pre-positioned equipment set for a second armor brigade in Europe. This is a good first step which sends an important signal of American commitment to deter Russia. But our recent wargames have shown it's not enough to change combat outcomes or cross a new threshold of deterrence where NATO could prevent a rapid fait accompli. The cumulative rotational costs are more expensive than a one-time move, so the rotational brigade in the second equipment set are currently only being resourced at 50 percent strength. It's also not feasible for units to draw pre-positioned equipment in time to defend on only seven to 10 days'

warning. So there would only be 44 U.S. tanks opposite 680 Russian tanks on seven days' warning. Finally, the continuous turbulence would degrade military readiness given there are only nine armor brigades to meet three rotational requirements in Europe, Korea and Kuwait.

At the June 2016 Warsaw summit, the NATO allies agreed to rotate three battalions led by Britain, Canada and Germany, essentially matching the U.S. commitment to rotate a brigade in the region. This signals Russia that NATO will not be easily divided in the event of attack, which is an important signal. But policymakers should understand the realistic capabilities of a battalion which is not designed to fight alone. The military standard is a one-to-three ratio of defenders to attackers. The current three battalions of enhanced forward presence opposite 54 battalions in Russia's Western Military District is a one-to-18 ratio. That's not enough to defend, let alone present an offensive provocative threat to Russia.

To put this in perspective, if NATO had applied the same standard during the Cold War, it would only have needed nine NATO battalions of enhanced forward presence on the inner German border to deter the 171 Soviet battalions that were in East Germany. Obviously, NATO leaders rejected that ratio when Germany was at risk. After exhausting all other politically expedient, but military insufficient concepts of deterrence, NATO eventually fixed its forward posture to support forward defense and flexible response. The 2017 NATO summit in Brussels, therefore, should consider additional posture options to deter a war that must never be fought.

Still, despite the lingering operational vulnerability and the uncertain deterrent, NATO has made important progress with first principles at Warsaw that should be acknowledged. NATO now recognizes Russia can present a serious challenge which will require serious leadership on both sides of the Atlantic. NATO has accepted it's not prudent to rest our collective security on assumptions of Putin's intentions. And NATO has committed, in principle, to move from assurance to credible deterrence. The incoming U.S. administration and Congress should do likewise and lead the Alliance in a dual-track strategy of seeking greater cooperation with Russia where possible, but strengthening credible deterrence as necessary.

Thank you.

TIERSKY: I thank you very much for a fascinating presentation with, I think, very grave implications. I can see why your initial set of wargames had such impact leading up to the Warsaw summit.

So, Magnus, we heard that Ukraine was a shockwave in Scandinavia as well. We heard about the use of Swedish airfields in the wargame. What of it? Talk to us a little bit about Nordic perspectives on this problem. Thank you.

NORDENMAN: Sure. And, you know, thank you so much for having me. And thanks to the Commission for putting this together. And thank you all for coming today.

So I'm with the Atlantic Council. And obviously this region and this set of issues is incredibly important to the Atlantic Council. We've been watching and engaging with and working on regional issues almost for the last 10 years really, so sort of before the new battle

days happened. So it's an incredibly important region and certainly, I think, for all the reasons that Karl outlined previously today.

But I would also say one of the reasons why we think this is important is because it's not only about Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, it's actually about us, the United States. I don't think that Putin wants to rule Estonia again. What Putin wants to do is break NATO and sow doubt about American leadership in the world. So while the arena for this demonstration may be in Estonia or Lithuania or Latvia, it really is intended for us and it really is intended for other allies to see that the United States may not come to the aid of its allies. So that's why we feel very strongly about this and we're passionate about this region, because at the end of the day it's about the United States and U.S. leadership in the world.

And before I go on, let me just sort of add my shout out to Mike and the team over at RAND and the work that they've done. I think it's absolutely fantastic. There's a formal public report out there. I would definitely pick it up if I were you.

Earlier this year, I spent about two hours in Mike's office with coffee when we went over this. And professionally, it was the best two hours of the year. I learned a ton, so it's great work. And it truly has been very, very influential for the broader policy community thinking through these issues.

So what I wanted to do with my remarks is perhaps sort of broaden the lens a little bit and talk about the broader region and how the Baltic States fits in and how it, specifically, relates to security and defense of the Baltic States. And as some have already remarked, obviously a lot of the focus both here in Washington and at NATO over the last few years has been on the Baltic States and what is being done up front. So with the battalions coming out of Warsaw, hybrid warfare, reinforcement, which is completely understandable, that's where, the most immediate thing needed to be done.

But the Baltic States obviously exist in a broader context and exist in a broader region. And that broader region can also be brought to bear and brings opportunities and possibilities for the defense and security of the Baltic States. So that's what I want to spend my time on during my brief remarks.

