



## POLICY BRIEF

# **30 YEARS OF DEFENCE COOPERATION BETWEEN LATVIA AND THE UNITED STATES: BEYOND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND INTO THE FUTURE**

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# **THE RĪGA CONFERENCE**

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# **30 YEARS OF DEFENCE COOPERATION BETWEEN LATVIA AND THE UNITED STATES: BEYOND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND INTO THE FUTURE<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The author currently serves as a defence counsellor of Latvia in the United States. Opinions expressed in the brief are his own and do not necessarily correspond to those expressed by the Ministry of Defence of Latvia, whose employee the author is.

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to express appreciation to English language editors of this paper – Mr. Valdis Aleksandrs Būcēns and Lt. Col. (Ret.) Ivars Pauls Sīka.

## INTRODUCTION

Cooperation in security and defence with the United States of America is amongst the top priorities of Latvian defence policy. The current State Defence Concept (SDC) states that the United States “is Latvia’s main strategic partner”<sup>3</sup> and follows a similar line taken by all previous SDCs since 2003.<sup>4</sup> The agenda of this partnership is broad and active. It ranges from political consultations at the level of Ministries of Defence (MOD) and Foreign Affairs (MFA) of both countries, to military exercises of various types. Latvia hosts several hundred U.S. soldiers as part of rotational military presence.

There are several milestones that help trace the evolution of this dynamic cooperation. Firstly, the U.S. State Partnership Program (SPP), in 1993, formed the framework for beginning “mutually beneficial” relations. Over the years, this cooperation consistently formed the backbone of military-to-military contacts and has maintained its purpose by timely adaption and responsiveness to specific needs and abilities of Latvia. Secondly, in 1998, the U.S.- Baltic Charter brought broader political context into security and defence cooperation and bolstered security efforts towards prospective NATO and EU membership. Furthermore, NATO membership in 2004 provided new opportunities to enhance cooperation with the U.S. Assembling joint units of US and Latvian soldiers would have seemed an improbable development just some years ago, but based on cooperation with Michigan National Guard (MING), training of the Security forces of Afghanistan became a reality. Shared operational

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<sup>3</sup> State Defence Concept, The Ministry of Defence of Latvia, see [https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Valsts%20aizsardzibas%20konceptcija\\_ENG\\_0.pdf](https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Valsts%20aizsardzibas%20konceptcija_ENG_0.pdf) accessed on 25 June 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Only the very first State Defence Concept of Latvia in 1995 did not follow this line, largely because it did not at all have an external dimension included in defence considerations of that time.

experience and acquired new capabilities led to intensified cooperation with MING that added to the quality of the Latvian National Armed Forces (LNAF).

Eventually, the deteriorating global security situation caused by the Russian aggression against Georgia and Ukraine substantially intensified military cooperation. The U.S. military presence in Latvia (and also in Lithuania and Estonia), as part of the Alliance reinvigorated emphasis on deterrence and particularly the commitment by Allies as agreed in the NATO Madrid Summit to “defend every inch of Allied territory”<sup>5</sup>, is playing a critical role in maintaining peace and security in the region.

This paper offers a brief overview of the political and military development of defence cooperation between Latvia and the United States throughout 30 years of partnership. This overview will form the backdrop for the less analysed elements of Latvian-American defence relations that result from the deteriorating security situation and the progress in streamlining US political and financial support to the Baltic States as part of the Baltic Security Initiative. Changes in the Alliance’s posture stem from Russia’s illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Events related to Latvian and American military cooperation in previous years have been covered in a several papers devoted to the topic.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore not the intent of this paper to cover the whole spectrum of accumulated experience. At the end of the paper some opportunities for future cooperation are provided, coupled with proposals for next steps in the partnership between Latvia and the State of Michigan.

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<sup>5</sup> Para 9, the NATO Madrid Summit Declaration, available on NATO webpage, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_196951.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm) accessed on July 16, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> For a further reference see Toms Rostoks, *Latvia and the US: the Defense Cooperation, in Latvia and the United States: Bringing Friendship Into the Next Centenary*, Kārlis Bukovskis, Mārtiņš Vargulis (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, 2022; *Michigan-Latvia: 25 Years of Partnership*, (Ministry of Defence of Latvia, 2018); Airis Rikveilis, *Twenty Years of Latvian-American Defence Cooperation: From Cautious Beginning to Strategic Partnership and Beyond*, 71-91, in *Latvia and the United States: a New Chapter in the Partnership*, Ivars Indāns (ed.), Centre for East European Policy Studies, Riga, 2012.

## FOUNDATIONS OF DEFENCE COOPERATION

Interest about cooperation with the countries breaking free from the Soviet Union was expressed by the U.S. military even before the collapse of the Communist Empire in August 1991. Recognition of political change in Europe presented opportunities to expand U.S. relations with newly established democracies and ironically, with the demising Soviet Union itself. The DOD created two Interagency Working Groups (IWG) in order to pursue military-to-military contacts aiming at normalizing relations. The part of cooperation with Soviets diminished as a result of the brutal actions of the Gorbachev regime in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991. The IWG with Eastern European countries started contacts in August 1990, attempting amongst other things, to promote a politically neutral military, helping the military understand U.S. defence policies, developing regular dialogs about arms sales, relations with third world countries, etc.<sup>7</sup>

In parallel, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians living in exile in the U.S. proposed to explore opportunities to engage with the Baltic nations. As early as in 1989, retired officers of Baltic origin in Washington, D.C. established the Baltic Institute, in order to bolster assistance to the Baltic Freedom movements, in which issues related to societal resistance to the Soviet regime played a significant role.<sup>8</sup> Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, on 29 October 1991, in Washington, about a dozen retired officers and defence professionals of Latvian origin established the Latvian Defence Working Group with the aim to support the creation of the Latvian Armed Forces, according to the principles and standards of democratic societies.<sup>9</sup>

Once these informal preparatory activities were set, it was a time for seeking a more formalized framework for cooperation. Robert T. Cossaboom recalls

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<sup>7</sup> Robert T. Cossaboom, *The Joint Contact Team Program*, (The History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997). This work paved the way for subsequent expansion of bilateral activity with Czechoslovakia (from 1993 Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary and Poland.

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with one of the founders of Baltic Institute – Andrejs Mežmalis, October 31, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Ilmārs Dambērgs, *Latvijas aizsardzības darba grupas 20 gadi (20 years of Latvian defence working group)*, 2011, available on <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/vesture/2011-11-02/latvijas-aizsardzibas-darba-grupas-20-gadi> accessed on June 25, 2023.

that in the Fall of 1991, the United States European Command (USEUCOM) proposed the "EUCOM Coordination and Assistance program" that would lay the foundation to broader engagement with the states that broke away from the Soviet Union. The five-step process consisted of identifying areas for cooperation, aims of the program, host nation interests and capabilities, costs associated with the program as well as potential for assistance and training.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff was working on similar proposals, resulting in a proposal by General Colin Powell in December 1991 to create contact teams with eight objectives approved on 14 January 1992.<sup>11</sup> As of March 1992, both work strands became one unified effort for the U.S. forces approach toward counterparts in Europe under primary responsibility and coordination of the US Commander-in-Chief in Europe. The first contact teams departed to Hungary in Autumn 1992, followed by Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia in Spring 1993.

Latvia submitted a request to address military support to civilian authorities in July 1992. Since this request fell under the purview of the National Guard Bureau (NGB), the concept plan for Latvia was considered. Internal consultations in the Pentagon between NGB and the Strategic Planning Directorate resulted in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia being included in the modified Unified Command Plan thus paving the way "to pursue the contact program with these nations".<sup>12</sup> EUCOM proposed adding Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the program in the fall of 1992, alongside Romania, Bulgaria and Albania.

