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Baltic Bulletin

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U.S. Congress supports the Baltic states in a dangerous region

By Anne Smith

The year 2022 was a wake-up call for the Baltic community and a test for the U.S. Congress. On the upside, Russia's unjustified war on Ukraine strengthened the already close relationship between the Baltic states and Congress.

The Baltic states have become leaders in Europe by meeting their NATO alliance defense spending obligations and are now among the top five contributors of assistance per GDP to Ukraine.

The U.S. and NATO stepped up to new security challenges, and BAFL is pleased that Congress continues to prioritize Baltic security. This support was highlighted in legislation funding the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI); this funding exceeded levels requested by the president in his 2023 budget. Congressional support in 2022 included appropriations to support Ukraine, legislation to hold Russia accountable and other regional programs that support the Baltic states.

Baltic Security Initiative

Over the past year, our priority was to promote co-sponsorship of the Baltic Defense and Deterrence Act, introduced in the House by Baltic Caucus co-chairs Don

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All eyes on Congress in 2023

By Anne Smith

The 118th United States Congress ushers in changes in leadership and committees and brings in newly elected members of Congress. Several of the 72 House Baltic Caucus members in the last legislative session have retired or lost their seats; however, the 14-member Senate Baltic Caucus remains unchanged.

BAFL hopes for bipartisan additions to the membership of both caucuses. We urge grassroots members to request senators and representatives who haven't joined a Baltic caucus to do so.

This year, BAFL will engage with Congress for continued, strong, bipartisan cooperation to support the Baltic nations. We will work not only with the caucuses, but also with the many non-caucus champions of legislation that supports the Baltic states.



BAFL's visit to D.C. in May 2022 focused on support for Ukraine. From left: Blue/Yellow Ukraine's Rima Ziuraitis and Jonas Ohman, U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson, BAFL advocacy advisor Anne Smith and BAFL president Conrad Mazeika. Photo: BAFL

2022 saw great forward momentum and significant gains in support of Baltic and NATO security

Major funding bills before the armed services and appropriations committees will allow the Baltic governments to increase their purchasing ability. Potential purchases include critical military hardware

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President's letter

Dear members, supporters and friends:

In his address to a Joint Session of Congress at the end of the year, President Zelensky reminded us that Ukraine is fighting not only for its own future, but also for the national security interests of the United States and our Baltic NATO allies.

Russia's unjustifiable and brutal invasion of Ukraine on February 24 last year truly tested us as a community. Baltic leaders had sounded the alarm on Russia's territorial ambitions as early as 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia and later in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. Our community had echoed these concerns, and now peace in the Baltic states was in jeopardy.

BAFL responded to Russia's invasion by expanding its direct legislative outreach to congressional offices and committees. BAFL board members held in-person meetings in D.C. in May and September as well as multiple virtual meetings with staff throughout the year.

We also successfully reached congressional staff and members of Congress through our Calls to Action. These CTAs allow grassroots members to send pre-populated letters to Congress urging support for crucial legislation. This includes funding for security upgrades for the Baltic

states through the Baltic Security Initiative, which is managed by the Pentagon and funded by Congress. As issues develop, we also promptly send letters to legislative offices and provide congressional staff with fact sheets.

Anne Smith, BAFL's new advocacy advisor who rejoined us in May, is an experienced government relations professional who worked with BAFL when we advocated for

2014, Blue/Yellow Ukraine has raised \$40 million to provide non-lethal military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Relationships forged during this time ultimately led to Jonas Ohman's riveting testimony before the U.S. Congressional Helsinki Commission in December.

Our communities must continue to demonstrate that they're willing to engage the local community and reach out to legislators. Continued grassroots advocacy and involving new generations of activists are crucial to ensuring continued freedom for the Baltic states and for regaining peace and security in Europe.

The year 2022 was difficult and a real test for the free world. We hope you'll continue supporting the Baltic nations with your activism and financial support. Both have kept BAFL active since 1981.

We note that our dear friend and ally Ivars Mičulis passed away in December. Ivars served on BAFL's Board of Directors for many years and will be sadly missed.

