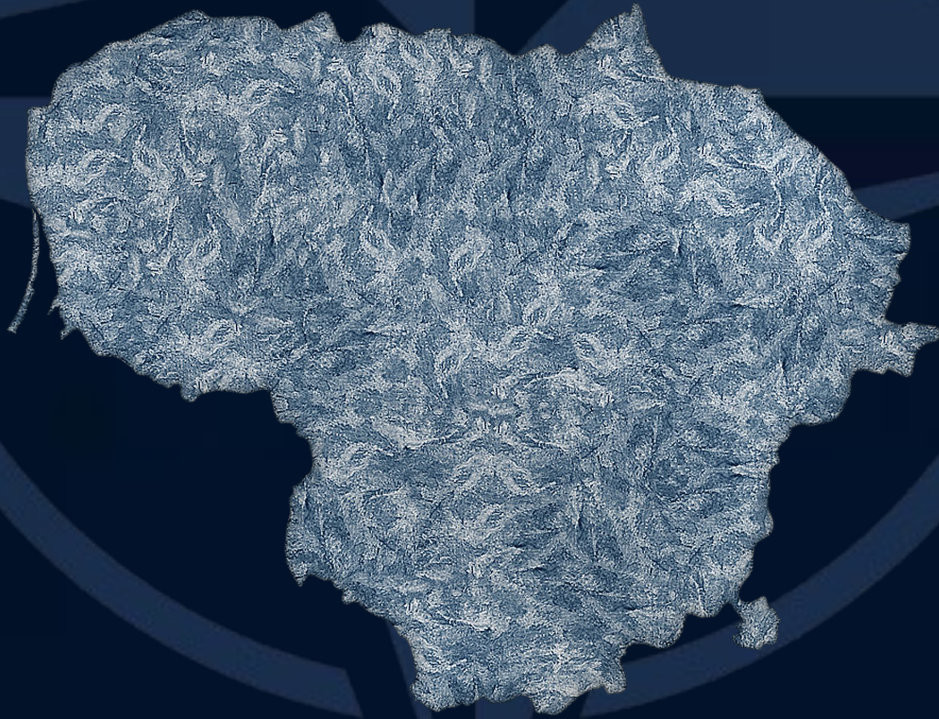




LITHUANIA

NATO Country Assessment — *TIER ONE* —

BURDEN SHARING • POLITICAL RESOLVE • CORE DEFENSE



JULY 2026



TIER 1

Model Ally



AT A GLANCE

Toplines

- **Embracing The Burden for European Defense:** President Nausėda was the first to commit to the 5% defense spending goal in 2025, with the December 2025 budget delivering ~\$5.2B and 5.38% of GDP for 2026, an eightfold spending increase since 2014.
- **Held Firm Against Chinese Economic Coercion:** the first NATO state to exit China-CEE/17+1 in May 2021, absorbing real Chinese trade retaliation after authorizing a Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius, without backing down.
- **Fighting the Russian Bear:** Lithuania enforced politically costly Kaliningrad transit restrictions on sanctioned goods despite Russian retaliation threats.



FORCE STRUCTURE AT A GLANCE



This radar chart compares a country's force structure to the Non-US NATO median (data from IISS's 2026 Military Balance) across six capability areas: Land Combat (tanks, IFVs), Active Personnel (total active-duty troops), Naval Combat (submarines, destroyers/frigates/corvettes), Air & Missile Defense (long/medium-range SAM systems), Air Combat (4th-gen+ combat aircraft), and Fires (artillery, rocket launchers). Scores are weighted, with modern platforms counted fully and legacy platforms counted at reduced weight.

