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An Airman's Perspective on NATO's Commitment to the Baltic States

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Since 2004, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined together in their accession to NATO, the Alliance's commitment to the Baltic Region has been strong and will remain so. As the senior Airman within the NATO Command Structure, I am working to build on this commitment through development of Baltic Air Power for the benefit of both the Alliance and the Baltic Nations.



A very visible demonstration of its dedication to the region is through the Baltic Air Policing mission. Air Policing is one of NATO's most important operations and special arrangements are made to ensure Baltic Air sovereignty. Alliance fighter jets are continuously hosted on Baltic soil, providing a close and ready response for when unidentified or unresponsive aircraft enter regional airspace. At a moment's notice, interceptors will launch and maneuver to positively identify target aircraft, all the while guided by the professional Baltic military personnel resident in the Karmelava and Amari control stations. The roar of fighter jet engines in the Baltic skies is reassurance of NATO's commitment to the Baltics, yet positive actions do not rest solely with Air Policing.

Over the last year, NATO, in concert with the Baltic Ministries of Defence, has conducted several Air-related training events designed to enhance Baltic capability and demonstrate competency. Taken together, the Baltic Region Training Events have involved not only Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but nations from across the Alliance. Each mission has been tailored to accomplish specific objectives that meet the overall aim of building capacity in Baltic regional forces, while providing valuable training to other NATO nations. NATO's most recent event took place last month and included an airdrop in Estonia and live air intercepts over Latvia and Lithuania. Future missions call for even more complex scenarios to include a combination of air transport and air-land integration training. Specifically, this September, NATO fighter jet aircraft will participate in an Estonian led exercise to certify their Joint Terminal Attack Controllers for deployed operations in Afghanistan. All these events directly relate to real-world situations, whether it is airdrop training for humanitarian relief operations or sharpening skills ahead of Baltic contributions to the International Security Assistance Force. These regional events provide valuable training to participating partners and enhance the capabilities of the forces in the Baltic states.

The Baltic States are committed to being producers, not just consumers, of Alliance security. This effort is tangible evidence of NATO commitment to this important region and the spirit of cooperation the member nations consistently display as part of the world's most successful alliance.

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