

Surf City XIX

Huntington Beach High School

NATO

Topic A: *The Situation in Afghanistan*

Topic B: *Russian Aggression Towards The Baltic States*



Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the Huntington Beach High School Model United Nations Program, we would like to welcome you to our Surf City XIX advanced conference!

Our annual Surf City conference upholds the principles and intended purpose of the United Nations. Delegates can expect to partake in a professional, well-run debate that simulates the very issues that those at the United Nations discuss every day. Both novel and traditional ideas will be shared, challenged, and improved.

It is our hope that all delegates will receive the opportunity to enhance their research, public speaking, and communication skills as they explore the intricacies of global concerns through various perspectives, some of which may be very different from their own. We hope their experiences here give them new insight and values that they can apply outside of the realm of Model UN for the betterment of the world community.

Please do not hesitate to approach our Secretariat or Staff Members with any questions or concerns that you may have throughout the day. We wish the best to all our participants and hope that they may share a fulfilling experience with us!

Enjoy the conference!

Sincerely,



Zach Bernstein
Secretary General



Vivian Bui
Secretary General



Lauren Le
Secretary General



Alison Miu-Martinez
Secretary General

Meet The Dais

Nelly Arreaga

Hi everyone! My name is Nelly Arreaga and I am very excited to serve as one of your Chairs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at Surf City 2022. I am a senior at Huntington Beach High School and have been a part of the MUN program here for all four years. I am also the president of the HBHS Junior State of America chapter, on the Make-A-Wish club executive board, and I am the captain of the girl's varsity swim team. Outside of school, I love to read, go to the beach, and spend time with friends. Thank you for your dedication to this committee. I can't wait to see you all then!

Katelyn Mai

Hi delegates, I am Katelyn Mai and I will be one of your Chairs for NATO this Surf City conference. I am a senior at Huntington Beach High School and this is my fourth year in MUN, a fantastic program that has helped to build my abilities in research, public speaking, and team cooperation. I have been on the girl's varsity swim team since freshman year and I think being a club swimmer since the age of 7 has greatly impacted my lifestyle, especially regarding food. I love to eat carbs, especially bread, I absolutely adore bread. An odd accomplishment I am quite proud of was winning Homecoming King this year, an exciting and unexpected occurrence. I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of your experience at the Surf City XIX Conference and look forward to seeing you all in committee!

Emily Poon

Hi delegates! My name is Emily Poon and I'm a senior in HBHS MUN. On campus I am a part of the Make-A-Wish board, NHS, Community Caretakers Club, etc. Outside of school I love reading novels & webcomics, as well as baking/being bad at cooking and making jewelry. I'm also a big fan of mythology, animation, and Asian literature. As stressful as this program can be, it undeniably is incredibly beneficial towards your research and public speaking skills. So while I hope you all didn't have too hard of a time with these topics, I'm super excited to see what you guys will come up with and I look forward to a good debate!

All Papers are due on **JANUARY 30, 2022** by 11:59pm to
surfcitymun.nato@gmail.com

Topic A: The Situation in Afghanistan

Background

As of this October, the conflict in Afghanistan has reached its 20th year and shows no signs of relief for the country. While the current war has traces dating back all the way to WWI from Afghanistan's inception as an independent nation, what is most commonly cited for its instigation are the events that took place on September 11th, 2001. The US's subsequent invasion of Afghanistan starting October 7th, 2001, (backed by British and future Canadian, Australian, German, and French support) toppled the Taliban's regime that had been in place since 1996.¹

The Taliban is a predominantly Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist group that emerged during the 1990s in response to Soviet occupation during the Afghan War. The group's initial appeal was their promise to establish stability after a period of drought, famine, and conflict amongst Mujahideen groups, as well as their devotion to traditional Islamic beliefs. In September 1996, they seized Kabul from President Burhanuddin Rabbani whom they viewed as corrupt due to his status as an ethnic Tajik. They later declared Afghanistan to be an Islamic emirate and instigated Mullah Mohammed Omar as leader. During their rule, they established a strict and extremist regime based on Pashtun social codes, excluding women from public life, banning television and music, jailing men whose beards were deemed too short, and overall neglecting a number of social services within the country.² The Taliban drew international attention after providing refuge to Osama bin Laden, founder of militant Islamist group al-Qaeda, after his orchestration of the attacks on 9/11. Despite the end of their regime, many of their core members remained active throughout the 2001-2014 Afghanistan War and they began to adopt techniques modeled after ones that were used in the Iraq War, including improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings.³