So to the Baltic States' north you have Finland and across the Baltic Sea you have Sweden. They are not NATO members. It's an important distinction to point out they are not covered by NATO's Article Five and collective defense. But they are incredibly close NATO partners and have been so for quite some time, with deployments in Afghanistan, in Libya and elsewhere. And obviously now in the new security context, they're important partners because they live in a region that's of importance to NATO because of the Baltic States and defense commitments that NATO has to those allies. So in this region we need to consider, how do Sweden and Finland fit it and what can they contribute in a crisis?

So Mike has already obviously discussed reinforcement options into the region, the use of airpower and so on and so forth. And due to sort of just sheer geography, there are things that Sweden and Finland can offer in terms of access routes and forward basing for NATO. Certainly

Sweden, which sort of lies across the region, it is certainly nifty, if you will, if you can use that airspace and use that basing to get close in order for airpower and naval power to sort of work in the region. And certainly both countries have signaled an interest to participate in the response to a crisis in the Baltic Sea region. And both countries are very much active participants in NATO exercises in the Baltic Sea region. And indeed, Sweden has actually passed what they call a “solidarity clause” in their parliament, which means that they have actually officially declared they stand ready to lend assistance in case of a crisis in the region.

But, of course, all these things are easier said than done. Just because we agree that this would be nifty and that we would like to do this in a crisis, that is far from enough. And you cannot make this up the day of the crisis or the evening before or the morning of. This will obviously require planning and arrangements with Sweden and Finland and how they figure in in a scenario where NATO is defending the Baltic States. You may want to pre-position equipment, you may want to pre-position ammunition and fuel and so on and so forth. And until that’s done, there’s very little that American and NATO planners can do with that potential opportunity for cooperation with Sweden and Finland as NATO partners. And we are not there yet.

The U.S. very, very recently signed bilateral defense cooperation agreements, not defense agreements, but defense cooperation agreements with both Sweden and Finland, which speaks to joint exercises, capabilities, development and so on and so forth. But so far, that cooperation does not include hands-on planning, it’s sort of, if you will, quiet conversations about who does what to whom in a crisis involving the Baltic States. So that is really the next step in order to make this partnership effective in a defense of the Baltic States scenario.

But you also need to look at the other side of this coin, because just as that geography is useful for NATO and useful for a United States seeking to provide increased defense for the Baltic States or ratcheting up deterrence at the beginning of a crisis, it is obviously also geography that is important to a Russia, which may leverage that in ways to stop NATO or make it tougher for a NATO or the United States to enter the region.

We’ve all heard about Kaliningrad and the A2/AD, anti-access/area denial bubble or network that is developing in Kaliningrad. You can certainly take, say, the Gotland Islands which lie off of Sweden’s east coast. And if you emplace air defense batteries there and combine that with Kaliningrad, you basically have air defense coverage across all of the Baltic Sea region. So just as that geography is important to NATO and the United States, it is, of course, important to Russia as well. So what does that mean for U.S., NATO, Swedish and Finnish cooperation? And what kind of scenarios do we need to consider?

Another aspect to all this – and we’ve done some work in actually trying to look at the region as a whole, both other NATO countries, but also the NATO partners, Sweden and Finland, and what’s actually there today. And obviously, Mike did a fantastic job sort of laying out what the defense of the Baltic States would require in terms of not only ground power, but aviation and naval assets and so on and so forth. And certainly a lot of these things will have to come from the United States and from other major NATO countries, such as a France and the

U.K. and Germany. But when you start counting out the resources and the assets that are already in the region, it's actually not too shabby.

The region actually has a pretty impressive array of airpower. The region is actually getting F-35s. Both Norway and Denmark are getting F-35s, the Finns operate F-18s, the Swedes operate Gripens, and Poland has a relatively new family of F-16s. And actually, there may be more F-35s coming into the region as well in the coming decades. And certainly Germany has a pretty impressive air force as well. So when you put all this together, actually just in the region itself there's something like 350 to 400 modern combat aircraft.

Same thing with submarines. The Russians have Kilo submarines, a handful. But between the countries in the region, there's something like 12 submarines on the, if you will, the good-guy side. And there's even some long-range strike capabilities that are coming into the region. Both Poland and Finland have acquired JASSMs from the U.S. for long-range strike.

So the trick here, I think, is, how do you make all this work together? And how do you coordinate this? And how do you ensure at a regional level, that you don't have sort of too much coverage in some assets and that you don't leave other gaps open that no one is thinking about because you're obviously doing sort of national defense investment plans? So I think there's an opportunity there to take regional stock in terms of capabilities and assets and try to orchestrate them for increased defense and deterrence in the region. And I think the U.S. certainly has a role to play here as a bit of a, if you will, orchestrator of regional capabilities and tying them together with U.S. capabilities.