The idea that Latvians would like to consult on NGB matters gave food for thought for the head of the Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP), general Thomas Lennon, who considered that cooperation based on National Guard engagement actually provides for greater flexibility for JCTP aims, particularly

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<sup>10</sup> Robert T. Cossaboom, *The Joint Contact Team Program*, (The History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9. These proposals were: 1) to promote the development of non-political military forces[.]; 2) to restructure force for legitimate defensive needs; 3) to remove the use of military force from the political process; 4) to instill respect for human rights and the rule of law; 5) the enhance public respect for the military within the society; 6) to expand cooperation/contacts between the armed forces of all nations; 7) to promote democratic, free-market economy; 8) to enhance understanding of US values and way of life, and to engender support for US positions in international forums.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

bearing in mind the sensitive issues related to the withdrawal of the Russian forces and the size of the Baltic countries. **During his visit to Latvia on November 1992, General Lennon, together with Chief of the NGB General John B. Conaway, discussed the prospects for cooperation with local political and military leaders, which clearly stated that Latvia would like to develop cooperation with the United States.**<sup>13</sup> Initially it was not entirely clear, who would be the Latvian counterpart to the U.S. side. Defence forces of Latvia did not have a necessary capacity at the time to sustain such interaction, while Zemessardze, according to Colonel (ret.) Juris Eihmanis, Chief of Staff of Zemessardze Headquarters (HQ) at the time, favoured more traditional military cooperation, primarily in the area of exercise planning, military and personnel management.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the British forces engaging in training of “small unit” tactics with Zemessardze as of summer of 1992 set the benchmark of cooperation that Latvians were eager to pursue. The U.S. military were suggesting more cautious approach, following their cooperation proposals mentioned earlier.

In early 1993, NGB decided to work on the SPP that would allow linking JCTP participating nations with National Guard units from American states. **It was envisaged that Latvia would be paired with Michigan, Lithuania with Pennsylvania and Estonia with Maryland.**<sup>15</sup> As said by Cossaboom, “the Bureau looked at native population centres within the states and geographic or economic factors that the state and European nation might have in common.”<sup>16</sup> Expansion of the NGB role led to inclusion of all JCTP countries in the partnership with the National Guard.

By spring 1993, the SPP that coordinated the major U.S. military partnerships with 14 European countries providing a sufficient political, military and legal framework for bilateral and multilateral engagement between the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert T. Cossaboom, *The Joint Contact Team Program*, (The History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997), p.17.

<sup>14</sup> Conversation with Col.(ret) Juris Eihmanis on August 3, 2023. Col (ret.) Eihmanis was Chief of Staff of Zemessardze Headquarters (1993 – 1996), Commander of Zemessardze (1996-1998) and Commander of National Armed Forces of Latvia (1998).

<sup>15</sup> Initial idea was to link Estonia with New York, but a decision was changed.

<sup>16</sup> Robert T. Cossaboom, *The Joint Contact Team Program*, (The History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997), p.19.



United States and the new European democracies. **On 27 April 1993, Latvia became the first formally approved partnership pairing its efforts with Michigan, immediately followed by Lithuania and Estonia.** On May 2, 1993 the first group of the U.S. representatives arrived in Riga forming a Military Liaison Team with the Zemessardze Headquarters and embarking on the task to develop a new kind of partnership in a new security environment.

## FROM CAUTIOUS BEGINNINGS TO BROTHERS IN ARMS

It is rightly observed that U.S. security cooperation with Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania started without the prospect of U.S. military presence in these countries.<sup>17</sup> When the first MING team under the SPP umbrella arrived in Riga, there were still the remnants of the Soviet army, now under the Russian flag. The initial steps of cooperation entailed the exchange of experts, family programs, consultations on crisis management and civil-military relations as well as preparation of training of the Zemessardze for basic military tasks. Eihmanis also pointed out important role that consultations on development of military medicine, combat engineers played to growth of military expertise of newly established Latvian home guards. To him, access to the U.S. field manuals helped to understand the force organization and roles and functions of various HQ branches.<sup>18</sup> This knowledge formed basis of Zemessardzes HQ structure that was later also copied throughout the LNAF.

**The first exercise in which Latvian Zemessardze units participated together with their Michigan partners took place in 1995. Over the years *Guardex* became a signature exercise for Latvian and Michigan cooperation.** A year later, MING played a crucial role in the first multinational exercise in Latvia after the withdrawal of the Russian military in 1994 – *Baltic Challenge'96* and a subsequent *Best Effort* in 1997. In the years before the invitation to join NATO, Latvian and the U.S. military cooperation was predominantly developed through the SPP.

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<sup>17</sup> Toms Rostoks, *Latvia and the US: the Defense Cooperation, in Latvia and the United States: Bringing Friendship Into the Next Centenary*, Kārlis Bukovskis, Mārtiņš Vargulis (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with Col.(ret) Juris Eihmanis on August 3, 2023.



**The U.S.-Baltic Charter signed in 1998 provided a new prospect to Latvia and its Baltic neighbours, that NATO integration will be possible.**

The U.S.-Baltic Charter signed in 1998 provided a new prospect to Latvia and its Baltic neighbours, that NATO integration will be possible. It also offered new possibilities for military cooperation. The Charter was unequivocal that “building on the existing cooperation among their respective ministries of defense and armed forces, the United States of America supports the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to provide for their legitimate defense needs, including development of appropriate and interoperable military forces.”<sup>19</sup> The Charter allowed for practical U.S. involvement in Baltic defence cooperation projects such as BALTBAT, BALTNET, BALTRON and BALTDEFCOL.<sup>20</sup> It also institutionalized the cooperation by creating a BALTSEA – a coordination mechanism for “a security assistance to Estonia’s, Latvia’s, and Lithuania’s defense forces”.<sup>21</sup> In combination with Alliance candidate state status granted to Latvia at the Madrid Summit of 1999, all factors necessary for practical integration into NATO were set.

Latvia joined NATO in 2004 and, in a way, it could be the end of the initial goals of cooperation under SPP as it was not initially intended to partner Allies. However, nothing prevented the program to be continued and

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<sup>19</sup> *A Charter of Partnership Among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, and Republic of Lithuania*, signed on 16 January, 1998, available on <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/usa/policy/baltic-us-relations/us-baltic-charter> retrieved on 12 July, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> BALTNET, BALTBAT, BALTRON and BALTDEFCOL – the military cooperation projects in the realm of air surveillance, land force and maritime force respectively. Established in mid 1990s all four were formed aiming at military interoperability and conformity to NATO policies and procedures. Additional information available on the webpage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/security-policy/co-operation-with-nato-member-states-and-candidate-countries/baltic-defence-co-operation-main-joint-projects> accessed on July 17, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> *A Charter of Partnership Among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, and Republic of Lithuania*, signed on 16 January, 1998, available on <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/usa/policy/baltic-us-relations/us-baltic-charter> retrieved on 12 July, 2023.

joint operational activities were considered to be the next level of cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Operations in Iraq and in Afghanistan brought cooperation between Latvia and the U.S. to another level. In 2007, for a mission in Afghanistan, Latvia proposed a joint Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) to train security forces of Afghanistan together with MING. Training began in January 2008 and the OMLT was ready for deployment in November 2008. This joint program continued until the end of 2010.

Further steps were taken when the Michigan Air National Guard (MIANG) engaged in training Latvian Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTAC) in 2008. **This new angle of cooperation opened new prospects and a substantial capability to the LNAF, which would now be able to lead U.S. airplanes to the target marking a huge step towards interoperability with Allied forces.** Over the years Latvian soldiers have become not only JTAC users, but also trainers making their achievement even more remarkable.

Joint combat experience has not come without casualties. The saddest day of this cooperation is 1 May, 2009, when Latvian soldiers stood together with their American Allies to defend a distant combat outpost in Kunar province in Afghanistan. Bari Alai suffered a major attack by Taleban forces resulting in one of the fiercest battles registered during the Coalition forces' presence in Afghanistan. It left two Latvian and three American soldiers fallen alongside five soldiers from the Afghanistan National Army (ANA).<sup>23</sup> Fighting continued also in other outposts. From July through September, the joint Latvian-Michigan OMLT-2 fought the Taleban over the village of Barg-e-Matal in Nuristan province joining the U.S. forces from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain division.<sup>24</sup> Probably the most described battle involving OMLT-2 took place in combat

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<sup>22</sup> See the reference to Major General Thomas Cutler in Airis Rikveilis, *Twenty Years of Latvian-American Defence Cooperation: From Cautious Beginning to Strategic Partnership and Beyond*, 83-84, in *Latvia and the United States: a New Chapter in the Partnership*, Ivars Indāns (ed.), Centre for East European Policy Studies, Riga, 2012. It should also be mentioned that the first Latvian unit ever deployed to Iraq as part of operation *Iraqi Freedom* served together with the U.S. soldiers in Kirkuk Air Base as part of 506th Air Expeditionary Group.

