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WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT: Foreign Correspondent

Airs Tuesday July 4 at 9:20pm on ABC and ABC iview

Tiny Estonia is digging in against potential attacks from its giant neighbour Russia. And it's employing defences far more creative than guns and boots on the ground, as Eric Campbell reports

If you don't want a war, prepare for a war – Kirsten, Estonian army reservist

They're fighting words from a young woman whose country would fit comfortably inside Tasmania and nearly 400 times inside the borders of Russia, its potential adversary next door.

Eight times a year Kirsten joins thousands of compatriots in war games that sharpen them for combat. Many are too young to remember a weakened Russia giving Estonia independence in 1991.

But they have seen a newly restive Russia grab Crimea and eastern Ukraine. They have clear memories of rioting by Estonia's Russian minority, followed by paralysing cyberattacks, a decade ago. And in just a few months they will witness about 100,000 Russian troops massing just across the border to stage their own war games.

Of course we're worried about the unpredictability of Russia. We have to be prepared – Marina Keljurand, former Estonian Foreign Minister

Attacking us must be as expensive as possible, that's the thing – Kaupo Karuse

When he's not in camouflage manning a machine-gun in combat drills, Kaupo Karuse dons jeans and a T-shirt as a consultant at one of Estonia's myriad digital start-ups.

And that's where pint-sized Estonia has drawn another line of defence – cyberspace.

This once backward Soviet republic has developed one of the world's most secure and connected digital networks.

Every Estonian has a unique digital identity. Parliament and cabinet are paperless. As the ultimate defence the government is backing up its entire data set in multiple "data embassies" abroad.

We don't have resources, we don't have a lot of land. We had to do something with our brain – Kaupo Karuse

Add to this the protective brawn of NATO, the 29-nation alliance that includes Estonia. But as Eric Campbell discovers, NATO is more a provocateur in the eyes of many ethnic Russians, who make up a quarter of Estonia's population.

If we didn't have NATO bases or military in Estonia it would be much safer to live here. They try to somehow push the Russian bear. For what? – Russian-Estonian Vladimir Cherdakov

Eric Campbell's report "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" airs on Foreign Correspondent Tuesday July 4 at the earlier than usual time of 9.20 pm, then at 10.30 am Thursday July 6 on ABC TV and 6.30 pm Sunday July 9 on ABC TV News. Also on iView.