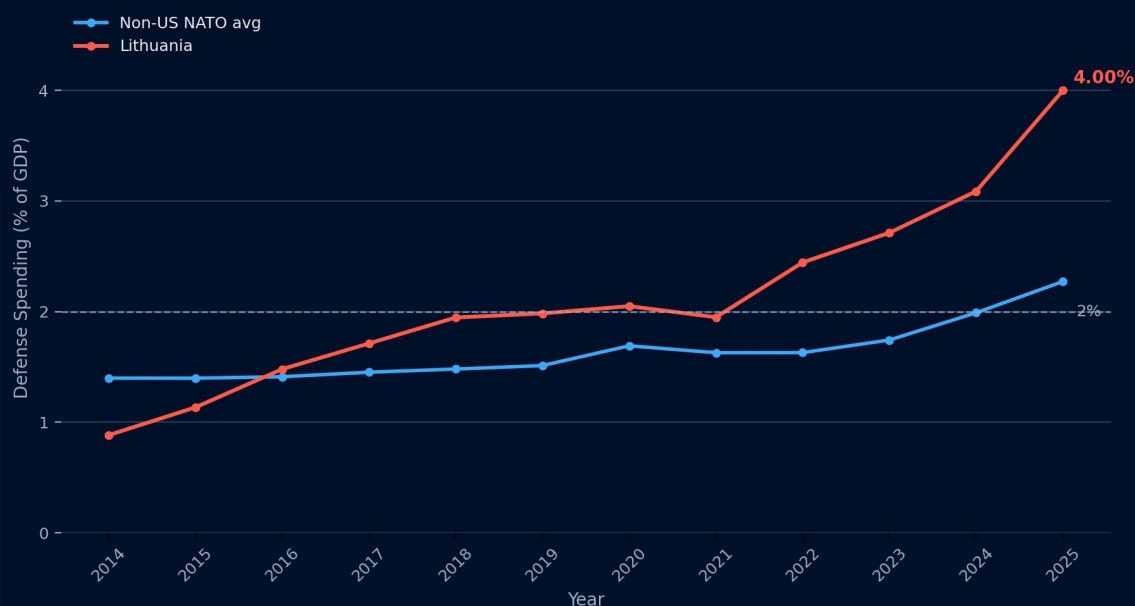


MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Defense Spending Level

Lithuania has made the most dramatic [defense spending](#) commitment of any NATO ally relative to its recent baseline. Spending grew from \$427M/0.88% of GDP in 2014 to \$3.6B/4.0% of GDP in 2025—an eightfold increase in eleven years. In January 2025, President Nausėda announced [Lithuania would commit](#) to 5–6% of GDP annually on defense from 2026–2030, becoming the first NATO ally to formally pledge the 5% goal, and the December 2025 budget delivered: €4.79B/5.38% of GDP in 2026, a 43% increase over 2025 and the largest defense budget in independent Lithuania’s history. Lithuania is already above the Hague 3.5% core defense plus 1.5% framework years ahead of the 2035 deadline. For a country of roughly 2.8 million people with a 274km border with Russia’s Kaliningrad exclave, a 679km border with Belarus, and the Suwałki Gap as the only land connection between the Baltic states and the rest of NATO, this spending commitment reflects a clear-eyed territorial-existential calculation backed by enacted legislation rather than political aspiration.