So my point here is not that the region can take care of itself or should take care of itself. That's not my point. Defending the Baltic States is very much an all-of-NATO task. And providing that defensive deterrence is certainly also something that requires U.S. leadership as the major military power within the Alliance.

However, if you look at not only the wargame that RAND has played, but also a number of other games that have been played here in town, one of the recurring issues is that the countries in the region will basically be the first responders. Right? And that's not so strange. They live there. The crisis is next door. So if you think of the countries of the region in terms of sort of being the first response to a crisis with Russia, I think it would make sense to see more regional coordination and orchestration of capabilities.

But let me say to emphasize so we don't have a misunderstanding, I'm not saying that the region should defend itself, but I say as a first response and as a base for the NATO response to rest on. So I think this really is the time to get to a lot of these issues and talk about them, not only here in Washington, but also in Brussels and in the allied capitals.

And I think it's already been mentioned a couple of times, I agree with the decisions about battalions in the Baltic States and also in Poland coming out of Warsaw were great decisions and certainly a place to start working. But obviously, so much more is needed to be done. And this will require a long-term effort and a long-term strategy.

Mike certainly described some of the things that could be done. But also I think we need to talk about regional air defense for the Baltic States and obviously reinforcement arrangements and what's needed, even down to, railroads and hangar space and ramp space, and the little sort of things that sort of prove to be the devil in the details but which becomes important in all this.

My final point to all of this, I want to pull back perhaps a bit more and sort of consider the new political environment that we all find ourselves in with the election. I think this will require a new focus on NATO as a two-lane road. This truly cannot be sustained, I think, if this is only about what the U.S. is doing for the Europeans. I think we also need to have a dialogue about what the Europeans offer the United States, not only in Europe, but also globally, and all the different security priorities that the United States is working on. That is a tough issue for small countries, like the Baltic States, which, again, are, in terms of spending, they are some of the best in class and they certainly take their defense and their security very seriously. But as we all know, they are small states.

But I do think that there are opportunities for countries, like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to show their support and find niches where they are relevant and can make meaningful contributions to U.S. security priorities in other parts of the world.

So with that I'll end.

RAULAND: Thank you, Magnus, for your presentation, and, Michael and Karl, for yours. These are really an excellent basis for us to begin further discussions on this very important topic.

We'd now like to turn to the question-and-answer portion of our briefing. And I am going to first selfishly use my position here to weigh-in with the first question. This month marks 25 years since the fall of the U.S.S.R. And our panelists have done a good job of pointing out how difficult it still is today dealing with the consequences of that monumental event.

There are a number of things driving Russian aggressive behavior in the region. One of them certainly is the sense that NATO expansion to the territory of the former U.S.S.R., (that is the Baltics), was a bridge too far. So my question for you is, in addition to the moves the Baltics and NATO need to make to provide credible deterrence, and you've touched on a number of them this afternoon, I'd like to ask you to comment on what needs to be done to address the Russian view that NATO expansion has gone too far and to counter the sometimes virulent Russian disinformation that is often linked to that.

JOHNSON: I'll take a first start at that. So I think it's important to understand the Russian perspective on strategy and security. But you can approach that on the basis that you could get to mutual defense and mutual deterrence as well.

The rhetoric surrounding the three battalions, which are commanded by a lieutenant colonel, have a captain for an intelligence officer, have a mortar platoon with an eight-kilometer range, and are outclassed by Russian rockets with a 90-kilometer range, a support platoon that can resupply about 10 kilometers, not the thousand miles back to Germany, that does not

represent an offensive threat to Russia. And the Russian general staff knows it, despite what they say. So I don't think we have to let Russia define anything it wants as provocative and exercise a veto over NATO defense strategy to establish a minimum defensive deterrent that doesn't present an operational threat to Russia. And I think we should proceed with that.

ALTAU: Just going down the line I'll add onto that - that Russia knows it, and Russia needs us. Russia needs the West. Russia needs the European Union for their markets. And all the countries in between. So by beginning to destroy that relationship, relationships with its neighbors and any trust or cooperation, Russia only undermines itself, simple as that.

NORDENMAN: I'm in broad agreement with both men. The one thing I would add, and again, I would agree that it's important to understand the Russian perspective and where they're coming from. And I think in the Baltic Sea region it's not rocket science to realize that obviously the Baltic Sea region is incredibly important to Russia. That's their outlet for exports to Europe. It's a major outlet for gas supplies. St. Petersburg is a big harbor. And actually, for the Russian navy, the Baltic Sea itself is actually an important sort of test and trial space for their navy. And obviously, all of those are perfectly legitimate national interests, right? So sort of, you know, trade, free passage and so on and so forth. So I think we can all agree that those are for any state, anywhere, perfectly understandable and legitimate interests.