<sup>23</sup> Those fallen at Bari Alai were Sergeant Voldemārs Anševics and private first class Andrejs Merkuševs (LNAF), alongside U.S. forces Staff Sergeant William D. Ville, Sergeant James D. Pirtle and specialist Ryan C. King. Two other Latvians – Sgt. Solvita Levāne and private first class Aleksandrs Pisarevs were wounded alongside 4 ANA soldiers.

<sup>24</sup> As depicted in *Michigan-Latvia: 25 Years of Partnership*, Michigan National Guard and the Ministry of Defence of Latvia, 54-56, 2018.

outpost Keating in Nuristan province. Latvian soldiers – Sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jānis Laķis and Corporal Mārtiņš Dāboliņš resisted attack by about 350 Taliban fighters as part of Bravo Company of the 61<sup>st</sup> Cavalry regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 13-hour battle left eight Americans dead and 27 wounded, with more than 100 attackers killed. Both Latvian soldiers were later described as indispensable for efforts to retake control over the outpost. On one occasion, a U.S. soldier claimed that Jānis Laķis saved his life.<sup>25</sup>

Combat experience substantially increased the expertise of Latvian soldiers on waging military operations of various scales. It also contributed to higher readiness of Latvian forces. In the midst of the financial crisis, when Latvia was forced to cut every sector of state expenditure, including the military, one engagement was continued until its planned finalization – a joint engagement with MING in Afghanistan. When the financial conditions improved, the MING and LNAF joined efforts to train the military of other countries. In 2013 and 2014, under the SPP between MING and Liberia, Latvian soldiers provided trainers in this African country. Combat experience acquired by this time was sufficient to move beyond the aims of the SPP.



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## THE CRIMEA EFFECT

In the aftermath of the Russian attack on Georgia in August 2008, Western nations largely ignored warnings coming from their Baltic Allies that Russia was on a course of deliberate confrontation with the West to re-establish its

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<sup>25</sup> Lance Benzel, *Mom works to help Carson soldiers honor battle bond*, The Gazette, January 9, 2010.

perceived zone of influence. “Business as usual” with Russia continued barely four months after this attack with only some slight adaptation measures undertaken. Allies reacted by adopting the contingency plan for the Baltic States and moving towards a more structured solution on Baltic Air Policing. On a bilateral level, the U.S. intensified exercises in the Baltic region and increased efforts to establish an infrastructure suitable for reception of reinforcement. During the BALTOPS exercise in the Baltic, Sea the 4th Marine Logistics Group and the Sailors of Naval Beach Group 2 helped to establish a landing and offload area near city of Ventspils.<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously the BALTIC HOST exercise attempted for the first time to develop a deeper expertise on logistical details for reception of Allied forces. Several weeks later the “SABER STRIKE” exercise, comprising more than 1700 Latvian soldiers and their Baltic and U.S. counterparts, also imitated reinforcement scenarios in times of contingency.

**What makes these measures particularly important for Latvia is the U.S. bilateral assistance to develop expertise in a critical area of defence planning in a situation when Alliance as a whole was reluctant to pursue substantial investment into strengthening overall Alliance posture in the Baltic.** Bilateral steps by the U.S. helped MOD and LNAF to acquire the necessary knowledge to shape the Alliance response to changed security environment after 2014.

The Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2014, occupation and subsequent illegal annexation of the Crimea peninsula illicited a global response that was unprecedented in the post-Cold War world. NATO set up the Assurance Measures – land, sea and air activities on the eastern part of the Alliance.<sup>27</sup> Yet another Russian aggression against its neighbour came with

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<sup>26</sup> Rocco DeFillippis, *Baltops 10 MPF Operations Kick Off in Latvia*, 2010, available on <https://www.marforeur.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/520886/baltops-10-mpf-operations-kick-off-in-latvia/> accessed on July 20, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Designed to be scaled up and scaled down the assurance measures over time of several years included AWACS employment; increased Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance activities along the eastern borders; enhanced Air Policing; assistance to refining Special Operations Forces capabilities; employment of Maritime Patrol Aircraft and Standing Naval Forces; and the execution of training and exercises across the eastern border. See the web page of NATO SHAPE <https://shape.nato.int/nato-assurance-measures> accessed on June 24, 2003

a sobering realisation that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are actually not sufficiently integrated in the NATO military structures and its defence planning. Three states lacked meaningful Alliance infrastructure suitable for either training of larger sized units or support defence efforts of NATO territory.

In solidarity with Latvia, on 24 April, a company of paratroopers from the 173<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team<sup>28</sup> landed in Camp Adazi. MOD Latvia stated that “sending of the US soldiers to Latvia, bilateral cooperation and military exercises will improve capacity of cooperation between the US and Latvian soldiers.”<sup>29</sup> They remained in Latvia until the end of the year, when the rotation from other U.S. forces in Europe continued their reassurance mission.

The effects of the actions of the so-called Russian military and special forces widely known as “little green men”, led to a number Alliance’s responses in the Baltic region. There were various troop deployments, scaled-up military exercises and high-level political attention not seen earlier. It marked a fundamentally new era in strengthening the defence of the whole of the Alliance territory as well as considerably more intensive relations between the Latvia and the U.S. Efforts to deter against the possibility of Russian aggression started to play more substantial role.

U.S. security assistance to its European Allies, including Latvia, was streamlined first into the European Reassurance initiative (ERI)<sup>30</sup> and then in 2017 in the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). ERI was initially created as a one-year program with funding of one billion dollars. The White House explained that “a persistent U.S. air, land, and sea presence in the region, especially in Central and Eastern Europe”, is a necessary and appropriate show of support to allies [...] who are now deeply concerned by Russia’s occupation and

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<sup>28</sup> John Vandiver, John Harper, *Vicenza-based paratroops deploying to Poland, Baltics*, April 22, 2014, *Stars and Stripes*, available on <https://www.stripes.com/migration/vicenza-based-paratroops-deploying-to-poland-baltics-1.279295> accessed on June 24, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> See the web archive of the Ministry of Defence of Latvia <https://web.archive.org/web/20160305011955/http://www.sargs.lv/lv/Zinas/Latvija/2014/04/23-03.aspx#lastcomment> accessed on June 24, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> See the information on ERI <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support->

attempted annexation of Crimea and other provocative actions in Ukraine.”<sup>31</sup> This funding allowed for increased exercises and force presence across land, air and maritime domains as well a strengthened Baltic Air policing effort. ERI in Latvia resulted in the possibility to finally develop a military infrastructure – a task that was for a long time neglected by the Alliance, partially because of the collective perception that Russia would not use military intervention as a tool to pursue its foreign policy goals.

The Wales Summit of 2014 committed to “further enhance NATO’s ability to quickly and effectively reinforce [...] Allies, including through preparation of infrastructure, prepositioning of equipment and supplies, and designation of specific bases.”<sup>32</sup> American assistance in developing the main military training area in Latvia – Ādaži base – is hard to underestimate. In just a few years a collective effort by the host nation, the U.S. and Alliance funding has transformed this unique military area into an effective training ground, prepared to host the Alliance enhance Forward Presence Battle Group. The number of exercises grew considerably involving more soldiers than ever as well as larger force formations.

