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Why America Needs Allies

by Andrejs Pildegovičs

05.26.2010

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In a **recent article** for The National Interest Online, Doug Bandow questioned the value of American aid that helps improve the military capabilities of its NATO allies fighting in Afghanistan. I strongly disagree with his premise and believe that it is smart to invest in NATO members participating in the Afghan War.

All NATO member states, including Latvia, are real contributors to the Afghan effort. NATO signatories responded to the American request for mutual assistance after the 9/11 terrorist attack on U.S. soil. Over the last nine years, against all odds, all members of the alliance have fulfilled their commitment to support the U.S.-led operation.

This commitment was unanimous, prompt and meaningful. Latvia is spending financial, military and civilian resources to help ensure the success of the operation in Afghanistan. A number of young Latvians have already paid the ultimate price in that country for the peace, stability and prosperity of the entire world. Latvia's contribution and losses per capita are among the highest of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). With the support of the Michigan National Guard, Latvia's Armed Forces have assisted in training the Afghan National Army within its own Operational Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT). Despite the severe economic recession, the Latvian army and security forces have helped enhance the effort in Afghanistan for the benefit of every country in the ISAF.

Latvia has also opened its borders to ensure ISAF receives the supplies it needs to continue its mission. Our country plays a strategic role as an entry point for the Northern Distribution Network to Afghanistan. The route continues through Russia and Central Asia. Riga's participation in the network is an important contribution to Washington's reset policy toward Russia and demonstrates an enthusiasm for the new trade routes that will be crucial to the prosperity of all Eurasia.

And, when it comes to security, Riga has never been a free rider. Over the last twenty years, since regaining its independence, Latvia has contributed in a number of international peacekeeping or peace-monitoring missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Georgia and Iraq.

All this should be a clear indicator that Latvia's membership in NATO has been a success. The country is now a stable pluralistic democracy, a member state of both the European Union and the transatlantic alliance. And membership in NATO has had a positive impact on our relations with an important neighbor—Russia.

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It goes without saying that NATO is the most trusted, well-tested instrument of the transatlantic partnership. Today there is a broad consensus in Washington that the United States needs allies and partners abroad. And America has always been able to count on the support of Latvia and its fellow Baltic States. None of the world's pressing problems can be solved by a superpower alone. Therefore, I am confident that mutual support is the only credible political option for defence of our homelands, values and vital interests.

Andrejs Pildegovičs is the Latvian ambassador to the United States.

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