But on the other hand, I think what they are doing in the region completely overshoots trying to guard those sort of normal national interests that you would have in the region. So on the one hand, let's tip our hat to the legitimate national interests that Russia has, along with any other state, but let's call them out for when they go way beyond guarding those legitimate national interests.

RAULAND: Thank you. I'd like to turn next to representatives we have here from the three Baltic embassies. I think it is important during this session today to hear your views on this and give you a chance to address the panel.

Then we'll get to the general audience with any questions you have.

So, do we have volunteers from any of the three Baltic embassies? Please, I'll give you the first crack at this. And if all of you as you come up could tell us who you are and who you represent or who you work for when you come up and speak. Thank you.

Q: Thank you. I'm Marki Tihhonova-Kreek, the Deputy Chief of Mission from the embassy of Estonia.

Thank you to all the panelists and the whole Helsinki Commission for your work done in this area and for that very timely analysis, the in-depth remarks, and also examples which very well describe the situation in our region.

A couple of points that I would like to make on the security environment in Europe, especially on the eastern flank of NATO. First, I'm very glad that Michael has pointed out the necessity to continue to make meaningful contributions from Europe. What I would like to point

out is that we do take defense seriously in Estonia and in all the three Baltic countries. To prove that, next year Estonia will spend 2.2 percent of its GDP on defense. On top of it comes our host nation support. So I'm confident that we can deliver on what is expected from us. Likewise, also Latvia and Lithuania have committed themselves to raise their defense spending.

In addition to defense spending, we have been active contributors in terms of international military operations. We have been very active in cybersecurity in global terms. So, again, like Michael has pointed out, we have to find our niches as contributors. And cybersecurity, when it comes to Estonia, is definitely one of those niches. So again, we do take our defense seriously.

At the same time, I think it is very important that when it comes to defense, burden-sharing is important. We have to match the means to the ends and align talking to resources. So it's very timely for all of Europe to face its obligations regarding this defense spending. The timing is very good to have serious discussions within Europe in this area.

My second point, Europe has its own discussions going on right now to shape and strengthen its security environment. At the same time, I would like to reiterate that a U.S. element in guaranteeing Europe's security is absolutely vital and is indispensable. Without U.S. support, the concept of Europe, whole, free and at peace, is shaking. No matter how much we spend on defense or how often we do exercises, we do need strong and credible deterrence measures by NATO and also strong U.S. bilateral support. So we are very, very grateful for U.S. support through ERI in that respect. NATO Warsaw Summit decisions were very good, now they need to be implemented. And like it was pointed out by some of you, we need to continue these discussions also during our next NATO summit which will hopefully take place soon.

And my third point is that I very much welcome the intensified cooperation of the EU and NATO on defense matters. This is another example to prove that there is never too much when it comes to defense and where we can cooperate. And in that respect, I welcome very much the NATO foreign ministers' decisions which were made recently on concrete measures to be taken when it comes to EU and NATO cooperation.

Thank you.

RAULAND: Thank you very much.

Do we have representatives from the other two embassies, please?

Q: Well, thank you very much. My name is Ilmārs Breidaks, I am Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Latvia. Again, thank you to the Commission for this meeting. And my Estonian colleague already spoke on the very important issues where we fully concur, as on defense and security matters. Our narrative is very similar.

But nevertheless, I will also add some points. We believe that Latvia and the Baltic States are defensible. We believe in deterrence, in deterrence which expresses collective and unified action as a response to the challenges in Europe and in the Baltic region. We are happy

with NATO decisions taken in the Warsaw Summit regarding forward enhanced presence. And we are thankful to the U.S. for the great leadership in strengthening defense of our region and in responding to the challenges which were raised after Russian interference in Ukraine.

We are definitely looking forward to U.S. continuous leadership, as my Estonian colleague just mentioned, and further implementation of ERI in the future. I would also like to add here that we are thankful to those NATO countries, like Canada, which has taken leadership in building a multinational battalion, a NATO battalion, and leading in Latvia, which will be operational next year.

Having said that, we are not complacent. We certainly recognize the challenges. And we ourselves, we keep our vigilance, if I may say so, on a high level. We do our homework, let's say so. We will have increased our defense spending by 30 percent next year. We will reach 2 percent in 2018. These decisions are supported by all main political parties in Latvia. And the budget was approved, like, three weeks ago and there were no discussions about the necessity to strengthen defense and to contribute more to, first of all, our defense, but also to contribute to the stability of Europe and transatlantic relations, which we will do through our continuous support of NATO and also U.S.-led operations in countries like Afghanistan. And we will contribute further also in Iraq and other operations.