In 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed control of Afghanistan's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), seeking to increase its role and reach across the country. During 2005-2006, ISAF troops increased from approximately 5,000 to 65,000, composed of troops from 42 countries including all of NATO's member states. The ISAF controlled all of the international military forces in eastern Afghanistan, ramping up their combat operations until NATO's military & security operations were handed over to the Afghan army in 2013. NATO's combat mission finally came to an end in December of 2014 with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) being left with full responsibility for the country's security. While US-led troops were left in order to train Afghan forces and plans to withdraw troops entirely were quickly abandoned, these events ultimately heralded the end of the American mission in Afghanistan.⁴ Between 2007-2021, over 1,100 NATO troops, 47,000 civilians, 73,000 Afghan troops, and tens of thousands of Taliban fighters died in Afghanistan. In 2020 the US committed to a total withdrawal of troops under a signed agreement with the Taliban; this was completed as of August 2021.⁵

On August 15th, 2021, President Ashraf Ghani fled the country leaving the Taliban free to fill in his position and drive tens of thousands of people to the borders. Shortly after on the 26th, a suicide bombing on Kabul airport killed 169 Afghans and 13 US troops trying to flee the country, marking one of the deadliest events of the war. Days later on August 30th, the US military evacuated the country, leaving behind over 100,000 Afghans who could have been eligible for a visa.⁶ Despite the US spending over \$4 billion USD annually on strengthening the

Afghan military, low recruitment rates, poor morale, theft of equipment by commanders, and desertions all left the country at high risk.⁷

For many, the Taliban's rule was synonymous with the violation of human rights, especially those of women and minorities. Amongst foreign aid, women's rights were often sidelined in favor of other strategic goals, and while the Taliban has allegedly claimed to uphold women's rights under Islam, many have reported women being turned away from schools, being flogged, ordered not to leave home without a male guardian, and forced into arranged marriages.⁸ Within the last few months, the Taliban has already established gender-segregated classrooms and many women are concerned that they will be denied the ability to work.⁹ During the previous Taliban regime, literacy rates amongst women were as low as 15%, and as of 2018 they increased to only 13%. Gender-based violence is also at a high, with over 51% of women and girls facing some form of physical or sexual abuse by their partners.¹⁰ Over 3.7 million children do not have access to education in Afghanistan, and large counts of children have been forced into labour or begging on the streets.

An estimated 73,000 Afghans fled the country alongside retreating US forces. Afghan refugees are already the third largest in the world in terms of number, with over 3 million being internally displaced. A number of countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and those of the EU have been found to forcibly return asylum seekers, violating the principle of non-refoulement that was enshrined in the 1951 refugee convention.¹¹ Iranian border forces were found guilty of the torture, drowning, and arson attack against Afghan migrants; no action was taken against the perpetrators and the attacks were not investigated. Both Pakistan and Iran have stated that they can no longer handle the number of Afghan refugees coming into their borders, and while Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have offered to provide support to migrants, no permanent commitments to take them in have been made. The European Union has been keen on avoiding another migrant crisis after the backlash they faced with the influx of Syrian refugees; the US, UK, Canada, France, and Germany have stated their willingness to evacuate some number of endangered Afghans while Austria, Poland, and Switzerland will not be accepting anymore arrivals and are increasing border security to prevent illegal crossings.¹² Millions of refugees currently live in over-populated camps that lack access to clean water, healthcare, and other essential services that have only worsened in recent years.

Even before the Taliban take-over, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was one of the worst in the world. Nearly half of the country's population was in need of dire humanitarian assistance, totalling up to around 18.4 million people. 1 in 3 Afghans do not have proper access to food and as winter approaches, it can be expected that up to 23 million Afghans will face crisis levels of food insecurity. Health infrastructure was especially weakened due to the COVID-19 pandemic; 52,011 cases and 2,237 deaths were recorded, a mere fraction of the true total seeing as most provinces had no means of obtaining COVID-19 tests.¹³ The government showed little response to many of the crises that arose during the pandemic, with many cases of poorer households separate from the community mosque being excluded from the distribution of bread. With the current drought being expected to extend into the next year, the livelihoods of over 7.3 million people will be affected and many will have to choose between migration or starvation.¹⁴

Lastly, Afghanistan faces a severe economic crisis and seeing as over 21% of their GNI came from foreign aid, the situation is likely to worsen as many countries retract this aid due to hesitance in working with the Taliban.¹⁵ According to the UNDP, over 38 million Afghans are at risk of falling into poverty with incomes amounting to a meagre \$0.94 per person per day, and even international bodies such as the IMF and World Bank cannot continue their aid programmes without approval from their members.¹⁶ All of these problems amount to a mere fraction of those

that need to be addressed before the crisis in Afghanistan can come to a halt. Historically, the developed world and NATO member states specifically have played a large role in the formation of Afghanistan as a nation, thus the countries of NATO are held responsible for the fate of it today.