In order to meet the Congressional criteria for Overseas Contingency operations, since Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, ERI has been executed under a heading of Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR), “whose core mission is to enhance deterrence.”<sup>33</sup> With these changes ERI was renamed and became EDI thus reflecting the changes in North-Atlantic security and NATO’s increasing focus on deterring Russia from further aggression in Europe. The EDI represented an even more robust effort by the U.S. political and military leadership to show solidarity with Allies as well as strengthen their own efforts to tackle security challenges. EDI financial support allowed enhancing efforts to improve infrastructure and prepositioning, a more active cycle

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<sup>31</sup> See the Press statement and the Fact Sheet by the Office of the Press Secretary of White House <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support-> accessed on June 29, 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Para 8, NATO Wales Summit Declaration, available on [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) accessed on July 5, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Tanja Lažić, *European Deterrence Initiative: the Transatlantic Security Guarantee*, Briefing to the European Parliament, The European Parliament Research Service, 2018, available on [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625117\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS_BRI(2018)625117_EN.pdf) accessed on July 23, 2023.

of training and exercises as well as building partnership capacity.<sup>34</sup> Albeit all components of the OAR and the EDI are important to Latvia, probably the “first amongst equals” and thus the most important outcome of the EDI became a rotational presence of U.S. soldiers on Latvian soil. Though modest in its size, its political significance outweighs its numerical strength. Firstly, it allows for training together and increasing interoperability. Secondly, it allows U.S. forces to familiarize themselves with the region and with its specific operational requirements. It also demonstrates to Russia that any implementation of its aggressive foreign policy has to take into consideration the determination and strength of the Alliance and its largest member.

In the aftermath of the NATO Wales Summit the exercise tempo in Latvia increased. One exercise – DRAGOON RIDE – in 2015 for the first time trained the movement of large-scale military equipment through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and into Poland and Czech Republic. The experience this offered the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment was instrumental for later considerations when developing the conceptual outlook for Military Mobility and enablement in Alliance territory. Lessons learned from this exercise confirmed what was known already in 2010, namely, that a transport infrastructure in Latvia will have its substantial limitations should it need to receive a substantial number of Allied forces in case of contingency.

Later the same year another landmark event took place in Latvia. Efforts by MING leadership allowed for deployment to Lielvārde Air Base of a Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) *MQ-1 Predator*, making its appearance in Latvia a unique operation in European airspace. As it was stated by the Latvian MOD and MING: “The noncombat deployment allowed for country-wide corridors to tie-in to special use airspace to de-conflict civilian and military flights, as well as nationwide utilization of surveillance capabilities to support a broad range of government needs for Latvia. In addition, the operation tested an Air National Guard Wing’s ability to deploy an RPA to a forward location and establish

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<sup>34</sup> More specific information on the EDI can be found in *The European Deterrence Initiative: The Budgetary Overview*, Congressional Research Service, accessed on 7 July, 2023.



operations.”<sup>35</sup> Investment into Lielvārde Air Base has succeeded and it gradually turned into a certified all-weather 24/7 airport, which has a lot to do with efforts by SPP. MING continued to play a substantial role in the training program with LNAF by hosting the “NORTHERN STRIKE” exercise in Michigan, which since 2017, has become a yearly signature event for both partners. Cooperation expanded also into the cyber defence realm, where experts from National Guard units in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania developed cooperation with their SPP states and involved EUCOM, opening a whole new area of expertise and facilitated development of capabilities relevant to both cyber security and cyber defence.<sup>36</sup>

NATO’s Warsaw Summit in 2016 became an even more significant milestone for strengthening deterrence efforts. Newly established Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) Battle groups would arrive in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in 2017. **Together with the rotational presence of the U.S. troops, the EFP established the Alliance posture that provides a vital tripwire against potential Russian aggression.** Politically, in the aftermath of the Summit on August 23, 2016 the Presidents of the United States, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia issued a Joint Declaration in which they reconfirmed their focus on “land, air and maritime defense; border security; law enforcement; national resilience; and transnational threats, with the aim to improve intra- and intergovernmental coordination and create regional efficiencies.”<sup>37</sup> The Declaration also highlighted the need to continue to explore areas such as cyber defense, resilience, energy security, and critical infrastructure protection, which clearly points to the broader spectrum of security issues that need to be tackled in the context of current threats and risks.

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<sup>35</sup> *Michigan-Latvia: 25 Years of Partnership*, Michigan National Guard and the Ministry of Defence of Latvia, 2018, 66.

<sup>36</sup> NATO recognized cyber as a planning domain during 2016 Warsaw Summit. See para 70-71, NATO Summit declaration, available on [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm) accessed on July 23, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Joint Declaration on Increased Security and Defense Cooperation between the United States, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, available on [https://lv.usembassy.gov/joint-declaration-increased-security-defense-cooperation-united-states-estonia-latvia-lithuania/?\\_ga=2.60781421.1158029924.1689470919-569846024.1689302939](https://lv.usembassy.gov/joint-declaration-increased-security-defense-cooperation-united-states-estonia-latvia-lithuania/?_ga=2.60781421.1158029924.1689470919-569846024.1689302939) retrieved on July 13, 2023. The date of the Joint Declaration is no coincidence – 23 August in the Baltic States traditionally is remembered due to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – the agreement between the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that partitioned Europe and paved the way for a Soviet occupation of the Baltic States.



**Overall, in the aftermath of the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2014 political and military activity between Latvia and the U.S. substantially intensified.**

Overall, in the aftermath of the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2014 political and military activity between Latvia and the U.S. substantially intensified. It expanded in size and scope as well as covered more operational domains. Ten years into Latvian NATO membership, Russia was clearly on a deliberate collision course with the West. Notwithstanding the coherence of the position of NATO and the EU on Russia's continuous aggression, the perception of Russian behaviour in the international system was far from a unified viewpoint. Russian expansionism was taken seriously in the Baltics. Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians and Poles, however, were often a lone voice in various international fora warning about what would be yet to come.

## **TOWARDS THE BALTIC SECURITY INITIATIVE AND BEYOND**

The next Russian attack on Ukraine took place on the early morning of 24 February 2022, destroying not only the last remnants of the European security architecture after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, but also the post-World War II construct of security, agreed within the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. If in the aftermath of the attack on Ukraine in 2014, the damage to international regimes and confidence building measures such as the Open Skies Treaty and Vienna document was profound, they still, to the certain degree, remained applicable for their original purpose. The full-scale attack of 2022, however, made them *de facto* non-functioning and not suitable for any meaningful conversation between Russia and the democratic European states. Moreover, strategic stability suffered substantially as a result of

continuous Russian violations of the INF Treaty<sup>38</sup> and withdrawal from the New START.<sup>39</sup>

**For the Baltic States' security and defence community the very fact of Russian aggression was hardly a surprise. "We told you so!", was one of the most used phrases in the aftermath of the Russian attack.<sup>40</sup> There has been evidence and arguments about growing Russian military build-up and increased political rhetoric related to restoring the "greatness of Russia" for quite a time. "We should have listened to our Baltic friends" became a common theme in many of the public statements of global leaders.<sup>41</sup>**

Russian aggression intensified concerns over the security of the Baltic States and those were swiftly addressed by the U.S. and Allies including about what would be the next steps in strengthening deterrence and defence of the Alliance and its most exposed members. A few hours before the Russian incursion in Ukraine, around 300 soldiers of the U.S. 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne brigade arrived in Ādaži base for training with their Latvian counterparts. A day later the U.S. forces from the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry joined them for exercise SABER STRIKE 22 further enhanced by the EUCOM deployment of "AH-64 Apache"

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<sup>38</sup> The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, signed in 1987 by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. According to NATO, "under the INF Treaty, the United States and Russia cannot possess, produce or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 to 5,500 kilometres, or possess or produce launchers of such missiles." On 4 December 2018 the United States, supported by NATO Allies, declared Russia in material breach of the Treaty, leading to The United States' decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty on 2 August 2019. See NATO webpage at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_166100.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_166100.htm) accessed on July 20, 2023.

<sup>39</sup> New START – The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms entered into force on February 5, 2011. It limits the number of warheads and launchers of deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments. Information available at <https://www.state.gov/new-start/> accessed on July 20, 2023. Putin on February 21, 2023 addressing the Duma announced that it will suspend its membership in the New START Treaty.

