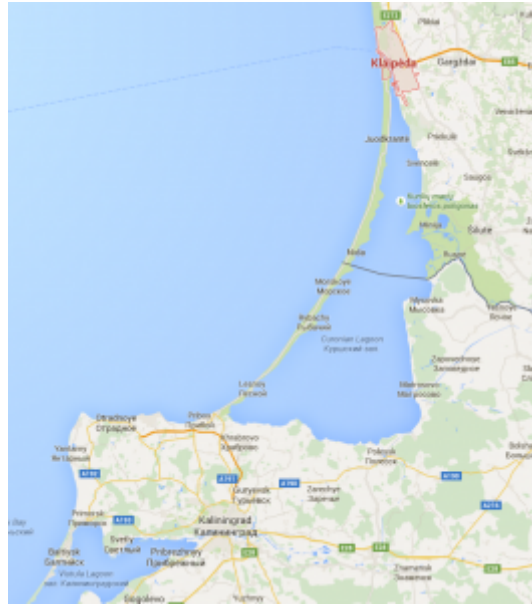


FLOATING SECURITY

Greetings!
I'm back,
just in
time to
refill the
liquor
cabinet.
Thanks to
Rayne, Jim,
bmaz, and
Ed for
their
fascinating
posts while
I was gone
(and if you haven't read it, I especially
recommend Ed's series on paradigms in
economics).



As I mentioned before I left, I just took a vacation with my mom, who turned 75 during our trip. Because seeing Russia and Scandinavia were on her bucket list but she has mobility limitations, we decided to go on a Baltic cruise for the trip (it was my first cruise). Which meant, among other things, we were sailing from Germany past Poland and Kaliningrad to Lithuania on the last days of a NATO war game involving the Baltics, and we were docked in St. Petersburg for 3 days.

While I don't know whether it was related to the war games, on the night of June 17-18, the ship took what a long-time sailor told us the next day seemed like an evasive maneuver at 2 AM that woke everyone I spoke to up. The following day, at around 6 (almost no one was awake because it was our one sailing day), the crew noted a ship tracking us on our starboard side that seemed very unusual to them. It pulled up ahead of the cruise ship far enough I couldn't get a good picture or binocular check (it had a mostly red flag) when I returned, but was there for about 6 hours. I suck ass at military ship

identification but it might have been a frigate. In any case, the New Cold War™ has not yet heated up sufficiently to turn our cruise ship into the Lusitania, so you're all stuck with me.

I was just as interested in the security procedures for the ship. There are obvious measures (as those of you who have taken cruises surely know): a card check as you get on and off the boat every time, with metal detectors every time you get back on the boat. What I found interesting, though, were the less obvious measures, something you'd need to have for something that would otherwise be such an easy target but for which you wouldn't want passengers to realize it. For example, there were undercarriage checks (the kind that are meant to be obvious in places like Brazil) that were not obviously visible. There were deck guards (one of whom got sheepish when I got into a conversation about the sunset he was taking a picture of), which are probably intended to minimize teenage pregnancies as much as anything else, but which keep a low profile on outer decks late at night. You couldn't see security cameras anywhere, but I'm sure they were omnipresent. I'm really interested in the security checks employees undergo, as there can be up to 1,000 tip-dependent employees from developing nations on board. In any case, I imagine the cruise ship tracks everyone's movement on board through use of key cards.

I was also interested in how cruise ship security intersected with Russian security (Russia has a 3-day exception to its visa requirement for cruise ship passengers who use a tour guide in Russia and return to their ship every night, but it requires going through customs every time you leave the ship and there is fine print that got a few people in trouble). Every time you left the ship, you'd first be scanned off the ship, then interact with a surly Russian border guard (I tried to little avail to butter them up with my very rudimentary Russian). On return, you'd go through a Russian metal detector to get into the port facility –

but the guards only made you put bags through their x-ray machine, not all metal, and they pretty much ignored when you set off the metal detector. In other words, while Russia made a show of preventing weapons or bombs from entering the cruise ship terminal, it was pretty ineffective (there was a toll entry to get to the port itself by car, bus, or truck, though, which may limit what kinds of people could even get to the port). Then, you'd be checked out of Russia by the same surly border guards. Next you'd be checked into the boat and put through another metal detector upon entering the ship (though there were a few weak points to this process that I won't mention). Though admittedly, the ship security was probably also designed as much to find booze and food that passengers were taking onto the ship, both of which had ostensible security purposes, but also served the cruise's business model of ensuring captive consumption of booze on board.

In any case, the cruise ship obviously didn't trust Russia's security measures, but the latter probably rely much more on their own intelligence and policing.

All of which is to say the cruise ship is an exercise in a mix between security theater (the not entirely perfect metal detector on board) and more obscure but presumably more effective measures. Given the volume of passengers that have to be processed in quick order, it would seem to be proof that such an approach is possible in other areas (including aviation), but we choose not to use it. Or maybe cruise ships are 1) better able to do a cost-benefit analysis and 2) subject to fewer US laws. I'm now interested in more about how cruise ships carry out their security, though expect much of it is secret.

One final observation. I found Lithuania (Klaipeda, right on the border with Kaliningrad) to be the most fascinating stop, in part because it has been a cruise destination for a shorter period of time than, say, Tallinn, and so has

not been transformed as much. Mom and I took a ferry to the Curonian Spit, then took a taxi down the spit and then back to Klaipeda; our taxi drivers were a son and then his father in succession. That's where my (as I noted, very rudimentary) Russian was most interesting. At the ferry, I was told clearly not to use it at all by a maybe 55-year old woman. The son, who had excellent Hollywood English, was more measured. His father, who reminded that he had had to use Russian all through school and military service, was very happy to have a quasi conversation in Russian with me (we occasionally resorted to Polish and Czech at times, as better mutually comprehensible languages). I found the mixed feelings about Russian, in a place with a very audible Russian minority, to be fascinating. But then, Lithuania is ground zero for the New Cold War™ and I can understand how rising tensions exacerbate underlying divisions.

Anyway, that's the sum of my impressions from being unable to entirely turn off the security side of my brain.