United Nations Involvement

On January 3, 1980, several Member States called for an urgent meeting of the Security Council to address the situation in Afghanistan, resulting in the emergency special session of the General Assembly.¹⁷ At the 35th GA session, resolution 35/37 was adopted, in which the members recognized the situation and its implications for international peace and security.¹⁸ In response to the growing concerns in the following decades, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), a UN Special Political Mission, was formed on March 28, 2002 by the Security Council Resolution 1401.¹⁹ The original mandate of UNAMA was to support the implementation of the Bonn Agreement (2001) which formulated a method of establishing a more stable government utilizing an interim authority, a transitional government, and free and fair elections.²⁰ However, due to its failure in securing a stable government, the mandate adapted to the development of the situation and is now focused on the capacity and protection of human rights, maintaining humanitarian assistance, and support for Afghanistan's governmental development.²¹

More recent developments were addressed in The Security Council Resolution 2593, passed on August 30, 2021, which focused on the Taliban's Seizure of power and the August 26th attack at Kabul airport.²² Moreover, the United Nations Security Council extended UNAMA until March 17, 2021 in the Security Council Resolution 2596 on September 17, 2021 to call upon all Afghan and international parties to coordinate with UNAMA's mandate and requested the Secretary-General to submit a written report by January 31, 2022, to establish recommendations on further mandate strategic and operational developments.²³ The resolution also emphasized that the Taliban would be judged by their actions rather than words.²⁴ The Bonn Agreement of 2001 was not a complete failure and succeeded in minor aspects due to 5 main reasons: the US-supported Northern Alliance had the military advantage, the US interagency position was synchronized, bilateral preparations and consultation actors paved the way before the agreement, negotiations and national interest were cohesive, and the objectives of the Bonn conference were limited and achievable.²⁵

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allies entered Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and in 2003, the organization led the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).²⁶ The ISAF aimed to create conditions where the Afghan government could establish itself nationally and build capacity for Afghan security. The program was completed in December 2014 when the Afghan National Defense and Security took over the responsibility for national security. In 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to improve Afghan security forces and institutions to fight terrorism with a focus on the Special Operations Forces and the Afghan Air Force. However, in April 2021, Allied forces began to withdraw troops and RSM was terminated in September. NATO Allies are currently monitoring Afghanistan to ensure the safe evacuation of personnel from Allied and partner countries as well as NATO affiliated Afghans, but have suspended all support to Afghan authorities.

Due to the recent developments in Afghanistan, many NGOs have left the country, despite the Taliban expressing their interest in receiving foreign aid and contacting NGOs.

Certain NGOs like the Norwegian Refugee Council²⁷, the Red Cross²⁸, Doctors Without Borders²⁹, and the World Food Programme announced on Twitter that they would continue operations within Afghanistan. The Taliban stated that there are no intentions to harm foreign aid workers, seen in the assault on Kunduz city in 2015 where Taliban officials contacted aid agencies before occupation and no humanitarian staff were killed or injured.³⁰ Yet despite the assurances, the situation still poses a danger to workers, such as the June 8 raid of the UK agency HALO Trust compound, in which ten people were killed.³¹ Although the United Nations aims to continue aid within Afghanistan, many nations and NGOs struggle to secure the safety of their humanitarian workers while remaining in the conflict situation. In order to work within Taliban-controlled territory, it is important to look at past operations of organizations in areas that were previously under the Taliban.