Having said that, once again, thank you very much to the Commission, I am looking forward to a discussion.

And if I may, just one comment about a very good point which you raised about the role of disinformation which we have witnessed for the at least last two, three years in earnest. I think it's fair to say that it is important to recognize that we are challenged with concerted steps by one country to undermine some of the things, but the most important, I think, are values which we believe in. And to undermine that, these concerted steps, we should – we feel that we should first recognize it for what it is. It is – these are actions to hurt us. And in this regard, we should make collective, unified efforts to counter that.

Thank you.

RAULAND: Thank you very much. And finally, a representative from the embassy of Lithuania.

Q: Hello. I'm Evelina Petronè, I'm the Political Officer from the Embassy of Lithuania. And since we have a delegation of parliamentarians who came here with the same goal to speak about our security and defense, so my ambassador and DCM are with the delegation, so I will be brief.

Thank you very much for this session. I think it's very, very important. And having it at the Helsinki Commission, it's a very timely discussion. I agree with my colleagues from the Estonian and Latvian embassies and what they said.

Just brief points. Lithuania is taking its commitments very seriously. We are trying to increase our commitment (defense spending) 2 percent. We had it at 0.79 (percent) two years ago, which is very low. We know that. We're increasing it fast. We came back to the obligatory conscription. We have obligatory conscription which we do not need because we have enough volunteers. People take this problem very seriously, as you can see.

And we are grateful to the United States and NATO for commitments, but as it was rightly pointed out it's about NATO's will. And I think we all understand here that it's not some theoretical or hypothetical threat. It's a real one. So, having said that, I think we can agree now we have to do something about that, not just to talk about it. So hopefully we'll come up with some ideas and some actions.

We had our parliamentary elections. We have a new government in place. All parties, minority and majority, understand that it's a real threat. And we have an agreement of all parties to continue doing something very well with that.

Having said that, another thing is the unity which was already mentioned, that Putin most probably doesn't want to rule Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania, but he wants to have this hot spot or he wants to break the unity and to challenge democracy, which he is already doing unfortunately. So this is the challenge we have to face and to do something with that.

Thank you.

RAULAND: Thank you. We appreciate the time that all three of you took to be here with us today and to share your views on this important topic.

And now the floor is completely wide open to anybody who would like to ask a question of our panel here. Again, if you can raise your hand I'll recognize you. .

Please.

Q: Hi, my name is Kathleen Weinberger. I'm with the Institute for the Study of War. Thank you all so much for speaking with us today.

My question is about the naval aspect of Baltic security. So most recommendations that I've seen have focused on ground forces and combating Russian air defenses. But Russia has very overtly started boosting its own naval capability in the Baltic Sea region. They have two new Corvettes armed with Kalibr cruise missiles. They completely overhauled the officer leadership of the fleet. And in addition, they recently deployed anti-ship bastion systems into Kaliningrad.

And so my question is a two-part question. A, how important is it for NATO and NATO partners to counter this with our own naval capabilities? And then, B, what would that response look like? Thank you.

NORDENMAN: So I'll jump on this one first. I think your observations are correct, but I also think it's important to sort of put it in a broader, if you will, sort of Russian naval context. So Russia has four major fleets, the Northern, Baltic, Black Sea and the Pacific. Of those, the one that is sort of, if you will, the power projection fleet and the nuclear deterrence fleet, that is the Northern fleet up in the high north with access to the Atlantic.

In comparison, the Baltic Sea fleet is not going anywhere. It's intended for the Baltic Sea and, in that sense, forms part of Russia's anti-access/area denial system or network, if you will. It's there to make it harder for other people to operate in the Baltic Sea region. And obviously in this context, it's about frustrating reinforcements. It's about holding reinforcements and NATO naval capabilities at risk.

In comparison, it is still one of the fleets in Russia that gets the least amount of resources. Again, most of it goes into the Northern fleet, but certainly they have gotten some new capabilities, and, again, frigates with Kalibr missiles and so forth. But just to put it in comparison to other things that the Russians are doing with their naval capabilities.

In my mind, the counter is submarines actually. The Baltic Sea is actually very small. And with long-range systems today, I actually think, in a war situation, the Baltic Sea would be a dead sea, nothing would be sailing on the surface because you can hit it from the sea and submarines can get you, too. So the counter, in my mind, is submarines on the NATO side. Where, again, as I said, there actually are some capabilities there. The Germans have a pretty good submarine force. The Swedes have a good submarine force. And the Poles are looking at recapitalizing their force as well, so the subsurface environment.