Lithuania — Defense Spending as % of GDP, 2014-2025

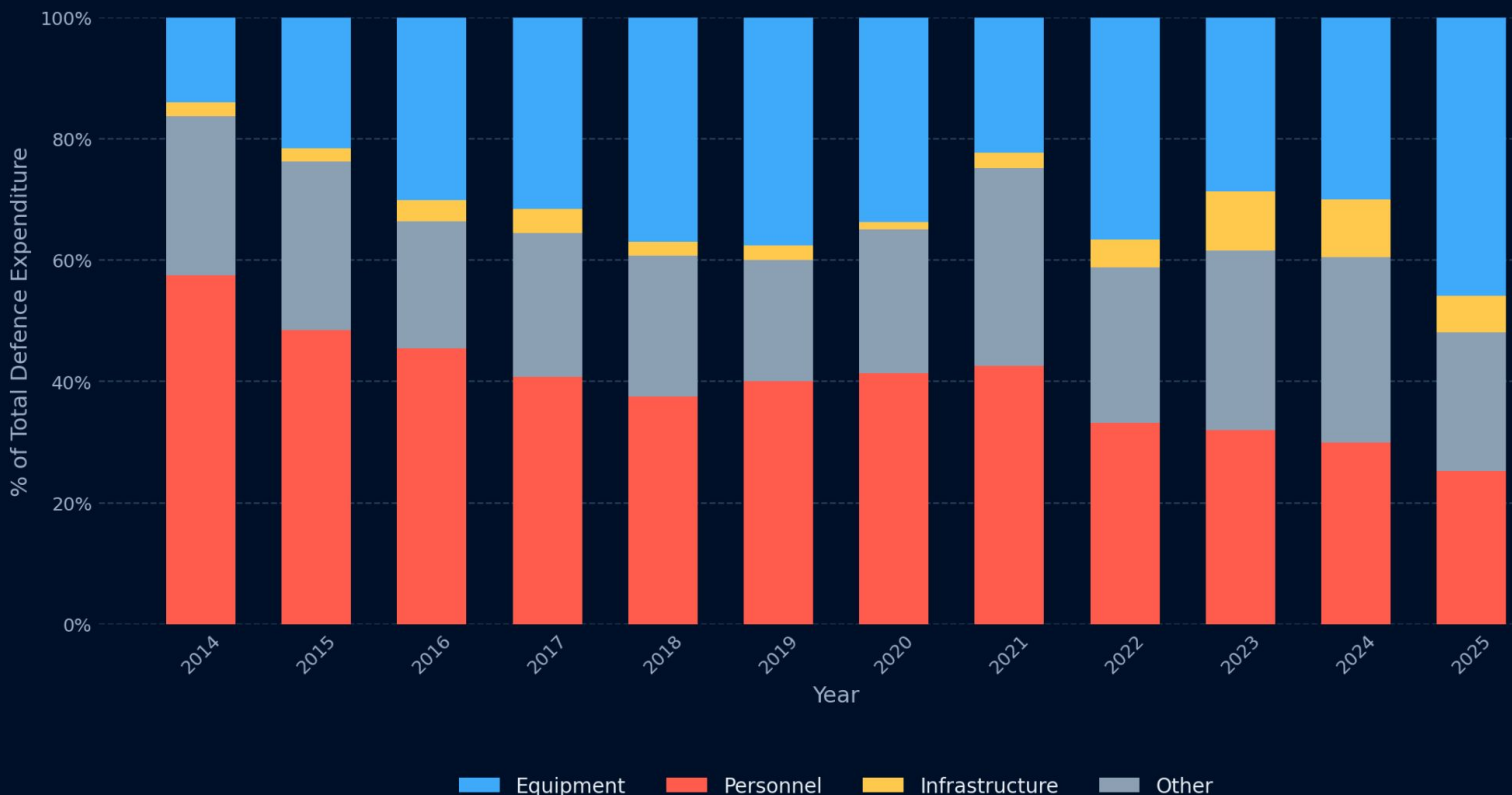


MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Equipment Share

Lithuania's equipment share has risen from roughly 14% of the defense budget in 2014 to 45.8% in 2025—well above NATO's 20% benchmark. The 2026 budget allocates 60% to modernization and equipment, with major line items including €350M for Leopard 2A8 tanks, €375M for CV90 MkIV IFVs, €100M for NASAMS, €100M for CAESAR howitzers, and €70M for HIMARS. At 5.38% of GDP, the budget creates real procurement capacity rather than accounting reclassification.