Case Study: Women in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan was partly described as a fight for the rights and dignity of women³², as voiced by First Lady Laura Bush in a 2001 radio address urging Americans to help secure the dignity and opportunity for women and children of Afghanistan.³³ Yet, over time, the global interest in the safety and security of women's rights in Afghanistan has declined significantly, which is reflected in the fall of US aid funding to Afghanistan from \$16,749 million in 2010 to \$3,120 million in 2021.³⁴ In 2002, the Afghan government was able to promote schooling of Afghan girls and allowed Afghan women to participate in public life including holding political office, however, despite growing efforts, the percentage of girls in school nationwide declined in 2014 with rising discrimination, corruption, and reduced funding. NGOs have seen success in improving access to education for girls in areas that would otherwise be difficult to obtain schooling with the use of community-based education. The government's inability to create community-based schools as well as the lack of funding makes widespread improvement for girls' education significantly more challenging alongside the constant insecurity, family resistance, and community restrictions.

From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban-controlled government saw that nearly all education for women and girls was banned³⁵, imposed punishments such as stoning, lashing, and amputation on women, restricted women from traveling unless accompanied by a male family member,³⁶ and denied women employment opportunities. Although recently the Taliban have pledged to reform these strict practices to allow girls to study and women to work, as permitted by Islam, there is always the issue of on-ground practice. Local Taliban officers have varying regulations, differing between the words of their leaders as well as each other, with some closing most girls' schools, and others preventing access to even primary schooling. In Taliban-controlled districts, NGOs creating and maintaining community based-education programs have found small success in providing education where no other schools are accessible. However, some districts impose taxes on teacher salaries and threaten residents to prevent girls' access to schooling, even in government-controlled areas. The Taliban have claimed that the difference seen in districts and provinces is due to the differing levels of acceptance of girls' education within each community: many rural communities see such resistance in Afghanistan more so than other districts or provinces. Yet it is still within the Taliban officials' control to determine the method and implementation of policies in areas they control.³⁷ Oftentimes, women who seek Taliban courts to settle inheritance and property disputes receive little to no action from the justice system, and many courts have even imposed harsh punishments on men and women for moral crimes, deterring women from reporting to the courts any issues, including abusive home situations.

Many nations have previously considered utilizing targeted sanctions and aid conditionality to influence the actions of the Taliban, as well as UN mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court, UNAMA, and Security Council actions.

In December of 2017, a 23-year-old Khadija, an Afghan woman, set herself on fire in order to escape the domestic abuse within her home in Herat, Afghanistan. Despite her desperate attempt to relieve her suffering, she woke up at Herat Hospital with third-degree burns, a situation that prompted her husband to be arrested for domestic abuse, something rarely criminalized in Afghanistan. Even with her husband in prison, Khadija was not free as her in-laws gave her an ultimatum to tell the police she was lying in order to be reunited with her son or to never see her 3-month-old baby again.³⁸ Like Khadija, a majority of Afghan women suffer from domestic abuse³⁹ but hardly any are able to receive sympathy from the Afghanistan government and justice system. Afghanistan was ranked the worst place in the world to be a woman in 2018,⁴⁰ a time in which $\frac{2}{3}$ of Afghan girls were unable to attend school, where 87% of Afghan women were illiterate, and 70-80% were forced into marriage, issues which have worsened significantly in the light of the Taliban nationwide takeover.

In 2010-2011, UNICEF along with the Afghan government's statistical agency took the Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey to determine the stance of women on domestic violence within the nation. The survey found that 92% of women in Afghanistan felt that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one of the reasons in a list created by the Demographic and Health Surveys: going out without telling the husband, neglecting the children, arguing with the husband, refusing sex, and burning the food. Overall the acceptance of domestic abuse within Afghanistan is significantly higher than other countries in the region with India at 54%, Bangladesh at 36%, and Nepal at 23%. The study found that women's level of education affected their attitudes towards domestic violence: 62% of women with no education accepted domestic violence whereas 31% with secondary education or higher accepted domestic violence. Moreover, children of educated Afghan women are less likely to die during infancy or childhood and are more likely to be immunized and complete primary education. In Afghanistan, 82% of all women are uneducated, thus affecting the nationwide attitude towards abuse in the household.