And this is actually one area where the U.S. actually has less to offer. Obviously, the U.S. operates big nuclear attack submarines. And the Baltic Sea is actually too small and shallow for them to effectively operate in there. So this is one area where actually the European contributions may be more important than the American ones.

A final point on all this, mines and countermines, again, in terms of anti-access and area denial in the use of Russian mines to frustrate reinforcements, so, therefore, the ability to quickly clear mines to keep the sea lanes open. And on that note, this is one niche, by the way, where the Baltic States have cut a pretty impressive figure as something that they contribute. They all have done a lot of hard work on building up capabilities for mine clearing and UXO clearing in the Baltic.

JOHNSON: All right, good question. We did have players from the Navy staff and from U.S. Navy Europe in some of our games as well as allies in Europe. We've conducted several games over there with the naval dimension. I would agree with Magnus that you have a condition of, you know, both sides can deny access to the large surface vessels in the Baltic Sea. Some of the additional things beyond what Magnus mentioned that I think would be helpful is the Navy, too, has SEAD – suppression of enemy air defense – capabilities, they need to work on a long-range anti-radiation missile to be able to neutralize the SA-21s that have between a 250, 400-kilometer range.

There's also long-range anti-ship missiles to get the maritime. They have Corvettes where they could try to put SAMs on top of that. It's not exactly clear if it will work well or not. But if it does, that could interdict the maritime air avenue reproach coming out of Sweden, which would be a significant problem for the close-air support and interdiction for ground forces.

Along with that, this is something else where allies could help us, to be able to deny Russia the ability to seize islands and emplace SA-21 capabilities on those islands. That would be important, although that's one of a number of things that need to happen. We'd have to be able to target Russian long-range anti-ship missiles as well, and then the countermine capability that Magnus mentioned.

RAULAND: Thank you. Alex, over to you for a question.

TIERSKY: Thanks. I'm going to throw a quick raft for maybe a few quick hits from our panelists, if that would be OK.

To Mike, I'd like to get you in this forum publicly to respond to the question of Russian intent. Why, the question floats out there? Why would Russia invade the Baltics when all they would have to do is undermine them through measures short of war? And to what extent would the additional military deployments that you recommend be responsive to threats short of an all-out invasion?

To Karl or any on the panel really who might like to respond, I'd like to hear a little bit more about domestic efforts by the Baltics in terms of their national resilience. I understand we've heard the point repeatedly about increased defense spending. That point is well registered. But what about improvements to infrastructure? We've heard infrastructure is extraordinarily important in these scenarios.

And to Magnus – again, please, just quick hits – to Magnus, you talked specifically about Sweden and I'd like your thoughts on the extent to which Russian rhetoric can impact the political will of those states, in particular to play the significant roles that the Baltic States would like to see them play in a contingency. Put differently, do they fear becoming targets? Thank you.

JOHNSON: That's a great question. And there's certainly a healthy debate in the community about that. There are two basic approaches to defense planning. One is to try to make predictions of adversary intentions and to build a force specifically tailored to counter that. And the other, which we recommend, is where you have a vital region with U.S. vital interests where there's an adversary pursuing a strategy that runs contrary to our objectives and we have the capability to inflict a high consequence event, that's enough for a plausible standard for prudent defense planning that exists in other theaters, you know, with respect to China, with respect to North Korea and Iran. There's no reason not to apply that same prudent standard for defense planning to the Baltics, especially when our predictions went wrong.

I mean, the – there's still a wide range of op-eds, I think, trying to explain Putin's behavior, running from he has Asperger's to he's a strategic genius, so I think our ability to stay

ahead of him and his next move is we ought to approach that with a degree of humility, especially when, again, it's a high-consequence event. I can't think of a scenario that's more likely or with more potential to involve the United States in a nuclear war, in the second nuclear age, than a miscalculation out of NATO security in the Baltic States. So it is serious for us, not just the Baltic States.

But in terms of Russian motives in the Baltics, I'll answer the question directly, even though I'm skeptical of being able to ascribe intentions. There's just the ability to militarily and strategically restore a buffer zone, and to roll back NATO influence from their borders. Their recent defense strategy has articulated NATO infrastructure on their borders as a threat to Russian national security, so that's articulated. There could also be domestic reasons as a diversion from potential unrest.

ALTAU: So on the second point about the domestic efforts in the Baltics, certainly the representatives from the Baltic embassies could address those very thoroughly here today. But let's say very briefly, the Lithuanian representative did mention conscription on Lithuania, that that has been a recent change in that country to address this situation. Estonia has had conscription for a long time. So the work of the National Guard, let's say, also has seen an increase in volunteerism we heard. There were more people volunteering to go out and train and to take that responsibility. So that's been definitely a big thing.

