



**COMMENTARY**   **AUG 8**

# Anna Hanks: Trump plan to weaken NATO obligations is unfair to the Baltic countries that had our back

 Anna Hanks, Contributor 

   

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In July I headed to the Positivus music festival in Salacgriva, Latvia. It's on the border with Estonia and not far -- as the tanks roll --from Russia.

This was the 10th year of Positivus, and I've made eight of the festivals. Latvia has just under 2 million people, so a festival that attracts thousands of visitors is a big event for the entire Baltic region of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. While Positivus is held in what used to be the Soviet Union, Latvia is now part of both NATO and the European Union. They even switched their currency from the Lat to the Euro.

I didn't spend a lot of time discussing politics at Positivus. However I spent loads of time taking pictures, buying a fabulous fabric crown from a Latvian-American woman who had recently moved from Dallas to Riga, talking about British writer Angela Carter with members of British buzz-band "Wolf Alice" and listening to tales from an adorable British tour manager of scrounging random drum kits in foreign countries. While I discussed the music of Soviet-era band Aquarium with a longtime Latvian rock journalist, I didn't think much about politics, beyond the politics of who is allowed backstage.

It was a surprise to return home and find that Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump was talking about the Baltic states. It turns out Trump isn't committed to making sure Positivus can continue.

Mr. Trump said in an interview with *The New York Times* that in the case of Russian aggression toward the Baltic states that are recent NATO entrants, he'll have to consider whether their contributions have been met before jumping to

their defense.

"If they fulfill their obligations to us," he said, "the answer is yes."

That's a step away from our current pledge to willingly defend NATO allies. Putting American interests ahead of other obligations is part of Trump's "America First" plan, and it's not fair to my friends in Latvia, many of whom have small children, thriving businesses and bustling record labels.

When American forces were on the ground in the Middle East, Latvian forces served with them, part of the much-touted "coalition of the willing." During Positivus, I chatted at a bar with a former member of the Latvian end of the coalition of the willing. The ex-military man liked hearing my American accent, partly because of the Americans with whom he had served in combat.

While the details of our early morning conversation are fuzzy (as early-morning bar chats tend to be) I came away with the feeling that these Latvian forces had our back, and, due to our NATO agreements, we have theirs.

When the Soviet Union ended, the Baltic countries allied themselves with NATO and with the United States, not with Russia. We've made agreements as a nation, and we need to stick to them. If we follow Donald Trump's "America First" plan, we won't be taking care of our friends who've helped us when we needed them. That would be wrong.

Donald Trump would benefit from attending a Latvian music festival and meeting the people who count on our defense under NATO treaties, instead of just courting trouble by inviting Russia to search for Hillary Clinton's missing emails. Might I suggest that he take his Trump jet to the "Fontaine Rock Festival" festival in August in the port city of Liepaja, Latvia.

In Liepaja, Trump might make a solemn and soul-searching stop at the beach side memorial to the Mariners Lost at Sea. A plaque commemorates the 10 U.S. Navy airmen whose aircraft was shot down nearby in 1950, when our country was trying to win the cold war.

"America's promises do not come with a price tag," President Barack Obama said at the Democratic National Convention. That's the kind of America that I want to represent next time I go to Positivus.

*Anna Hanks writes about pop culture. Website: [www.anna-hanks.com](http://www.anna-hanks.com)*

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