In 2009, then-Resident Hamid Karzai passed the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, which was later reconfirmed by President Ashraf Ghani in 2018.⁴¹ The law works to increase reporting and investigations of violent crimes against women, and on a lesser scale, convict those responsible for the violence. Through the use of funding from international donors, the Afghan government was able to develop specialized police units called Family Response Units, prosecution offices, and special courts with appointed female judges. This effort resulted in growing awareness of the law in urban areas and improvements in the justice system in regards to responses to EVAW cases. The law itself makes 22 acts of abuse toward women criminal offenses, including rape, battery, forced marriage, preventing women from acquiring property, and prohibiting a woman or girl from going to school. Nationwide implementation of the law was difficult due to resistance from all levels of justice participants including police, prosecutors, and judges, who deter women from filing complaints and redirect them to mediation. Although the law prohibits the use of mediation in cases involving extreme violence, some officials continue to refer women to mediation, solidifying the precedent of impunity for violent crimes.⁴² Women and girls who report violent crimes against them have also reported the use of invasive and abusive "virginity tests," which are accepted as evidence in court and contribute to long prison sentences for women and girls. In 2014, the World Health Organization released guidelines that stated such tests were scientifically invalid, yet the use of vaginal examinations is still heavily practiced in Afghanistan.⁴³ In February of 2018, Afghanistan passed

a new criminal code that UNAMA claimed was a milestone for the country's justice system reform, yet just before it was passed, a chapter of the code was removed: the chapter that penalized violence against women.⁴⁴ The laws and measures taken by the Afghan government were already difficult to implement, but with the takeover of the Taliban, women and girls face significantly more unstable, dangerous, and inhumane futures.⁴⁵ In order to secure the lives of the 90% of Afghan women who experience abuse⁴⁶ and educate the 83% of women unable to attend school, NATO Allies and partners must dedicate special focus to the safety and security of women's rights within the modern context of Afghanistan.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the Taliban be prevented from filling in governmental positions?
2. What has your country done in order to protect women's rights in Afghanistan?
3. How has the Covid-19 pandemic worsened the economic crisis and the lack of access to healthcare within Afghanistan?
4. How has foreign military aid in defense benefitted or worsened the security of Afghanistan?
5. What legislation can NATO enforce in order to ensure non-corrupt government officials taking office?
6. What are possible solutions to assist Afghans with the humanitarian crisis while being under the Taliban?

Endnotes

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Topic B: Russian Aggression Towards the Baltic States

Background

In 2014, the Russian Federation violated many international agreements and the territorial integrity of Ukraine through the act of illegally annexing the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Throughout the past seven years, Russian leaders have exerted a willingness of applying aggressive nature in order to attain their geopolitical goals. This has challenged the security and stability of the European Union. Russia has proved to lack hesitation in utilizing military power in order to threaten the influence of America and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in regions that have proven to be extremely important to the European Union's security.¹

Throughout the course of history, the Russian Federation has presented extreme ambitions of expansion; in which the European Union and NATO are paralyzing Russia's capabilities to do so. Therefore, Russia has sought to weaken the power that NATO holds by undermining Western initiatives such as the Euro-Atlantic security order. To further this, the Russian Federation has implemented policies that target the confrontation of the West at all times. In order to intimidate and destabilize members of NATO, Russia adopted the "Strategy of Active Defense". The strategy consists of applying different overt and covert military measures upon different points of time within conflict. The tactic of Hybrid Warfare is used during peacetime in order to create confusion by spreading misinformation, uplifting far-right radical groups, interfering with democratic elections, and more. Hybrid Warfare is a non-military force that creates favorable conditions for successful results when military force is applied. When applying military force, Russia stays below the line of confrontation that would warrant receiving military response from NATO. For example, Russia deploys nuclear missiles within the range of NATO's borders in order to intimidate but not directly within NATO's jurisdiction so that they are not triggered to deploy as well. Moscow does not rule out the use of nuclear weaponry in order to obtain many parts of the Baltic and Black Sea regions.²

In 2019, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) found that Russia spent more than \$62 billion on military expenses. Of that \$62 billion, 35 to 40 percent of it had been set aside exclusively for the modernization of weaponry equipment. Over the last decade of sustained investment, the Russian armed forces are seen at their highest capability. In 2019, the IISS also found that Russia had more than 136 battalion tactical groups (BTGs). About half of all BTGs, which consist of over 55,000 personnel, are capable of fast deployment in order to be used for large-scale militarization operations. Military planners from NATO have found that the military leadership of the Russian Federation has the ability to deploy around 60,000 troops in just a few days; which can be a massive threat to members of NATO and to citizens residing in the area of conflict. The Russian Federation holds such ability to deploy large groups of personnel in a rapid amount of time due to their geographical advantage. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are composed in an exposed location and have a very small size of their defense forces.