BAFL looks to 2023 with renewed vigor. The new 118th U.S. Congress will bring many changes and opportunities. Please stay tuned for news and updates, and keep an eye out for our new website.

Wishing you the best in 2023!
Ačiū! Paldies! Aitäh!

Conrad Mazeika
President
Baltic American Freedom League



From left: BAFL president Conrad Mazeika, Senator Richard Durbin and BAFL secretary Danute Mazeika in September 2022 at a U.S. Capitol reception celebrating 100 years of Baltic-U.S. diplomacy and the 25th anniversary of the Baltic caucuses. Photo: BAFL

Baltic state membership in NATO. Anne has also served as a staff member on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Anne's knowledge of the legislative process and national security policy is of tremendous value to our advocacy efforts.

Standing up for Ukraine

In May, BAFL accompanied Jonas Ohman—Blue/Yellow Ukraine's founder who is based in Lithuania—and Rima Ziuraitis—a BAFL director and Blue/Yellow USA's managing director—to D.C. Since

**...U.S. Congress** *cont'd from 1*

Bacon (R-NE) and Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and in the Senate by Baltic Freedom Caucus co-chairs Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA). This legislation would have authorized the BSI for five years and expanded it to include a State Department Economic Enhancement Initiative to address hybrid warfare, including cyber threats and economic coercion, and to bolster U.S.-Baltic trade and economic ties.

This prescient initiative is giving the Baltic states and NATO the means to immediately respond to any potential military action by Russia by making it highly unlikely that any such action would succeed. This change is much needed given the Baltic states' borders with Russia, Belarus's wartime complicity with Russia and the destabilizing role of Kaliningrad.

BAFL's primary concern in 2022 was to win support for legislation to address the new threats and to secure increased funding and authorization for the BSI to meet needs identified in a Pentagon 2020 Baltic Defense Assessment. The bill had strong bipartisan co-sponsorship. We hope that this expanded initiative will be considered by Congress this year.

2023 defense legislation

In December, the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by the president. The final NDAA includes strong language that supports not only the Baltic nations, but also other areas that BAFL endorses. The NDAA

- supports the Baltic Security Initiative by encouraging enhancements to critical capabilities that will strengthen Baltic security and NATO's deterrence and defense posture. The enhancements will include integrated air and missile defense, maritime domain awareness, long-range precision weapons, and command and control.
- directs increased data collection of Russian atrocities in Ukraine to hold Russia accountable for war crimes. It also allows assets seized from Russia's oligarchs to be used to fund the reconstruction of Ukraine. Asset seizures could result in billions of dollars in assistance.
- reiterates U.S. support for Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO and urges all NATO countries to follow suit. The U.S. Congress approved a resolution

to ratify Sweden's and Finland's membership last August. Approval was a giant step towards greater Baltic security.

- authorizes \$6 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative, which bolsters NATO-allied exercises to enhance the readiness of countries on the eastern flank.
- looks forward to strengthening U.S. force posture in Europe. The NDAA will redirect U.S. military construction funds to the Baltic states and NATO's eastern front and direct the Department of Defense to eliminate reliance on Russian energy at U.S. military installations in Europe. The NDAA acknowledges the need for the U.S. to work with NATO allies to collectively reconstitute weapons stock and provide "enhanced rotations to the Baltic countries."



The head of Blue/Yellow Ukraine, Jonas Ohman, presented Lithuanian ambassador Audra Pleplytė with a Ukrainian flag flown in from the battlefield. The meeting occurred in May 2022 at the Lithuanian Embassy in D.C. *From left:* BAFL's advocacy advisor Anne Smith, BAFL director and Blue/Yellow Ukraine managing director for the U.S. Rima Ziuraitis, Lithuanian Embassy NATO liaison Gediminas Sereika, Ambassador Pleplytė, Jonas Ohman and BAFL president Conrad Mazeika. *Photo:* BAFL

BAFL is gratified that Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2023 in the final days of 2022. It provides \$45 billion for Ukraine and \$225 million for the BSI—\$69.5 million more than the president's budget request.

The act also granted \$10 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to each Baltic state that supplements their ability to purchase defense equipment.