<sup>40</sup> Stuart Lau, *We told you so! How the West didn't listen to the countries that know Russia best*, Politico, March 9, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> See for example statement by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, available at State of the Union address on September 14, 2022 in European Parliament, available on [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_22\\_5493](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_5493) accessed on July 21, 2023. Similarly, see statement of the President of France Emmanuel Macron on May 31, 2023, available <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-macron-offers-mea-culpa-eastern-eu-nations-russia-2023-05-31/> accessed on July 21, 2023.

helicopters. On June 29, 2022, during the Madrid Summit, the President of the U.S. Joe Biden announced an increase of the presence of U.S. forces in Europe, including Latvia.<sup>42</sup> Reaction to the Russian aggression was to address the immediate needs of deterrence and send an unambiguous message to Russia that the U.S., together with other NATO Allies, will be firm in their response to any attempts to doubt the Alliance's resolve. By the end of 2022 the U.S. commitment to maintain rotational<sup>43</sup> deployments in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia had taken the longer-term perspective as well as a more integrated approach in terms of the composition of such deployments. **The number of the U.S. forces in Latvia has been scaled up and down according to the tasks performed. In Spring 2022 there were approximately 1000 U.S. soldiers in Latvia, according to State Secretary Anthony Blinken.<sup>44</sup> Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin visited more than 600 soldiers in Ādaži base as part of his visit to Latvia in August 2022. Increased U.S. presence is maintained also in 2023 after a commitment expressed by President Biden in the NATO Madrid Summit.<sup>45</sup>**

Even before Russian aggression re-entered its active phase in February 2022, efforts were made to consolidate the approach to the U.S. security assistance for the Baltic States with a more active role played by the Congress thereby giving this assistance greater political importance. It has not been the case in the previous period of military cooperation, therefore the factors underlying this legislative action merit attention in this report.

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<sup>42</sup> *Biden bolsters long-term U.S. military presence in Europe*, available on <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-says-us-changing-force-posture-europe-based-threat-2022-06-29/> retrieved on July 13, 2023

<sup>43</sup> Often in the military terminology this persistent rotational presence is called – "heel-to-toe" due to its continuity as well as ability to provide mobility and higher readiness of troops during the training. It is often used as opposed to permanent stationing of troops that requires much larger infrastructure associated with such deployment.

<sup>44</sup> Remarks by Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs at a Joint Press Availability, available at the web page of the U.S. Embassy in Latvia. See <https://lv.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-latvian-foreign-minister-edgars-rinkevics-at-a-joint-press-availability/> retrieved on July 15, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> See remarks by the U.S. President Joe Biden at the NATO Madrid Summit, available on <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/06/29/remarks-by-president-biden-and-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-madrid-spain/> accessed on July 26, 2023.

The U.S. assistance provided to the defence and security sector of Latvia was always seen as part of a broader regional approach. ERI and EDI appeared to be very successful instruments in providing necessary security assistance and to boost certain areas of capability development. In the context of the deteriorating security environment due to Russia`s continued aggression, responses by Allies needed to be even more robust and even more coordinated and consolidated across Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. For years the U.S. defence planners have seen the three States as one operational region. The evolving security situation presented a good opportunity to lay out a more synchronized approach to defence assistance in the Baltics and to benefit substantially from strong defence cooperation between the three states reaching back to the very beginning of their regained independence in 1991.

**“The evolving security situation presented a good opportunity to lay out a more synchronized approach to defence assistance in the Baltics and to benefit substantially from strong defence cooperation between the three states reaching back to the very beginning of their regained independence in 1991.**

Since mid 1990-ties the U.S. provided financial assistance to Latvia defence and security sector predominantly through FMF and IMET.<sup>46</sup> During the last five years the U.S. Congress has recognized the need to build a greater capacity to resist aggression by the Russian Federation in the Baltic States. For example, in the National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA) for the FY 2018 it was already stipulated that a more coherent approach towards the

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<sup>46</sup> FMF – Foreign Military Funding – a U.S. government program that enables eligible partner nations to purchase U.S. defense articles, services, and training. IMET – International Military Education and Training provides training and education on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations.

Baltic States efforts can be applied.<sup>47</sup> There is however no credible information at this point as to what extent this authority was used by either the Baltic States or the U.S. administration. A year later the U.S. Congress supported “robust United States security cooperation with, and security assistance for, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, including through continuous and enduring presence of United States forces, training and support activities of United States special operations forces, and increased joint training and exercises to deter aggression, promote interoperability, build resilience, and enable NATO to take collective action if required.”<sup>48</sup> It also encouraged exploring “transitioning the Baltic air policing mission of NATO to a Baltic air defense mission”<sup>49</sup> as well as “support multilateral efforts to improve maritime domain awareness in the Baltic Sea.”<sup>50</sup>

The NDAA for FY 2020 introduced a more focused approach to the security of the Baltic States. It pointed to a need for a Baltic defence assessment (and tasked the Pentagon and the State Department jointly to provide one) as well as an extension and modification of security assistance for the Baltic countries.<sup>51</sup> Amongst other points, for the first time, it indicated the need for increasing the rotational and forward presence, improvement of counter unmanned aerial system capabilities, improvement in logistics and infrastructure as well as activities to improve cyber defence and electronic

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<sup>47</sup> See Section 1297 D., National Defense Authorization Act for a Fiscal Year 2018 at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text> accessed on June 29, 2023. Security assistance for Baltic Nations for Joint Program for Interoperability and Deterrence Against Aggression. In short, the Congress agreed that a joint program of the Baltic nations to improve their interoperability and build their capacity to deter and resist aggression by the Russian Federation. As part of this program the Baltic States could be able to jointly agree to procure defense articles and services such as actionable intelligence, unmanned aerial tactical surveillance systems; lethal assistance; Air defense radars and anti-aircraft weapons [...] One of the requirements of this Act was the need for “A detailed assessment on how the joint program will improve the interoperability of the Baltic nations and build their capacity to deter and resist aggression by the Russian Federation.” It was also stipulated that the “total amount of assistance provided pursuant to subsection may not exceed \$100,000,000.”

<sup>48</sup> See Section 1248, National Defense Authorization Act for a Fiscal Year 2019 at <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf> accessed on June 29, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Section 1246, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1790/text> accessed on June 29, 2023.

warfare.<sup>52</sup> It also increased the amount of assistance to three countries to \$125 million.<sup>53</sup>

By 2020 Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania had reached a level of defence spending standing at 2 per cent of their GDPs. All three were viewed as frontrunners in the Alliance not only in terms of defence investment, but also in burden sharing, defence investment as well as Host Nation Support. There was also a growing understanding about the region as “particularly vulnerable to potential Russian aggression.”<sup>54</sup>

Latvia, alongside its Baltic neighbours, also considered that the security situation required more robust deterrence efforts that would include a longer-term outlook to both security assistance and the U.S. military presence in the region. In this spirit the ministers of defence of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, in spring 2020, proposed to the United States Congress to consider launching the Baltic Security Assistance Initiative in order to carry a strong political and military signal and to significantly increase the capability of the armed forces of the Baltic States. They also proposed expanding cooperation into capability areas such as Maritime Situational awareness, ammunition, C4ISR<sup>55</sup> and Special Forces. This would come on top of ongoing efforts to boost air defence capabilities in the region.

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<sup>52</sup> See Section 1248, National Defense Authorization Act for a Fiscal Year 2019 at <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf> accessed on June 29, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. At the same time there is also funding available for projects under Countering Russian Influence Fund that by the end of 2022 made available approximately \$1.5 billion for “civil society organizations and other entities [...] for rule of law, media, cyber, and other programs that strengthen democratic institutions and processes, and counter Russian influence and aggression.” There were \$73,278,170 designated for projects in Latvia according to State Department, Report of the Office of Inspector general, December 2022, available on [https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report\\_pdf\\_file/aud-mero-23-09.pdf](https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-mero-23-09.pdf) accessed on July 21, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> See Jan van Tol, Christopher Bassler, Katherine Kjellstrom Elgin, Tyler Hacker, *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, IV, Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2022, available on [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8312\\_\(Deterrence\\_Defense\\_Baltic\)\\_web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8312_(Deterrence_Defense_Baltic)_web.pdf) accessed on June 30, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> In absence of a unified definition, I would like to provide a contribution, defining C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence and Surveillance) as term used to describe the process of collecting and distributing data about adversary's actions, available in real time and giving military commanders and political leadership sufficient options for deterrence, defence and battle management, including identifying enemy targets.

