



# Executive Summary

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## THE SECURITY CONCERNS OF THE BALTIC STATES AS NATO ALLIES

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The three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania hold a special position among the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations, as they are the three full members of the Western Alliance that were once republics of the Soviet Union. This fact alone is characteristic of the radical nature of the changes that have taken place in the political and security context of NATO in just over 20 years. When the Baltic States regained their independence in 1991, they embarked on a course to become fully integrated with the West in the quickest possible time. To everyone's surprise, the Baltic States initiated a program of transformation and reform that was extremely successful. Part of the political transformation was a commitment made by all three nations in the early years of independence to become full members of the European Union (EU) and of NATO; this feat was accomplished in 2004 when the three Baltic States all joined the EU and NATO together.

Because of their shared history going back to the Middle Ages, and because of their shared experience of ruthless repression under Soviet tyranny, the Baltic States have formed a special block within NATO. If one is to generalize, one can say that the Baltic States have a political culture and a perspective on security that has much in common with the "new NATO" nations. However, within this eastern European group of NATO allies, there also exists the special perspective of the three Baltic nations. That special Baltic perspective is the focus of this monograph.

First, due to their shared history and similar political and economic conditions, the three Baltic States have carried out a high level of political, security, and economic cooperation since regaining independence in 1991. On security matters, the three states confer and coordinate efforts on a regular basis. The defense ministers and the military defense chiefs of the three states meet quarterly to discuss common issues. The armed forces of the three states train together and, in a unique program of multinational cooperation, have even created a single staff college and school of higher military education jointly owned by the three states. The common language of Baltic cooperation is English. Since the early-1990s, the Baltic States worked closely together to meet both EU and NATO standards and set the goal to join both organizations as quickly as possible.

Since 1991, the three Baltic States have closely identified with NATO and the United States as security partners. Beginning in the 1990s, the Baltic States committed small detachments of peacekeepers to the Balkans. After 2001, the Baltic contributions grew larger, with Baltic military detachments sent to the coalition operations in Iraq and significant forces (several hundred) committed to the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan. The close alliance in security matters with the West and the United States remains a central pillar of the national policies of the three Baltic States, and that is not likely to change.

One thing common to the policies and strategies of the Baltic States is an uneasy relationship

with Russia. Memories of ruthless Soviet oppression are still quite fresh. The often aggressive and confrontational attitude of the Russian regime toward the Baltic States on many issues also forces the Baltic States to worry about Russia. The difficult position of having Russia on their borders requires the Baltic States to reach out and try to develop friendly relations with Russia on economic and trade matters, and the Baltic States try to maintain an even and unemotional tone in their relations with Russia. Still, few, if any, of the leaders in the Baltics and of the Baltic States believe that the relations with Russia have been reset. Although the Baltic States' governments see any overt military action on the part of Russia as extremely unlikely, they do see a program of low-level pressure applied to the Baltic States through economic and informational campaigns and Russian propaganda campaigns geared to create distrust between the large Russian minority populations in the Baltics and the Baltic national governments. However, there are other security concerns as well for the Baltic States, and here one can see clear differences in the way each of the three countries views the long-term security situation.

This monograph is based on in-depth interviews with security policymakers and shapers from all three Baltic nations. The Baltic leaders are exceptionally well-educated and have a deep understanding of the American and European views. The interviews show that they fully understand the many differences that exist between the continental European perspective on security and the more global American perspective. These are people who follow the U.S. and European debates closely; for that reason alone, their views are interesting.

This monograph attempts to provide some insights into the thinking on security in the three Baltic States and to outline not only the policy thinking, but also the reasons for the Baltic perspectives that lie in the background. Although small nations, the three Baltic States have moved quickly in the past decades to develop high-tech economies and to make a serious contribution to the Western Alliance. As the Baltic States remain strongly committed allies and will continue to strongly support NATO and Western policies, it is also important that the United States take their perspectives into account in formulating strategies and policies for the future.

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