Consisting of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the Baltic States are bordered by Russia, Belarus, and Poland. In 1991, the Baltic States were restored to a statehood when they regained

their independence from the Soviet Union. Despite Russia's military presence within the Baltic States ending in 1998, Russia continued to influence the security and foreign policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Moscow attempted to restrict NATO and the European Union from attaining the Baltic states by refusing to sign the border demarcation agreements.²

Russia has also often used the excuse of the argument that the Baltic governments discriminate against ethnic Russians. This narrative of discrimination has been viewed to be a political excuse for the Russian military intervention within the Baltic States. It is believed to be a political excuse because Russia has used the defense of protecting Russian compatriots as the basis of war in the past; such as with the interference in Crimea. Russia's Western Military District (WMD) includes five headquarters locations and three army commands. Particularly in Estonia and Latvia, there is a sizable amount of Russian-speaking minorities residing in the Baltic states. Despite this demographic, Estonia has stated that they do not support Russia's ambitions of expansion. Under the Soviet Union, the Baltic States' population was massively changed due to the mass deportation. 25 percent of the total Estonian population is ethnic Russian, 27 percent in Latvia are ethnic Russian, and 4.5 percent of the Lithuanian population is ethnic Russian. Russian aggression in the Baltic States is under the same basis of reasoning as the annexation of Crimea because it was believed that there were many ethnic Russians residing in Crimea. However, the difference between the Russian aggression within Crimea and the Baltic States lies in the risk of attacking the NATO members.⁴

The Baltic States have taken measures against Russia's soft power that consists of media serving as a channel of information by banning certain Russian television channels and not allowing Russian journalists. The misinformation campaign is used to promote anti-NATO and anti-United States propaganda. Russia has since then accused Estonian authorities of Russophobia, or anti-Russian sentiment for the censorship.⁵

Currently, the Russian aggression within the Baltic States is low due to Russia avoiding direct military conflict against NATO, the United States, and the European Union. Despite appearing to be low on the Russian Federation's agenda for foreign policy, every region of the world has had a reshaped viewpoint with the global competition of the United States in mind.⁶ However, the Russian Federation views NATO, the European Union, and Western countries like the United States as a threat to expansion.

The Russian aggression in the Baltic States can pose harm to the citizens residing in the regions of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania due to the widespread misinformation and tampering with elections, which leads to a fraudulent and corrupt governmental system. The citizens are also subjected to anti-NATO propaganda which can be severely detrimental to collaboration of NATO and the Baltic states for the future in which NATO provides assistance through forms of security and defense, humanitarian needs, and financial stability.

United Nations Involvement

NATO's current relationship with Russia was defined when the nation rejected the offer to cooperate on missile defense in 2013 and suspended all practical cooperation in 2014 due to the Russian military intervention in Ukraine.⁷ The Baltics are difficult for NATO to defend due to the military advantage Russia has in the area, thus NATO members have created resilience and risk-reduction measures to specifically address Russian behavior in a method that would avoid escalating conflict. In the 2016 Warsaw Summit,⁸ NATO Allies decided to establish a forward presence in the Baltics and deployed the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP), consisting of a tripwire force of four multinational battalion-sized battlegroups, to three Baltic states of Estonia,

Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland on a rotational basis.⁹ These groups are led by the UK, Canada, Germany, and the U.S. in order to strengthen the transatlantic relationship and establish a network reaction in the case of an attack on one Ally.¹⁰ Currently, more than 4,500 troops from Europe and North America are located in the Baltic states at the request of host nations.¹¹

Many NATO allies are concerned about the consequences of NATO's actions, with two major differing views. Some are concerned that NATO's current response including the EFP may not be enough to deter Russia from using military force against the Allies, while others believe that Moscow should be approached with caution and increasing resilience to reduce risks of escalation. Both concerns could result in miscalculation or escalation: if underestimated, Moscow could pose a threat to NATO Allies, if overestimated, the nation may feel that defensive measures are necessary.¹² NATO's ballistic missile defense, contrary to many concerns, should not pose a significant threat to Russia as it is designed to protect European Allies against missile threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic Area and is not directed against Russia nor can it undermine Russia's strategic deterrence capabilities. For example, the Aegis Ashore site in Romania is a purely defensive mechanism: Interceptor missiles cannot be used for offensive purposes, and the site contains no explosives or weapons that can hit the Earth's surface.¹³

