Estonia's prime minister visits U.S. Army Europe-led multinational exercise Saber Strike 2012

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AMARI AIR BASE, Estonia - Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip visited Airmen from the Michigan Air National Guard who were operating fighter and aerial refueling aircraft at the Amari Air Base in Estonia during Saber Strike 2012, an exercise based in Estonia and Latvia aimed at building partnership between the host nations and visiting forces from six different countries. The exercise was coordinated by U.S. Army Europe.

"Saber Strike is an excellent example of stable and ongoing defense co-operation between US and Estonian military forces," said Ansip. "These exercises demonstrate that our US allies support us, and that the Estonian military and civilian organizations are well prepared and fully able to collaborate with them."

During the exercise, U.S. A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft utilized a gunnery range in Adzai, Latvia, to simulate supporting a movement of friendly ground troops in the region. American KC-135 Stratotankers were also in the region, providing air-to-air refueling support to the A-10s. Both types of aircraft were flown by the Michigan Air National Guard and were based at Amari in Estonia.

"We very much appreciate the support of Michigan and its Airmen," Ansip said.

Chief Master Sgt. Anthony Liggins was among the Michigan Airmen who met the prime minister. Liggins in a boom operator on the KC-135 and provided a short briefing to the prime minister about the capabilities of the aircraft.
"It is just amazing to me to even be here," Liggins said. "When I first joined the Air National Guard in 1987, Estonia was part of the Soviet Union and for us to be here was just unthinkable.

"To see the changes that have taken place in my lifetime - not even that long, just in the course of my career in the Guard - has been awesome," said Liggins. "This makes me believe that the world is becoming a better place."

About 150 Michigan Airmen supported the exercise, part of a contingent of about 2,000 total military forces. The exercise represented the first time that fighter aircraft from the U.S. operated from Estonia, Estonian military officials said.

For more photos, visit the Saber Strike set in the USAREUR Flickr photostream

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