Lithuania — Defence Expenditure by Category, 2014-2025



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Manpower & Recruitment

Lithuania's [personnel picture](#) is one of the most positive trends in the alliance. Active military personnel have grown from roughly 8,600 in 2014 to approximately 20,000 by 2025 while personnel's share of the defense budget has fallen from roughly 57% to 25% over the same period. The mandatory service expansion to approximately 5,000 annual draftees is building force depth alongside the equipment surge, creating a growing mobilizable reserve base. Lithuania [reintroduced conscription](#) in 2015 and has steadily expanded throughput since—the personnel growth line in the chart reflects that policy compounding over time. The result is a force that is simultaneously growing in headcount, professionalizing through Western equipment integration, and freeing budget space for the procurement programs that define Lithuania's modernization agenda.

Lithuania — Personnel Cost Share & Active Personnel, 2014-2025



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Capability Modernization

Lithuania's modernization is one of the most [rapid and comprehensive](#) in the alliance. On ground forces, 44 Leopard 2A8 tanks give Lithuania its first-ever main battle tank capability, complemented by 100 CV90 MkIV IFVs and existing Boxer Vilkas—the foundation of a full 1st Mechanized Division by 2030. On fires, Lithuania operates 16 PzH 2000 howitzers, has contracted 48 CAESAR Mk II wheeled howitzers making it the second-largest operator after France, and fields 8 HIMARS with ATACMS providing 300km deep strike, with an additional battery added in May 2026. On air defense, NASAMS III, Saab SHORAD, Stinger, Javelin, and counter-drone systems create a layered architecture—critical given Lithuania has no combat aircraft and depends on allied Šiauliai rotations for airspace coverage. The [Rheinmetall Baisogala ammunition](#) joint venture beginning production mid-2026 adds sovereign production capacity. The most significant gap is upper-tier air defense and the absence of national combat aircraft.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Force Posture

Lithuania's force posture is anchored by three allied presences that make it one of the most heavily forward-defended countries in NATO relative to its size. The German 45th Armored Brigade, [activated in Vilnius](#) on May 22, 2025, is the first permanent foreign deployment of a German combat brigade since the founding of the Federal Republic—roughly 4,800 troops plus 200 civilians at full strength by end-2027. The existing NATO [Multinational Battlegroup Lithuania](#) with Belgium, Czech Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Norway is being integrated into the brigade structure. US Abrams and Bradley rotations at Pabradė provide a visible American heavy armor presence. Šiauliai Air Base hosts continuous [NATO Baltic Air Policing](#) rotations as Lithuania's primary air defense given its lack of national combat aircraft. The three-layer Border Defense Line along the Kaliningrad and Belarus borders adds physical denial depth. Lithuania's Suwałki Gap geography makes it the most strategically critical transit point connecting the Baltic states to Poland and the rest of NATO.



MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Industrial Base

Lithuania's defense industrial base is developing rapidly through foreign joint ventures. The Rheinmetall Baisogala [artillery ammunition plant](#) is Lithuania's most significant industrial investment, building sovereign 155mm shell capacity serving both Lithuanian stockpiles and Ukraine. A June 2025 Northrop Grumman medium-caliber ammunition MoU adds a second major NATO industrial partner. The [2024 Defense Industry Law](#) and [green-corridor investment framework](#) accelerate permitting for drone manufacturing, counter-UAS, and electronics production. Leopard 2A8 and CV90 programs include domestic assembly and sustainment commitments embedding Lithuanian industry in allied supply chains. Lithuania's Baltic port infrastructure at Klaipėda and the LNG terminal are more relevant to NATO supply chain resilience than domestic mineral deposits. Lithuania has no sovereign platform design capability, but the Rheinmetall plant makes its industrial base structurally more significant than most Baltic peers.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Declared Posture

Lithuania's declared posture is among the most forward leaning in the alliance. The [National Security Strategy](#) identifies Russia as an existential threat and warns Moscow could be prepared for broad-scale action against NATO by 2030. Belarus is treated as a hostile Russian proxy having weaponized migration since 2021 and hosted Russian nuclear weapons since 2023. And Lithuania is the only NATO ally with direct lived experience of Chinese economic coercion, having [withstood a sustained pressure campaign](#) after authorizing the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius in 2021. Lithuania withdrew from China-CEE/17+1 in May 2021 as the first NATO state to do so, imposed Kaliningrad transit restrictions on sanctioned goods despite direct Russian retaliation threats, and held firm. The [2025 Border Defence Line](#), Ottawa Treaty withdrawal, and €1.1B counter-mobility plan translate doctrine into concrete investment. Posture documents and policy conduct are tightly aligned.



