

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

As I watch the news reports about Eastern Europe I fear for the safety of our country. Much of my military career was spent in Europe. We were stationed in Germany in 1987 when President Ronald Reagan said, "Mister Gorbachev--Tear Down this Wall." In just a little over two years we celebrated with our German neighbors when the wall fell. Within weeks of that event the Soviet Union began to crumble and resurrected Nationalisms blossomed in the former Socialist satellites.

I also remember the "Singing Revolution" that started in Estonia in 1987. That revolution quickly spread across to Latvia and Lithuania. In three countries, thousands upon thousands of people stood arm-in-arm and sang songs of national pride as they faced T-72 Russian tanks and Russian troop sent in to quell the uprisings. Soon there were three new independent Baltic nations. Yes there were some lives lost. For the most part there was not "full scale" military on civilian violence.

On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared independence from the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian independence was soon followed by the independence of the other two Baltic republics. In 1993, the last Russian troops departed Lithuania. Upon the departure of the Russian, signs of the Russian occupation were removed from every corner of the country. In 2004 Lithuania joined NATO and the European Union. The Lithuania Land Forces quickly joined the coalition forces in first Iraq and then with the NATO elements into Afghanistan.

The Baltic nations were not the only countries to open their borders and become part of the International community. Many of these countries quickly developed strong ties to the European Union and to the United States. Even in the heart of Russia, average citizens dared to dream the dreams of self-destiny. Places like Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Georgia, and yes.... the Ukraine all found strong ties in economic opportunities in Western Europe and the United States.

Fast forward to last Fall. I was asked to be part of a small group sent into Lithuania to work directly with the Lithuanian government and the Lithuanian military. We were asked to help develop social service

programs to support Lithuanian military families and employers. During my time in Lithuania, I learned of the commitment of the Lithuanian people to freedom. In very open discussions, I learned about the past imprisonments in the Gulags. I learned about the turmoil during the years of World War II and during the decades of Soviet occupation.

One afternoon, I was walking in the city center of Vilnius. A Lithuanian Army captain escort showed me a plaque on the side of the City Hall. The plaque read-"Anyone who would choose Lithuania as an enemy has also made an enemy of the United States of America." G.W. Bush Nov.23, 2002.

Back to today. I listen to the reports coming out of the Ukraine. I read where U.S. fight jets and tankers have been deployed into Lithuania. I am deeply saddened! I see in my mind's eye the new walls of Russian tyranny being rebuilt, but I hear no voice of authoritative Presidential leadership telling the Russian leader to "tear down the wall."

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.