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**The U.S. Congress labelled the security assistance to three Baltic States as the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI) with NDAA appropriations for FY 2021 in the amount of \$169 million.**

The U.S. Congress labelled the security assistance to three Baltic States as the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI) with NDAA appropriations for FY 2021 in the amount of \$169 million.<sup>56</sup> **Subsequently, in 2022 and 2023 BSI gained its brand name through a parallel effort in Congress and in the Senate<sup>57</sup>, where legislation within NDAA was introduced and aimed to make BSI a standalone piece of legislation.** To date this proposal has not gained support by both Chambers of Congress. Nevertheless, \$180 million was appropriated in FY 2022 and \$225 million for FY 2023 as part of the NDAA. Through this legislation, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Defense to “implement a Security Cooperation including the transfer of defense articles and services; military-to-military exercises; military education, training, and advising; and capacity building of partner security forces”.<sup>58</sup>

In order to maintain awareness of the defence cooperation between the U.S. and three Baltic States, in April 2023, the ministers of defence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania addressed Congress and provided their outlook on the next steps that should be taken in order to strengthen defence capabilities at

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<sup>56</sup> Guidance through the process on the BSI in the U.S. Congress can be found in an update by the Congressional Research Service *Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Background and U.S.-Baltic Relations*, updated on September 29, 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Senators Richard Durbin (Democrat from Illinois) and Chuck Grassley (Republican from Iowa), both Co-Chairs of a Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus during the 117th Congress introduced a “Baltic Defense and Deterrence Act” (Introduced on March 29, 2022, Senate reference - S.3950, available on the Congress webpage at [www.Congress.gov](http://www.Congress.gov)). This was in parallel introduced in the Congress by Representative Don Bacon (Republican from Nebraska) and Representative Ruben Gallego (Democrat from Arizona), both Co-Chairs of the Congressional Baltic Caucus.

<sup>58</sup> Defense Primer: DOD “Title 10” Security Cooperation, Congressional Research Service, updated May 17, 2021.



NATO's Eastern flank. **In a letter sent to the members of Congress, Ināra Mūrniece, Hanno Pevkur and Arvydas Anušauskas made clear that “though temporally degraded in military might and having warfighting shortfalls, Russia will remain the most imminent and persistent military threat to NATO and the Baltic States. Russia will continue attempts in exploiting its perceived advantages in geography and time, including using Belarus as a military proxy. Because of Russia’s strategy, backed by nuclear and non-nuclear strategic weapons, exploited by use of tools such as cyber and counter-space, it will continuously pose risks to vital US and Allied interests.”**<sup>59</sup> The ministers also enumerated the six most critical regional capability gaps in the Baltics that should be addressed by the next steps in security cooperation. These are – Integrated Air and Missile Defense; Maritime Situational Awareness; Baltic regional long range fire capability; Ammunition; C4ISR, and Special Forces. Moreover, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania urged the US to take long-term decisions related to “the sustainment of persistent rotational forward stationed combat-ready US forces and capabilities in the Baltic States”. They also asked “to support Baltic States’ divisional framework capacity building by deploying divisional level enablers as fire, army aviation, ISTAR, Cyber Electromagnetic Warfare platforms” as well as “to facilitate and identify key requirements for the strengthening of defensive Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities and indications and warnings along Europe’s Eastern flank as outlined in the U.S. National Defense Strategy 2022.”<sup>60</sup>

A discussion on NDAA for the FY 2024 is substantially burdened by the internal U.S. discussions on the fiscal debt ceiling. This is the most important single factor that determined support for the Baltic Security Initiative in the Senate at the level of \$228 million.<sup>61</sup> Precise breakdown of this funding to the various U.S. government programs is yet to be seen, but in any case, it will directly contribute to the development of missing capabilities in the LNAF or will mitigate shortfalls that could not be otherwise addressed. The

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<sup>59</sup> Letter of Ministers of Defense of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the U.S. Congress, April 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Bill Summary on the NDAA FY24, available on <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/majority/bill-summary-defense-fiscal-year-2024-appropriations-bill> accessed on July 28, 2023.

House of Representatives, in its decision before sending for final deliberations in the Senate, made clear that the Baltic States are “model NATO Allies” and that “the United States should pursue consistent efforts focused on defense and security assistance, coordination, and planning.”<sup>62</sup> The Senate also requested an update on the DOD funding “on the spending plan for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 and projected funding requirements for fiscal years 2024, 2025, and 2026.”<sup>63</sup> The DOD also has to provide “a strategy to deepen security cooperation with the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania”<sup>64</sup> in order to enhance regional planning and cooperation among the Baltic states, “particularly with respect to long-term regional capability projects; and enhance the Baltic states’ defenses and resiliency.”<sup>65</sup> Overall, the decision by Congress points towards the long term interest of the U.S. in the security of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and allows for further possibilities for defence cooperation and enhancing of critical capabilities needed for defence of the region.

## **CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC ADAPTATION AND AREAS TO EXPLORE TO BROADEN COOPERATION**

30 years of military cooperation and a strategic partnership between Latvia and the United States can serve as a great example and a template of this type of engagement between many other countries. What started in 1992 as a cautious attempt to formulate a framework for civil-military engagement has turned into a flourishing and active exchange of experience resulting in an increased military expertise and introduction of unique military capabilities in the National Armed Forces of Latvia. It could hardly have been predicted during the first visit of MING experts to Zemessardze in May 1993.

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<sup>62</sup> Section 1233, NDAA, Baltic Security Initiative, July 14, 2023, available on <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/2670/text> accessed on July 16, 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Section 1237, NDAA, Report on progress on multi-year strategy and plan for Baltic security cooperation, July 11, 2023, available on <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/s2226/BILLS-118s2226rs.pdf> accessed on July 20, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

The State Defence Concept of Latvia makes it clear that the United States “has supported our country throughout history and has helped significantly strengthen our state defence ever since we restored our independence”<sup>66</sup>. **This support that results in military presence, training and development of new cutting-edge capabilities was only possible due to political support by both democratic and republican U.S. administrations as well as the commitment of all Latvian governments so far.** As a sign of such a U.S. commitment we can see that according to the available data since 2001, Latvia has received more than \$470 million in U.S. security assistance.<sup>67</sup>

The success of the past should not turn into complacency about the future. The global security environment remains unstable with autocracies continuing attacks on democracies, their values and way of life. More defence and security cooperation between democratic states around the globe must be sought, to strengthen partnerships and mutual support using NATO at its core. U.S. leadership in such an environment remains indispensable. It is, however, unclear how near future developments in U.S. domestic politics will echo its global engagements. The current emphasis on worldwide partnerships must prevail over the voices calling for limiting engagement or a withdrawal from international affairs.

Several factors in a broader strategic context will serve as a catalyst for the future of this cooperation. One of them and probably the most critical one – Russia’s continued aggression and the potential revival of its military after humiliating inefficiency in Ukraine, will require persistent attention from the U.S. leadership and NATO to Latvia and the Baltic Sea region. Deliberate

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<sup>66</sup> State Defence Concept, The Ministry of Defence of Latvia, see [https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Valsts%20aizsardzibas%20konceptija\\_ENG\\_0.pdf](https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Valsts%20aizsardzibas%20konceptija_ENG_0.pdf) accessed on 25 June 2023. The Ministry of Defence of Latvia is in preparation of a new State Defence Concept that needs to be submitted to the Saeima by Fall of 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Available data from 2001. However, there was a funding of Foreign Military Financing and International Military Education and Training some years before that. The amount of assistance is therefore higher than mentioned here. See [www.foreignassistance.gov](http://www.foreignassistance.gov) accessed on July 12, 2023. According to data, the MOD receives vast majority of the assistance. However, there are also other recipients of the security assistance in the areas such as various areas of law enforcement, non-proliferation export control program, educational institutions and others.

intent to destabilize the situation in the region by Russia and its Belarus puppet-government should be seriously considered. Latvia has already responded with a clear commitment to increase defence spending reaching 3 per cent of GDP in a few years and strengthening its institutional and societal resilience. The next five to seven years could be particularly decisive as a wide support for aggression in Ukraine is transforming Russian society and puts it in a position of ever-growing demand for conflict with the West and NATO. If not defeated in Ukraine, Russia would still be left capable of waging a range of military operations from hybrid warfare and limited incursions to full scale attacks. In almost any conceivable scenario it can be seen as willing to do exactly that to sustain its ongoing aggression. Russia will pose a range of persistent threats to its neighbours in years to come.