I really can't talk too much about the domestic military efforts in too much detail. But Magnus did talk about the niche capabilities. And again, I reiterate that in the Baltics each country has done something to address a particular situation, but an overall issue that is very important to NATO as well and to the United States. So Estonia, when it was cyberattacked by Russia, at that time was developing a NATO Cyber Center of Excellence which has now been operational for quite a while, for almost 10 years, I think. The Lithuanians, as you may remember, a few years ago opened an offshore LNG, a floating terminal, so they've been very keen on energy security aspects. So they have a NATO Center of Excellence for energy security. And just like the Latvians, who suffer also, as do all three of the Baltic countries, from repeated disinformation attacks, sustained propaganda campaigns, subtle and not so subtle, so the Latvians have set up a NATO Strategic Center for Strategic Communications to address all these threats.

NORDENMAN: I'll be very quick. So on the first question, I think both the Swedes and the Finns are convinced that a crisis over the Baltic States would directly impact them and that there's no way of getting around that and would very, very likely involve them one way or another. But obviously, the particular route or trajectory of a crisis is, of course, hard to predict.

On your second question, and again, now we're completely speculating here, but I don't have a hard time imagining that in a crisis over the Baltic States where Russia certainly would go to a Helsinki and a Stockholm with a very sharp message of, "do yourself and everyone else a favor and stay out of this, the big boys are playing," so obviously both Stockholm and Helsinki would, in a crisis, face very, very difficult questions and very, very difficult choices. And I don't think they're difficult because they're Stockholm and Helsinki. I think they're difficult because

we're talking about two relatively small countries who need to – who will have to deal with an aggressive and assertive major power.

RAULAND: Thank you. We have time for a few more questions, if any of you still have things on your mind you'd like to address to the panel, please.

Q: So good afternoon. My name is Pirak Cusick (ph). I'm a graduate student focusing on European security. And as a proud Estonian, I will thank U.S. continuous commitment in the region.

We haven't talked much about diplomatic relations. General Breedlove just months ago said that we need a constructive discussion with Russia. And thus I would ask, do you see that happening anytime soon? If yes, what would be the potential talking points and what role will the Baltics and also Sweden and Finland play in these discussions? Thank you.

NORDENMAN: Sure. I guess I can start. This will likely be an unsatisfying answer, if you will. So when you're talking about sort of diplomatic dialogue, I certainly think there is certainly room to do some things to lower tensions and make sure that mistakes are avoided. So in terms of behavior in the airspace, behavior in the maritime space and so on and so forth and your hot lines and so on, and we certainly did that during the Cold War and we certainly have developed that with the Chinese today. And that is obviously a way to avoid incidents escalating into war.

More broadly speaking, I don't think this is a good time to reset the relationship or make arrangements. I'm pretty sure I know what Putin wants out of us, but actually I'm not very sure that he has much to offer us on the other end. So again, so I have a hard time seeing sort of a major dialogue, but certainly opportunities in order to avoid misunderstandings, to avoid confrontation and to avoid accidents. And that's certainly a very, very needed and urgent conversation to have with the Russians.

JOHNSON: It's a good question. Like Magnus, I think we should keep the lines of communication open. The dialogue is important, not only for regional security in Europe, but on the range of political challenges that we both face. There may be potential for cooperation in other regions.

I think, though, that the Russians approach it from more of a transactional perspective rather than a firm belief and support for a liberal democratic international order. And so the question would be, what's the quid pro quo to get that cooperation versus ISIS or other challenges that are out there? I personally don't think that the West, that NATO should trade credible deterrence of NATO allies in hopes of gaining cooperation elsewhere. That strikes me as a rather bad deal to ratify aggression and leave allies vulnerable and so that we can help Russia fight its enemies in Syria and occupy its position there. I don't see how that's a good trade for the U.S. or for NATO or the international order.

RAULAND: Any other questions?

Q: Hello. And thanks to the Helsinki Commission for convening this timely meeting. My name is Petyo Varbanov from the embassy of Bulgaria. I'm a political officer at the embassy.

I would like to expand a little bit more on the previous question vis-à-vis the U.S. policy toward Russia and the new incoming Trump administration. The current Congress was quite critical, especially from the Republican Party, of President Obama and there were accusations that the Obama administration was too soft et cetera, et cetera.

So I was wondering, now the Republican Party controls both houses, the House and the Senate, and there is a Republican president soon in the White House, I was wondering, what role the Congress might have in shaping the foreign and security policy of the Trump administration? And how do you square this with the indications for eventual rapprochement with Russia?

JOHNSON: I'll take it first. So I'm reluctant to engage in military and strategic speculation, and that's actually my field, I'm even less inclined to engage in political speculation about what the new administration will do. I would just say that Congress as a coequal branch of government has responsibility for foreign policy and defense planning as well.