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...U.S. Congress

This congressional funding followed the Biden administration's announcement in October to allocate FMF of approximately \$144 million to Latvia, \$141 million to Lithuania and \$140.5 million to Estonia. This funding was previously authorized by Congress to recognize 17 countries that have sent funding to Ukraine and are most at risk of Russian aggression.

Both the FMF program and the BSI are vital to the Baltic states, which have significant defense needs such as "backfilling" weapons provided to Ukraine and upgrading their own capabilities.

D.C. outreach

In May, BAFL traveled to D.C. with Blue/Yellow Ukraine's Jonas Ohman and Rima Ziuraitis to discuss their crucial work in Ukraine. We greatly appreciate the assistance of Ambassador Audra Plepytė of Lithuania and Ambassador Oksana Markarova of Ukraine in welcoming Blue/Yellow to Washington and organizing a stakeholder meeting at Ukraine House.

BAFL traveled to D.C. once more in September to attend the 100 Years of Diplomatic Relations reception, which was hosted by the Baltic American Freedom Foundation and the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) and held in the U.S. Capitol. We also met more than a dozen staff and members of Congress to discuss support and concerns about pending legislation and had meetings with House and Senate leadership and committee staff.

In sum, 2022 saw great forward momentum and significant gains in support of Baltic and NATO security. BAFL believes strongly that grassroots action makes a difference in ensuring continued U.S. congressional support. Grassroots activities will continue to be essential to support the defense of Ukraine and the Baltic nations, which have a significant role in creating a stronger and safer America.

BAFL appreciates the hard work of the House Baltic Caucus co-chairs and the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus co-chairs and their staff who worked hard to advance legislation. We thank the many members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees and House and Senate Appropriations Committees for their great support of the Baltic Security Initiative. ▲

Anne Smith is BAFL's advocacy advisor.

2023 Events

700th anniversary of the founding of Vilnius

Lithuania

BAFL Human Rights Conference and Annual Banquet

Los Angeles, CA | April

15th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE)

Kaunas, Lithuania | June 15-17

13th Youth Song and Dance Celebration

Tallinn, Estonia | June 30-July 2

150th anniversary of the Latvian Song and Dance Festival

Riga, Latvia | June 30-July 9

NATO summit

Vilnius, Lithuania | July 11-12

...All eyes

such as high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) and Switchblade drones as well as other equipment and the provision of training that's vital in today's high-threat environment.

Continued support

BAFL anticipates the introduction of funding and programming legislation that will demonstrate continued support for the Baltic states. Following the president's State of the Union address to Congress, the Fiscal Year 2024 budget process will begin. We will provide updates and release Calls to Action as the annual legislative process moves forward.

We're excited that the eyes of the national security community will be on Vilnius as it prepares to host this summer's NATO summit. This event will address next-level NATO interoperability and new ways to address security challenges that emanate from Russia and its allies.

The NATO summit provides a wonderful opportunity to bring the Baltic success story to the U.S. Congress. The summit will also showcase the contributions of the Baltic nations to allied security during their 18-plus years of NATO membership. ▲

Restore the status of Königsberg

By President Vytautas Landsbergis

While Putin's terrorist regime tugs at maps and pulls apart borders, it's worth looking at one of the first cases of Soviet-Russian occupation.

The annexation of the Königsberg region (a part of East Prussia now known as Kaliningrad) took place after the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in 1940 and Soviet re-occupation of Lithuania in 1944 and 1945.

When Joseph Stalin made the unilateral decision to annex Königsberg, neither the Soviet Union, nor its largest constituent, the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, acquired legal rights to the European land and its inhabitants. (This action is reminiscent of the recent "annexation" of Donetsk or Mariupol in occupied Ukraine.)

Soviet action also did not receive any direct international recognition or legal confirmation. There was no accord. In fact, the timid West remained silent.

Genocidal extermination and the forced resettlement of local people—the indigenous communities—have also never been legally evaluated. Königsberg was handed over to hostile and lawless murderers and colonists. Moscow erased historical documents and changed all geographical names, thus destroying ethnic and linguistic evidence that native people had ever lived in the region.