**“Understanding Russia remains vital – contrary to the leaders of the old Soviet regime, leadership of today`s Kremlin believes that it can win the war against the West. This constantly drives putinists to grave miscalculations – and probably, the next could be even more catastrophic than the one in Ukraine.**

Understanding Russia remains vital – contrary to the leaders of the old Soviet regime, leadership of today`s Kremlin believes that it can win the war against the West. This constantly drives putinists to grave miscalculations – and probably, the next could be even more catastrophic than the one in Ukraine. Therefore, NATO should not rest on its belief that resolve and Allied unity alone will convince Russia of abstaining from military confrontation. If to the former Prime Minister of France George Clemenceau war was “too important to be left to military”, maybe peace is too important to be left to diplomats. Growth of defence spending across NATO nations must be translated into next generation of superior capabilities backing diplomatic efforts at maintaining peace and deterrence. The industrial capacity of NATO nations has to be substantially increased and prepared to supply the needs of a

protracted contingency be it with Russia or other rogue actors. Resilience and will to prevail must enable democratic societies to maintain strength in facing an existential threat arising from multiple directions.

Related to the aforementioned, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO will require a colossal strategic adaptation as the initiative in the Baltic Sea region swings sharply in favour of NATO, and the Alliance should not waste a single moment to position itself as the dominating force and impose its will on Russia, diminishing and later denying the latter's ability to threaten NATO and EU countries of the region. This includes a need to nullify earlier Russian perceived advantages in establishing its version of Anti Access Area Denial by effectively employing NATO Integrated Air and Missile defence, ensuring the freedom of movement of Alliance forces in the maritime domain as well as safeguarding cyber space, the information domain and critical infrastructure. There is a need to better understand, for example, whether an international regime similar to the Montreux Convention should be considered for the Baltic Sea, clearly limiting Russian military adventurism and showing Russia that the "window to Europe" has ceased to exist and Russia must seek, should it truly desire, "a proper door" through which to enter discussions on European security in an acceptable and sustainable manner. The critical point is that long term stability in the Baltic Sea region seems hardly possible without the presence and active stance of the U.S. due to its unsurpassed ability to project a full range of capabilities and sustain deterrence in cooperation with its Allies.

In light of this, the size of the U.S. military in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania and in the vicinity of Suwalki Gap should be further aligned with the nature of the Russian-Belarus threat foreseeing the further increase of the quantity and quality of such forces. This should happen in parallel and in support of efforts by the Alliance's military leadership to establish effective command and control of its forces at the Northeast of NATO. Development of the associated infrastructure for prepositioning war materiel and stockpiling supplies still lags behind the need to support deterrence. Latvian authorities are hurrying to develop new training ranges, including "Sēlija" – the largest in the region. Even elevated defence spending will not lead to success for Latvia alone. Alliance and U.S. assistance needs to come urgently to help.

For Latvia, in the context of the above-mentioned, four shorter term capability advancements and three longer term policy developments should be considered.

Firstly, the ongoing acquisition process for the most modern weapon systems with the most pronounced effect on the defence capabilities of Latvia must be finalized and these systems delivered in the shortest possible time. Once fully integrated, the long-range rocket artillery systems (HIMARS) that Latvia is striving to purchase from the U.S. as well as the coastal defence system<sup>68</sup> will play an important deterrent role and serve as an effective enabler for Latvia's defence efforts.

Secondly, as air defence remains one of the top priorities for Latvia's defence and it is prioritized as a cooperation area by U.S. Congress and U.S. military leadership, every effort must be made to make it credible and effective against the multiplicity of threats that Latvia and its NATO neighbours face. The joint Latvian-Estonian purchase of the NATO interoperable IRIS-T air defence system from Germany is just a visible part of the process. Equally important is to connect and integrate it with the ground segment, radars and sensors and command and control solution. This is a complex task that normally would require a long-term effort. Unfortunately, the nature of the current security environment puts Latvia in the need to expedite the solution, which simultaneously must be in the persistent focus of the U.S. and NATO defence planning community. To complete all the requirements for an effective integrated air defence in the region, U.S. expertise and availability of its security assistance is indispensable.

Thirdly, developing unmanned aerial vehicles' (UAVs) capabilities and similarly – being able to counter similar adversary capabilities – opens a particularly interesting area of cooperation with the U.S. Many countries and industries are currently investing in development of these systems. Bearing in mind many layers of UAV technologies as well as the industrial segment

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<sup>68</sup> See the Press release by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency available on <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/latvia-naval-strike-missile-coastal-defense-system> accessed on July 21, 2023.

already existing in Latvia, there is enough room for developing further cooperative solutions to achieve a better understanding of operational utility and maximizing efficiency of such systems.

Fourthly, enabling the previous three developments, effective C4ISR, including secured high-speed data links, will be needed in any future operational environment and has to be expeditiously developed. Latvia needs an infrastructure that allows effectively employing command and control networks across the operational domains. In warfare that can be waged in real time conditions, operational advantage over an enemy can be achieved by using uninterrupted and secure communications. It is, in many cases, a matter of saving the lives of soldiers and allowing for speed of manoeuvre that the enemy cannot match. Solutions sought together with the U.S. forces and defence industry could be instrumental for ensuring such information superiority.

There are also some longer-term developments that could be considered for the future of Latvian and the U.S. defence cooperation.

Firstly, the partnership between LNAF and MING, as part of the SPP, should certainly be continued in order to provide for training, combat readiness and strengthening ties between the Latvian U.S. militaries. Lessons identified and learned from the combat operations of Ukraine defending from the Russian aggression will be paramount to define the next steps in partnership. **The SPP will continue to be an instrument of cooperation, capability development and a source of inspiration for advancing ideas that would not otherwise see the light of day.** In addition, there are other aspects that could be considered, since the SPP is by no means limited to military cooperation. The U.S. Code<sup>69</sup> gives sufficient authority to develop cooperation with the “governmental organizations of a foreign country whose primary functions include disaster response or emergency response”.<sup>70</sup> Such an engagement between Latvia and the U.S. would mean taking into account ideas regarded in the very beginning of the SPP and integrating internal security in a broader

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<sup>69</sup> The U.S. Code – a compilation of codification by subject matter of the general and permanent laws of the United States.

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 341.

national security vision. Full exploitation of the SPP would also correspond to the spirit of the NATO Strategic Concept, in which the Allies declared to “pursue a more robust, integrated and coherent approach to building national and Alliance-wide resilience against military and non-military threats and challenges to our security”.<sup>71</sup> Areas mentioned in NATO baseline requirements for resilience and commitments taken recently<sup>72</sup> allow for various forms of cooperation between Latvia and Michigan.

Secondly, there is a need for further development of infrastructure for swift reception of U.S. and Allied forces on Latvian soil. Latvia has invested a lot over the last years to make its Host Nation Support commensurate with the presence of Allies. Yet further expansion of these efforts in terms of prepositioning of items necessary for Allied forces, storage facilities as well as associated transport infrastructure for Military Mobility, remains a costly and time consuming effort. Limited availability of resources points to much larger attention needed by NATO, the European Union and EUCOM.

Thirdly, there are near endless possibilities to consider new technological developments in the operational environment, cyber defence, sustainable energy solutions as well as autonomous systems and Artificial Intelligence. **Latvia is leading efforts to develop military and civilian synergies in the development and testing of next generation wireless technologies through its 5G test range in Camp Ādaži. There is a need to better understand the impact of these technologies on the operational art. Most of these new technological developments are by nature dual use, which presents an opportunity for cooperation between academia, industrial actors and government institutions beyond Latvian and the U.S. militaries.** The experience

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<sup>71</sup> Para 26, NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.