ALTAU: Well, I don't know whether to give the long answer or the short answer. But this is the short one, because we could talk all day about this, the role of Congress. And I think that Congress does have an extremely important role as the new administration is coming in. So I think that as whether a counterbalance to a Republican administration or with working across the aisle to balance legislation and policies, I can imagine that being of serious consideration next year, for the next couple of years.

And as some people look ahead to the next elections already and the mid-term elections and what the effects will be of what will come up in the meantime, and then also you have to keep in mind elections elsewhere across Europe and France, for instance, in the spring, and how the U.S. Congress will respond to those. The relations that Congress has with the countries of Europe, the transatlantic relationship is very, very important.

So I know that for the Baltic-American communities, we work with a broader group of members in the House Baltic Caucus. And there's a Senate caucus as well. And there are people in Congress, and not just in the caucuses, but in the committees who are, I think, very pragmatic and very realistic about their approaches in dealing with Russia. So we've already seen that by the indications that, for instance, Senator McCain will be holding hearings on Russia early next year, Senator Graham, of course, and a number of members in the House as well, so there's opportunity, certainly.

RAULAND: I think we have time for at least one more question. Are there any other questions out there? Please.

Q: Hi. I'm Beni Kovacs. I'm an intern here at the U.S. Helsinki Commission.

So I have a question about what was said earlier about how U.S.-Baltic relations should be mutually reinforcing. My question is, number one, how can the Baltic States facilitate U.S. support, rotational forces in the region in terms of infrastructure, rules of engagement or strategy? And additionally, Mr. Nordenman mentioned these niche areas where the Baltic States can be contributing to U.S. and global security. What are these areas and how do you think the Baltic States can move forward in this respect? Thanks.

JOHNSON: That's a great question. I'd like to just begin by acknowledging the Baltic commitment to our collective security, the increasing commitment as well. I served with Baltic forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. They fought without caveats. And one told me, "We will fight and die with you here in Afghanistan so that you will help defend us should the need arise."

But I think it's still important to keep this in perspective. They have the combined population of, I think, Maryland, the combined GDP of New Mexico. It's not realistic to expect that the Baltic States themselves will provide NATO's land army in a major conflict with Russia. That would just exceed any realistic capabilities. Even if they match Russia at 4 percent defense spending per GDP, collectively that's still only \$8 billion which is not enough to buy three armor brigades, OK? So we have to be realistic.

That being said, there's a lot of things that they could do and are doing in terms of making their countries more resilient, more difficult to occupy, things to slow down the Russian advance, be able to extend Russian security requirements. And you could implement and integrate that within a more comprehensive NATO general defense plan in which that would provide some valuable operational contributions.

NORDENMAN: I'll just make one quick point about niche capabilities. I think actually all of the countries in the Baltic region have sort of clear niche areas where they've cut a figure and are recognized experts. Certainly cyber in Estonia has already been mentioned. Also clearing of sea mines. Another one actually, fun factoid for today, Lithuania has the largest special operations community as a proportion of the overall force of any NATO country. So that has become a niche for Lithuania. And obviously that is a tough skillset to build and maintain. And obviously, cyber is globally applicable, special forces, you know, globally applicable, you know, mine-clearing is certainly something that we like to do potentially in the Gulf and other places. So those are niches that can play beyond the region.

I'll just end with sort of an anecdote when it comes to our commitment to defense. We had a visiting fellow from the Marine Corps last year who really got into Baltic issues. And he went to the region and he wrote on defensibility of the Baltic States and deterrence and reinforcement. And he sort of ate and lived Baltic defense.

And at one point, sort of at the water cooler, I said, "John – you're a Marine Corps officer, you've served around the world, you've been to the Middle East a bunch of different tours and you've trained Afghan security forces and Iraqi security forces. So of all the different things that you could be doing, why did you get so excited and why are you so passionate about the Baltic States and Baltic defense?" And he came back and he said, "Because these people give a damn!" and that's why he thought this was exciting and that's why he wanted to work on

it, because he thought that these were allies and partners that gave a damn about their own security and their own defense.

RAULAND: That's a very good note to end on.

Well, let me thank all of you - the audience for your interest, for attending, for some very good questions today, and our panel for some excellent presentations and good answers to all the questions that were offered up.

Most of you may know this, but for anybody who doesn't the Helsinki Commission always posts unofficial transcripts of these sessions. Those will be at our website hopefully by tomorrow. And in case you don't know what the website is, it's www.csce.gov, CSCE stands for the formal name of the Helsinki Commission, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

So thank you once again and have a great evening.

[Whereupon, at 3:37 p.m., the briefing ended.]