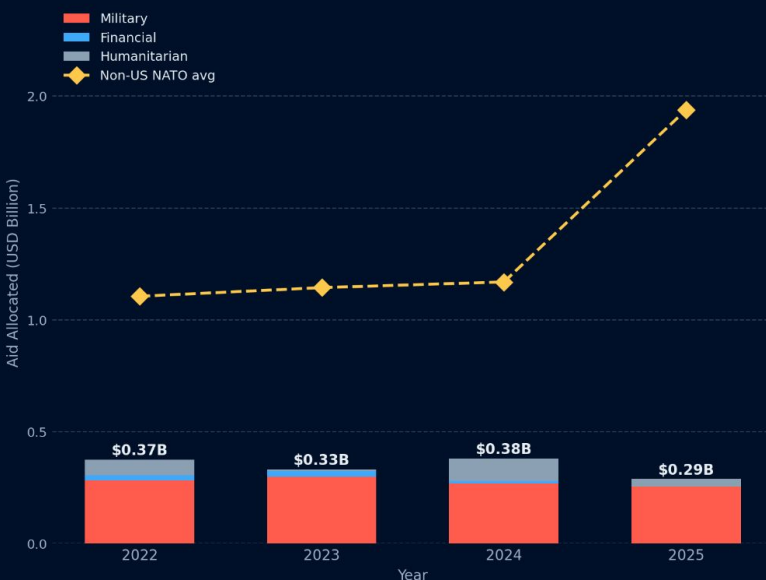
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Ukraine Support

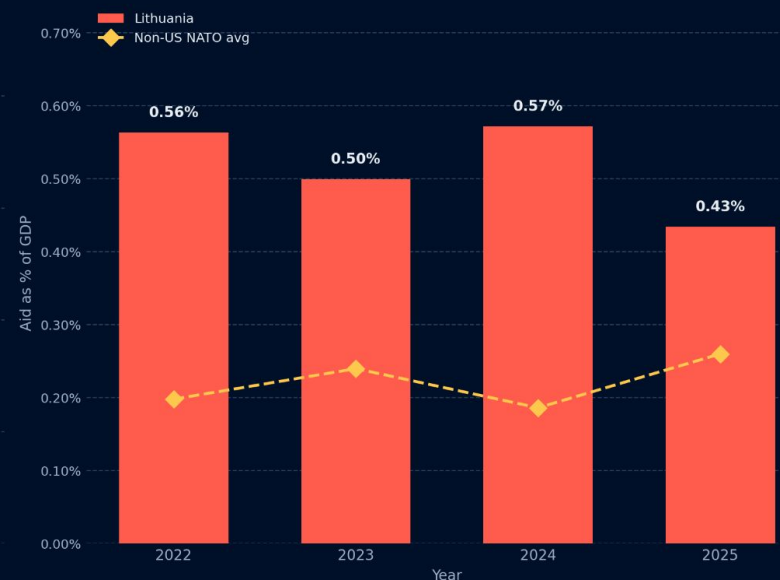
Lithuania's [Ukraine aid chart](#) shows consistent, relatively large contributions every year: 0.56% of GDP in 2022, 0.50% in 2023, 0.57% in 2024, and 0.43% in 2025—roughly double the non-US NATO average throughout. Kiel tracks €1.418B allocated and €1.595B committed (2.52% and 2.84% of GDP) which is top-tier globally alongside Estonia, Latvia, and Denmark. Military support has exceeded \$1B since February 2022, codified through a statutory minimum of 0.25% of GDP annually. Lithuania co-leads the [Demining Coalition](#) with Iceland, contributes to the Czech Ammunition Initiative, PURL, IT Coalition, Drone Coalition, and Coalition of the Willing. For a country of 2.8 million simultaneously spending 5.38% of GDP on its own defense while facing Russian, Belarusian, and Chinese pressure, Lithuania's proportional Ukraine burden is among the most remarkable in the alliance.