<sup>72</sup> According to updates taken at NATO Brussels summit of 2021 these areas are – continuity of government and critical government services, energy supplies, uncontrolled movement of people, food and water, mass casualties, civil communications, and civil transportation. At the same time in a separate document – Strengthen Resilience Commitment – nations also committed to address the impact of emerging technologies, to secure next-generation communications systems and to protect technology and intellectual property; to bolster efforts to meet challenges to energy security, and to deal with the impact of natural hazards. See Strengthen Resilience Commitment, June 14, 2021, available on NATO webpage [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_185340.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_185340.htm) accessed on July 22, 2023.



of Michigan State in the car industry, biomedicine, defence and aerospace could be explored for developing innovative solutions relevant to both civilian and military areas.

These proposals mentioned do not constitute an exhaustive list of needs or directions of work already pursued by the Latvian national security, defence and military experts. Nor they are necessarily the only ones upon whose implementation a success of deterrence in the future rest. Thus, one can be sure that the next decade for the topics discussed in this paper will be dynamic and rich. There will be plenty of aspects to analyse and build upon looking into the uncertain and increasingly volatile future. The partnership between Latvia and the U.S. in defence will continue to play a vital role in Latvian national security efforts. This partnership, along with similar efforts in other states around the Baltic Sea, will continue to prioritize deterrence and defence against Russian aggression. Ensuring efficiency of these efforts is vital for maintaining peace and stability for Latvia, its Baltic neighbours and for the entire European continent.

## THE LATVIAN TRANSATLANTIC ORGANISATION (LATO)

LATO is a non-governmental organisation established in 2000. Its aims are to inform the public about NATO and Latvia's membership in the Alliance, to organise informative public events about Latvian and Euro-Atlantic security issues, to promote partnerships with other countries, to lay the foundations for Latvia's international role as a member of NATO, and to foster the international community's understanding of Latvia's foreign and security policy aims. During the past 20 years, LATO has numerous achievements to be proud of. LATO organises the most influential security conference in the Baltic Sea region: The Rīga Conference facilitates discussion about issues affecting the transatlantic community and annually gathers international experts in foreign affairs and security/defence matters, policy makers, journalists, and business representatives. LATO promotes policy relevant research on topics such as gender equality, peace and security, resilience in the borderland, and the subjective perception of security. A series of various initiatives intended for increasing the interest of Latvian, Baltic and European youth in security related issues have been put in motion, including an annual future leader's forum and masterclasses for young political leaders. LATO's most recent projects are several information campaigns aimed to inform and educate wider publics about resilience, transatlantic bonds, national and international security. LATO has the SecureBaltics.eu internet platform, which serves as an information hub for those who are eager to join the debate on international security.

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## **PROGRAM WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

LATO launched its first initiative at the Rīga Conference 2020 with a discussion as part of focus on the Women, Peace and Security Initiative. In 2021, a series of different activities on behalf of LATO have been established including special discussion in the Rīga Conference and upcoming publications and a documentary film. In 2022, we hosted two discussions on the WPS agenda in the Rīga Conference. In the second part of the year, we conducted a mentoring program and offered a special training course for young women professionals dealing with security issues or interested in WPS agenda. In 2023, The Rīga Conference continues to lead the pace with a dedicated discussions in the Rīga Conference and a new mentoring program has been launched for aspiring young leaders.

The promise of the Women, Peace and Security agenda set by the United Nations provides a framework for sustainable peace amidst a global crisis, and it is powered by a fearless women's movement that knows few bounds. But, while the agenda has strong support from governments all over the world, that support hasn't plugged the persistent implementation gaps. This is also the case in Latvia and the Baltics.

The general public's knowledge on the importance, leadership and influence of women enlisted within the defence, military and security sectors are quite minimal and their role in defence is often overlooked. Therefore, LATO has been working on developing a series of activities with an overarching aim of raising awareness and understanding on women in the defence, military and security sectors.

The LATO Mentoring Program targets young women professionals from Latvia to connect them with multiple highly ranked, highly achieving and highly reputed women professionals in the defence and foreign affairs sectors. By connecting both the successful and the aspiring leaders, the program bridges the gap in understanding and support and aims to create a long-term network of like-minded individuals. Thus, LATO not only encourages the growth of young professionals and raises awareness of the need for such encouragement at different levels. The mentoring program is supported by the German Embassy in Riga and NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

## INFORMATION SPACE SECURITY PROJECT #BORDERRESILIENCE

From 1 November to 31 December 2021 the #BorderResilience information space security project was implemented under the leadership of the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO). The project included four workshops with eight simulation sessions in the Eastern border regions of Latvia. The project aimed to identify the practices of border communities in countering information attacks, especially on border security issues. The experience and knowledge offered by the communities was used to develop policy recommendations and further steps to promote information security in society with the special emphasis on the border regions. At the end of the project, the results, evaluation and recommendations were presented for the stakeholders, who took further steps in implementation on new information security-oriented policies. The final report of the project is available on the websites of the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation [www.lato.lv](http://www.lato.lv) and [www.securebaltics.eu](http://www.securebaltics.eu). Methodological and social campaign materials were also developed. The project is turned to become a strategic initiative, which encompasses new projects working together to serve the needs of the larger communities.

The project was implemented in cooperation with the State Chancellery and the NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

## SECURE BALTICS

LATO holds an internet platform SecureBaltics ([www.securebaltics.eu](http://www.securebaltics.eu)).

The site gathers different materials – policy briefs, discussions, interviews, studies, educational materials – created in the framework of the Rīga Conference, as well as work from our partners. It is a stable platform that the Rīga Conference community can rely on and use as a credible source of information in the region.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the platform is to collect the know-how that is generated by the excellent minds gathered at the Rīga Conference on an annual basis. The Rīga Conference gathers regional and international experts in foreign policy and defence, academics, journalists, and business representatives by promoting the discussions on issues affecting the transatlantic community. It has been growing in influence since its inception in 2006.

Every year, for two days the National Library of Latvia is the centre of the most important regional discussions on security issues. However, it is not enough to engage in these discussions only once a year. Therefore, LATO developed SecureBaltics as a practical tool which can encourage the use of any resources and materials that have been produced as part of the Rīga Conference or its follow-up events.

### **Reach**

The platform provides materials in both, English and Latvian, in order to reach multiple audiences. It is intended for the traditional Rīga Conference community of opinion leaders and experts in foreign policy and defence matters as well as any other interested parties that could benefit from the generated materials such as high school teachers looking for study materials.

### **Vision**

LATO is working on SecureBaltics to become the go-to hub for resource associated with defence and security issues in the Baltics within the next few years.

### **Materials**

The platform SecureBaltics provides resources:

- For all interested parties, including expert community, in the form of interviews, policy briefs, commentaries on topical issues
- For teachers and lecturers in the form of study materials and tests that can be included in academic curriculum
- For students in the form of lectures and study materials, as well as interactive study materials through games.

### **Partners**

The SecureBaltics portal is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

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Airis Rikveilis is working in the Ministry of Defence of Latvia since 2001. He currently serves as a defence counsellor at the Embassy of Latvia in the United States. His previous assignments include an expert's position on the Common Security and Defence Policy in the Secretariat General of the European Commission as well as Chairmanship of NATO Allied Ground Surveillance Management Organization.



From 2013-2019 Airis Rikveilis took the position of defence counsellor at the Latvian delegation to NATO and the EU. His earlier positions in the in the Ministry of Defence, also entail a Director of Strategic Communication, Chief of Staff and National security advisor in the Defence Minister's office as well as Policy officer in the International relations department.

Airis Rikveilis also worked as visiting faculty member of the Latvian University, Baltic Defence College and National Defence Academy of Latvia, where he led courses on international organizations, media and diplomacy, Russian foreign policy and civil-military relations.

Airis Rikveilis holds a MS degree (cum laude) in National Security Affairs from the United States Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. He has been author of various publications about Strategic Culture, Latvia-Russia relations as well as evolving defence and security agenda in the Baltic Sea region. In parallel to professional expertise in defence policy and planning, his research interests also include areas of military mobility, resilience and cognitive warfare.



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