The Baltic states heavily rely on aid from Western countries, specifically the United States. At the 2021 NATO summit, the U.S. was urged to act strategically to implement measures that would resist Russian aggression in the region.¹⁴ The U.S. currently works in a security partnership with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and has contributed \$503.9 million worth of US-origin defense articles under the Foreign Military Sales program, and \$346.3 million via the Direct Commercial Sales process since 2015. This defense support increased the Baltic states' operability with NATO armed forces and has developed NATO's defense and deterrence in the region. Moreover, the United States worked to establish security assistance programs such as the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) to enhance territorial defense capabilities and cooperation with NATO programs and defense. In 2017, the United States signed the Defense Cooperation Agreements¹⁵ with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to create a framework for a partnership in defense and security. Alongside this agreement, the NATO Status of Forces Agreement¹⁶ provides a legal framework for the U.S. forces in the Baltic states, and in 2019, the United States signed the Security Cooperation Roadmaps¹⁷ with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to identify their security priorities for 2019 to 2024. As these three countries meet their 2014 Wales Pledge, each has received approximately \$1.2 million annually in IMET assistance between 2015-2018 and about \$2 million in 2019 for the military education of officers at Department of Defense schools in the US.

Throughout 2014 to 2018, NATO created strategies for responding to the Russian aggression. The strategy focused on strengthening the defense and security of the European Union. In order to do so, the Joint Force Command Naples established a regional hub for the purpose of improving NATO's awareness of threats from foreign threats and the ability to be able to respond. At the 2014 Wales summit, NATO created and implemented the Readiness Action Plan. The plan was created in order to provide a demonstration to Russia that NATO would not hesitate to defend all allies. The Readiness Action Plan enhanced the military activity of all forces and reinforced NATO's air policing mission over Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Readiness Action Plan also allowed for NATO Response Force, or NRF, to triple in size; composed of 40,000 troops with 5,000 on permanent standby. The plan was completely implemented at the 2016 Warsaw summit.

The leadership of NATO also came to an agreement for the formation of the Defense Investment Pledge (DIP). The Defense Investment Pledge is a goal that is hoped to be achieved by 2024 where allies move toward 2% or above spending on defense.

Case Study: Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine

Hybrid warfare encompasses everything from conventional military tactics, to cyberattacks, disinformation, political corruption, and so on. Hybrid warfare has been a key component in Russia's aggression towards the Baltic states, and understanding its uses and effects is crucial toward approaching the situation in Crimea. This strategy is exemplified through Russia's activity in Ukraine, most notably starting in 2014.

On multiple occasions, the Kremlin has been seen pursuing an information war, attempting to shape the narratives of certain events in Ukraine towards their favor. Throughout the pro-European Maiden movement, accusations against the protesters claiming that they were Fascists as well as claiming that the post-Yanukovych government threatened the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in Crimea led to the polarization of these minority groups that generally consumed pro-Russian media. The Kremlin's information war in this instance aimed to embolden native separatists, and Kiev's initial reluctance to suppress them allowed for Russian soldiers to disguise themselves as separatists and complete the invasion of Crimea. Other political tactics include Russia's support of the Eurosceptic, pro-Russian Opposition Platform — For Life that calls for tighter relations between Russia and Ukraine. Party leader Viktor Medvedchuk is known for his closeness with Putin, and is estimated to be one of Ukraine's richest politicians.¹⁸ Local channels serve as the main medium for spreading disinformation, with many of Medvedchuk allies running channels such as NewsOne and Zik Television. Russia has often made use of bots and trolls, and until VKontakte was blocked these bots took up nearly ⅔ of Ukraine's social media.¹⁹ In 2019 the Russian network VKontakte was found to portray presidential candidates and Ukraine in general in an extremely harsh light. Russia has also made good use of cyberattacks in their hybrid warfare. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) reported over 360 cyberattacks against Ukraine in 2018, increasing up to 500 attacks by the time of the 2019 election. During that time, Ukrainian officials saw nearly 1 attack per every 40 minutes in various institutions; countermeasures have been taken alongside NATO specialists as of the 2020 elections.²⁰ These aspects of Russia's hybrid warfare campaign all aim to demoralize Ukrainians, siphoning off of rising frustrations and resentments in hopes that they will eventually be directed towards Ukraine's politicians and keep the war as a constant. In the past this has led to distrust in the government, having many citizens believe that the politicians did not intend to end the war or additionally working to separate voters.²¹ Thus far, Russia's hybrid warfare has had a number of negative effects on Ukraine, particularly with their economy and trade. The loss of industries in Crimea along with the costs of war and Russian import bans/economic sanctions has all led to Russian-Ukrainian trade dropping by 75% and Ukraine's GDP dropping from \$183 billion to \$91 billion between 2013-2015.²² Russia's efforts have also undermined Ukraine as an energy transit nation, having shut off the flow of gas to East and Central Europe during winter in 2009 after having a pricing dispute with Ukraine.