Lithuania — Ukraine Aid, 2022-2025

Lithuania: Aid to Ukraine by Type



Lithuania: Aid to Ukraine as % of GDP



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Russian Decoupling

Lithuania's Russian energy decoupling is complete. Lithuania ended Russian gas imports in April 2022, substituting through the [Klaipėda "Independence" FSRU](#), which now serves as a regional LNG hub for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. The February [2025 Baltic electricity synchronization](#) with the Continental European grid eliminated the last systemic BRELL dependency. No Rosatom footprint. Lithuania supported every EU Russia sanctions package through the 20th, and its efforts at Kaliningrad transit enforcement—imposing restrictions on sanctioned goods transiting to Russia's Kaliningrad exclave despite direct retaliation threats—is its most distinctive sanctions contribution, requiring political will most NATO allies are never tested on. The residual concern is the [Belarusian Astravyets nuclear plant](#), a safety and coercion risk Lithuania cannot resolve unilaterally.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Public Support & Political Resilience

Lithuania posted 88% for staying in NATO, third-highest in the alliance, 76% willing to defend another ally, and 81% agreeing NATO membership makes a foreign attack less likely. Eighty-four percent said Russia's war had affected Lithuania's security, the second-highest figure in the survey, and Ukraine support stood at 79% combined. The governing coalition is strongly NATO-aligned, with Lithuania committing to among the highest defense spending shares in the alliance at 5%+ of GDP in 2026. The one concern is Nemuno Aušra (Dawn of Nemunas), a right wing party that entered the coalition in 2024 and whose leader has been critical of the pace and cost of Ukraine military support, without directly challenging NATO membership itself. The opposition Social Democrats are also broadly pro-NATO, meaning the mainstream political spectrum is unified.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Hedging Behavior

Lithuania's hedging behavior record is spotless and demonstrated under real pressure. No BRI exposure—Lithuania was the first NATO state to exit China-CEE/17+1, has minimal Chinese FDI, no Chinese-controlled critical infrastructure, and Chinese telecom restricted from 5G core networks. When [China retaliated](#) for the Taiwan Representative Office in 2021—blocking Lithuanian goods at customs and pressuring multinationals to drop Lithuanian suppliers—Lithuania held firm. Diplomatic relations with China have been at chargé d'affaires level since 2021, the lowest in the EU. Arms procurement is entirely Western: Leopard 2A8, PzH 2000, HIMARS, CAESAR, CV90, NASAMS, Black Hawk, C-390—zero adversary procurement. No high-level Moscow, Beijing, or Tehran engagement. Lithuania didn't just maintain a clean record; it absorbed concrete economic costs to defend it, which is a meaningfully higher standard than rhetorical alignment.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Operational Cooperation

Latvia [contributed to Afghanistan](#) under ISAF and has been fully supportive of recent US operations—no obstruction of Operation Epic Fury, full Iran sanctions alignment, and active Baltic Sentry participation. Latvia [participates in EU Operation Aspides](#). The core operational contribution is hosting: the Canada-led NATO [Multinational Brigade Latvia](#) at Ādaži anchors NATO's Baltic land-deterrence architecture, with Canada planning 2,200 persistent troops including Leopard 2 tanks. From mid-2026, Latvia and Estonia fall under German-Dutch 1GNC headquarters designed to bring allied mass at speed. The [Drone Coalition co-leadership](#) with the UK—roughly 30,000 drones contracted for Ukraine—is Latvia's most distinctive contribution: building Ukrainian drone-warfare capacity at industrial scale through Latvian institutional leadership.