The so-called end of war

Usually, wars end with some sort of peace treaty. But there was none in this case, just a provision confirming that there would be one in the future. The Potsdam Declaration, which laid out the future boundaries of defeated and conquered Germany, stated that the Königsberg territory would be administered by the

Soviet Union "pending a Peace Treaty," at which time all issues would be addressed.

To this day, however, a peace treaty (agreed to in writing by Stalin himself) has not addressed the Königsberg region. Temporary administration of the territory was granted to a now non-existent entity, the USSR.

At the time of the Potsdam Conference, the Soviet Union occupied a number of countries, including Ukraine and Belarus. They do not administer this region, so the agreement has been violated. Russia announced that it had inherited the rights of the Soviet Union after the state created by Stalin ceased to exist in 1991. So post-Soviet Russia has potentially "inherited" the right to temporarily administer the former region of Königsberg.

This temporary administration continues to this day. So much for post-war legality. The question is apparently closed. Or is it?

The United Nations General Assembly could prepare and approve a newer provision declaring that the previous 1945 provision was never withdrawn and is therefore still valid, even though the current Russian state is not equivalent to the former USSR.

Encouragement to organize a delayed post-war peace conference could follow; a peace conference would at least define issues related to this territory.

Europe could then move forward in a more legally correct and stable way that's based on international law, a legality that Russia has never addressed. ▲



There are similarities between the annexation of Königsberg and the recent "annexation" of Donetsk and Mariupol in Russian-occupied Ukraine. Pictured is Königsberg castle in 1895. Photo: Wikipedia



Baltic states change the course of history - again

By Dr. Darius Furmonavicius

U.S. military assistance in the Baltic states is vital to the stability and security of Europe and the entire transatlantic alliance.

The Baltic states were occupied by the Soviet Union under the auspices of the notorious 1939-1941 Moscow Pact, also known as the Stalin-Hitler or Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. “A special military operation” began on June 14, 1940. Hundreds of thousands of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians were deported to Siberia. Sound familiar?

At the time, U.S. Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles refused to accept the annexation of the Baltic states. Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America also kept alive the call for freedom. Peaceful liberation of the Baltic states finally occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Russian troops were withdrawn from Lithuania in 1993 and Latvia and Estonia in 1994.

Ukraine is being demonized and occupied by Russia much like the Baltic states were in 1940 and 1944-1945. It’s worth considering the parallels as well as future courses of action.

100 years of diplomacy

In 2022, the Baltic states celebrated a centenary of diplomatic relations with the United States. Politically, they became an indivisible part of the West in 2004 by joining NATO and the European Union. Economically, despite 30 years of attempting to achieve full energy independence, the Baltic states are still connected to Russia’s electricity grid. Fortunately, dependence on the Kremlin for natural gas and oil was severed by the opening of a natural gas import terminal in Lithuania in 2014.

BAFL supports Baltic liberation from Russia’s electricity grip and full energy independence. BAFL applauds the prime ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania who recently agreed to complete technical integration into the European electricity grid as soon as possible and no later than 2025.

Another security challenge for the Baltic states is the flow of migrants. Estonia has a border with Russia, and Latvia borders Russia and Belarus. Lithuania borders both the Russian military base in the illegally occupied Königsberg area of East Prussia (the Kaliningrad region) and Belarus.

“The regime in Belarus has been cynically using migrants as a hybrid tactic against Lithuania and its



Aircraft from Germany, Finland, Sweden and the United States fly in formation during BALTOPS 22, the maritime-focused exercises in the Baltic region. Photo: U.S. Navy/Jesse Schwab

neighbors,” Austin said in a 2021 meeting at the Pentagon. “Meanwhile, Russia is conducting a continuous hybrid campaign of its own. And now China is also increasing its pressure on Lithuania.”

Austin commended the Lithuanian government for its firm stance towards China and acknowledged that it had faced reprisals for permitting the opening of a Taiwanese trade representative office in Vilnius, despite pressure from the Chinese Communist regime not to do so.