Russia has yet to acknowledge the presence of their troops in east Ukraine, finding loopholes in international law by citing claims that the soldiers got “lost” and accidentally stumbled into war zones. Even when special forces from Russia were captured, Putin still actively denies this incident. In the same vein, Russia has also routinely denied it's shooting of a Malaysia Airlines plane that flew over Ukraine in 2014, arguing that Ukraine was responsible for closing the airspace around the war zone.²³ While investigation requests have been made by countries such as the Netherlands, Russia continually ignores these and other attempts to institute an international tribunal. The list of instances in which Russia has tried to shift the blame from themselves onto Ukraine expands even to this day and will continue to do so unless solutions from the international community are made.

Conventional warfare from Russia has also seen its advancements. Around 2018, Chief Sergey Shoygu reported to have fielded over 600 weapons, selling their most advanced T90MS tanks to Syria. As expected, a majority of these weapons have been found in Ukraine in the Anti-Terrorist Donbass region and in Kyiv's territory alongside over 14,000 Russian troops supporting 29,000 separatists. In the years between 2015-2019, Russia violated the Minsk Trilateral Contract Group's cease-fire on over 20 separate occasions. Aerial vehicles, electronic warfare, and cyber intrusions have expanded beyond the conflict zone and large scale Vostok military exercises have been displayed near borders as a show of power to adversaries and allies, exemplifying their hybrid tactics of incorporating aggression with psychological pressure.²⁴ Since the Cold War, NATO has increased focus towards aggression counter-measures, yet its inclusion of former USSR territories directly bordering Russia questions NATO's ability to counter an invasion. A full-scale militaristic war is unlikely to occur, due to the extreme costs that would occur on both sides, however any attempts from NATO to regain Baltic territory would have to come under Russian fire that could easily escalate into war. While Russia's military does not compare to NATO's total one, NATO's immediate forces residing within the Baltics are vastly inferior and leave some concerns over what would happen when Russia decides to invade.

So far, Ukraine's inclination to join NATO and the EU have been the biggest contributor in the drive to eradicate corruption and strengthen their governance mechanisms. Plans for reform and defence have been put in place, yet Ukraine faces the problem of having a shortage of honest politicians. Contracts between the West and Ukraine have also proved to be efficient in dissuading Russian aggression, with one of their biggest achievements being having gained Germany, the USA, and France as partners and mediators for dealings with Russia. Ukraine today acts as an epicenter for Russian hybrid warfare, showing the full effects of all the various tactics used and tested there. The events that took place in Ukraine in 2014 will serve to act as the blueprint for future Russian conflicts and military practices. Today, other regions also face the threat of Russian aggression as Baltic nations such as Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia have been speculated to be the Kremlin's next targets. The tools used by Russia in Ukraine currently pose threats to the internal security and constitutional order of the Baltic states, with reports showing that the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU) have been actively recruiting Baltic nationals in their spying operations. Furthermore, Russia has sought to exploit divisions in Latvian society; when the government rejected efforts to make Russian a national language, the Kremlin used this opportunity to promote the narrative of the oppression of Russian minority communities throughout the former Soviet states. Latvia has attempted to address these threats and counteract Russia's information warfare by supporting the efforts of NGOs, civil society organizations, and journalists in creating inclusive and engaging media content to encourage Russian minorities from turning to Russian news sources. These initiatives have shown some degree of success due to structures such as the NATO Stratcom Center of Excellence in Riga, and the Baltic Centre of Media Excellence, thus it is crucial that NATO member states continue to provide support for such endeavors. Hybrid warfare seeks to target weaknesses in join-alliances and international organisations, therefore the developed nations should look to implement policies ensuring the peace and security of the Baltic states before Russia is allowed to take further action.²⁵

Questions to Consider

1. How have other countries been affected by the tension between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian Federation?
2. What precedent has your country set in regards to establishing security and defense for allies?
3. How can the escalation of Russian aggression in the Baltic States be prevented or stopped?
4. How can the spread of disinformation be prevented in order to protect the security and safety of citizens residing in the Baltic states?
5. How has the number of self-identified ethnic Russians in the Baltic states fluctuated and affected Russian aggression?
6. What will the Russian response be to a firm military response from NATO?

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