Permanent U.S. military presence

The Baltic states have hosted rotational U.S. battalions in Lithuania since 2019, United Kingdom-led NATO troops in Estonia, Canadian-led NATO troops in Latvia and German-led NATO troops in Lithuania. The United Kingdom holds leadership of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and Standing Joint Force Headquarters. Usually based in London, these now operate in Latvia and Lithuania.



In addition, during this time of heightened regional security, U.K. liaison officers stationed in Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Sweden coordinate military activities between JEF nations in the Baltic Sea region. According to U.K. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, this deployment confirms the level of defensive partnerships in the 10-nation JEF alliance.

A permanent American presence in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would bolster U.S. and transatlantic security by ensuring that the Suwałki Corridor from Poland to Lithuania remains open. A U.S. presence would also clearly indicate to both NATO allies and adversaries that the territorial integrity and independence of the Baltic states is of vital importance. A U.S. presence would fill gaps in Baltic defense capabilities, provide the Baltic states with confidence and enable stronger NATO deterrence of attacks from Russia.

Fixing NATO's deterrent posture in the Baltic region would significantly reduce the probability of a Kremlin challenge.

Ukraine must win the war

It's interesting to note that the Baltic states once again changed the course of history by supplying Ukraine with weapons before the February 24, 2022, invasion. The Kremlin's plan to capture Kiev and all of Ukraine in a few days failed partly because of this allocation.

Before the invasion, Estonia granted Ukraine over a third of its entire defense budget and Latvia granted close to a third. In May 2022, it took Lithuanians just three days to collect over 5 million euros to purchase a Turkish Bayraktar drone. The Baltic states' total defense assistance of close to \$1 billion in 2022 was the highest per capita in the world. Defense budgets were 2.5% of GDP in Estonia, 2.2% of GDP in Latvia and 2.52% of GDP in Lithuania.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė have agreed that defense spending in 2023 needs to be raised to 3% of GDP.

The Kremlin must lose this war. An ambivalent war outcome, says Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, will not bring security to Europe. If Putin succeeds in achieving territorial gains, Russia will renew its war in Ukraine and elsewhere. According to former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, if the Kremlin isn't stopped in Ukraine, its next target will be the Baltic states.

Russian threats to the Baltic states, all of which are NATO members, as well as Finland and Sweden, which will join NATO soon, are unacceptable.

Strategic goals

Liberating all of Ukraine from Russian occupation and inviting Ukraine to join NATO must be key foreign policy priorities for the United States at the NATO summit in Vilnius next summer. This is the only way to deter a future Russian attack.

In addition, to truncate funding of Putin's war, the United States must place an international embargo on all Kremlin oil exports. If the Kremlin isn't stopped in Ukraine, the probability of a war between Russia and NATO increases greatly. It's important that the United States achieves a strategic victory over Russia by helping Ukraine achieve liberation.

Only the United States can provide Ukraine with the weapons it requires, including long-range missiles, tanks and planes. Only the United States can adequately mobilize production.

In short, it's going to be cheaper to deter Russia from possible aggression than to engage with Russia in direct military conflict. U.S. military assistance in the Baltic states is vital to the stability and security of Europe and the entire transatlantic alliance. ▲

*According to former
Russian Prime
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DR. DARIUS FURMONAVICIUS is a member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, Chair of BAFL's Advisory Board and author of *Lithuania Rejoins Europe* and *Lithuania Transforms the West*, which will be released in 2023.



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Leave a lasting legacy by bequeathing a portion of your estate to BAFL. Donations and membership fees currently cover BAFL’s annual expenditures, but these fluctuate significantly from year to year and your donations are invaluable.

BAFL is a charitable, 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization and it may be advantageous for you to bequeath appreciated property—including real estate, stocks and bonds, or works of art—to avoid incurring applicable taxes if you sell the property yourself.

If you have questions, please contact BAFL treasurer Talivaldis Paegle at treasurer@bafl.com. We can also refer you to an attorney for any legal concerns.

Your feedback please!
What would you like to see more of in the *Baltic Bulletin*? Is there something we missed? Did you catch an error?

Please drop us a line at editor@bafl.com.

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