



## PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

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# SEPTEMBER OCTOBER 2021 ADVANCED PUBLIC FORUM BRIEF



**Resolved: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
should substantially increase its defense commitments  
to the Baltic states.**

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## **Topic Evolution**

The September/October topic provides a lot of room for development, as many debaters went to camps over the summer and have had a lot of time to think about how they want their arguments to progress as they continue competing. Even though we were early in the season, there are a few big tournaments and early chances for teams to assert themselves in the competitive season.

The biggest area of debate this month is, as anticipated, about war with Russia. To win this, the affirmative must prove two things: That Russia is likely to attack the Baltics in the status quo, and that the current defenses are not sufficient enough to defend the Baltics. This is a tricky line for the pro to walk, as teams will still need to prove that the EFP has been effective or the con can question why we should continue to add defenses to a system that does not work. The negative, on the other hand, has a little more leeway in that they can either prove that Russia will not attack in the status quo or that if they do, the Baltics currently have sufficient defenses to keep them safe. If the con team wants to take a position of offense, they can also argue that affirming the resolution would provoke Russia to act, leading to war when the resolution is affirmed. There has also been a focus on cybersecurity, considering Russia has ramped up their cyberattacks in recent years, particularly against the Baltic states. They are working to undermine NATO unity and pro-Western beliefs within the Baltics, so this has become an important part of the topic.

Many teams have elected to focus on arguments other than war to try to diversify the subject a little bit. On the affirmative, teams may choose to talk about the unity of NATO and the fact that its legitimacy has potentially declined in recent years. If Russia and other actors perceive NATO to be weak and believe that its members would not uphold Article 5, it may make the organization more vulnerable to attack. Affirming has the opportunity to resolidify the organization and emphasize the commitment NATO members have to one another. On the negation, some teams have elected to examine the tradeoffs that affirming would have. For example, if NATO were to increase defense commitments in the Baltics, would that prevent them from increasing defense commitments elsewhere in the world? What impact would that have? Teams have also chosen to explore how alienating Russia through affirming would compromise some other important goals that NATO wants to achieve and needs Russia's support to do so.

## **Further Reading and Classroom Resources**

### **General and FYI**

Brauß, Heinrich. "Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region." German Council on Foreign Relations. 2 Oct. 2020. Web. <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>

Milevski, Lukas. "NATO's defence policy dilemma in the Baltic States." Security and Defence Quarterly, vol. 14, no. 1, 2017, pp. 51-68. doi:10.5604/01.3001.0010.8471. <https://securityanddefence.pl/NATO-S-DEFENCE-POLICY-DILEMMA-nIN-THE-BALTIC-STATES,103196,0,2.html>

NATO. "Founding treaty." NATO. 24 Sep. 2020. Web. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_67656.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67656.htm)

NATO. "Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)." NATO. Last accessed 1 Sep 2021. Web. <https://lc.nato.int/operations/enhanced-forward-presence-efp.aspx>

Pruitt, Sarah. "What Is NATO's Article 5?" HISTORY. 19 Jul. 2018. Web. <https://www.history.com/news/nato-article-5-meaning-history-world-war-2>

Rosu, Cristian. "How real is the Russian threat to the Baltic States?" New Europe. 8 Apr. 2021. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/how-real-is-the-russian-threat-to-the-baltic-states/>

Thieme, Lt. Col. Donald. "Are the Baltics the Next Crimea?" U.S. Naval Institute News. 1 Apr. 2014. Web. <https://news.usni.org/2014/04/01/baltics-next-crimea>

Thompson, Loren B. "Why the Baltic States Are Where Nuclear War Is Most Likely To Begin." The National Interest. 20 Jul. 2016. Web. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-the-baltic-states-are-where-nuclear-war-most-likely-17044>

**Pro - Status quo is insufficient**

Deni, John R. "NATO's Presence in the East: Necessary but Still Not Sufficient." War on the Rocks. 27 Jun. 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/>

Shlapak, David A. and Johnson, Michael. "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics." RAND Corporation. 2016. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html).

Vershbow, Alexander R. "Permanent deterrence: Enhancements to the US military presence in North Central Europe." Atlantic Council. 8 Feb. 2019. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/permanent-deterrence/>

**Pro - Russian threat**

Judson, Jen. "Do the Baltics need more US military support to deter Russia?." Defense News. 15 Jul. 2019. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/07/15/do-the-baltics-need-more-us-military-support-to-deter-russia/>

Tanner, Jari. "Estonia: Russia attack not likely but Baltics under threat." AP News. 20 Apr. 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/latvia-moscow-estonia-tallinn-lithuania-4c93bbb92085e3350a19bcd5e04122e>

White, Sarah. "Russian Aggression in the Baltics Will Not Look Like Crimea." Real Clear Defense. 21 May 2021. [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/21/russian\\_aggression\\_in\\_the\\_baltics\\_will\\_not\\_look\\_like\\_crimea\\_778176.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/21/russian_aggression_in_the_baltics_will_not_look_like_crimea_778176.html)

**Pro - NATO unity/legitimacy**

Painter, Sally A. "US must remain committed to NATO and the Baltic States." Atlantic Council. 8 Sept. 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-must-remain-committed-to-nato-and-the-baltic-states/>

**Con - Provoking Russia**

Euronews. "Russia says buildup at Ukraine border is a response to NATO 'threats'." Euronews. 12 Apr. 2021. Web. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/12/g7-calls-on-russia-to-cease-provocations-on-ukraine-border>

Galen Carpenter, Ted. "Is NATO Provoking the Russian Military Build-up in Kaliningrad?" Cato Institute. 14 Dec. 2020. Web. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/nato-provoking-russian-military-build-kaliningrad>

Kristek, Michael R. "The nature of Russia's threat to NATO's enhanced forward presence in the Baltic States." Calhoun.nps.edu. Dec. 2017. <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/56748>

Kühn, Ulrich. "NATO's Options - Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 28 Mar. 2018. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>

**Con - Status quo is sufficient**

Maguire, Steven. "The Positive Impact of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence." The Strategy Bridge. 3 Sept. 2019. Web. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/9/3/the-positive-impact-of-natos-enhanced-forward-presence>

**Con - Cybersecurity**

Kojala, Linas. "Baltic Security: The Same Challenges Remain, Even During a Pandemic - Foreign Policy Research Institute." Foreign Policy Research Institute. 8 Jun. 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/05/baltic-security-the-same-challenges-remain-even-during-a-pandemic/>

Kottasová, Ivana. "How Russian threats turned this country into the go-to expert on cyber defense." CNN. 18 Jun. 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/18/tech/estonia-cyber-security-lessons-intl-cmd/index.html>

**Con - War is unlikely**

Person, Robert. "Analysis | 6 reasons not to worry about Russia invading the Baltics." Washington Post. 12 Nov. 2015. Web. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/12/6-reasons-not-to-worry-about-russia-invading-the-baltics/>

**Con - Strengthen other forces instead**

Klein, Robert M, Lundqvist, Stefan, Sumangil, Ed, and Pettersson, Ulrica. "Baltics Left of Bang: The Role of NATO with Partners in Denial-Based Deterrence." Institute for National Strategic Studies. 7 Nov. 2019. <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-301.pdf?ver=2019-07-23-142433-990>

### **Con - Undermines other goals**

Michlin-Shapir, Vera. "Will Russia help the U.S. negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran?" Institute of Modern Russia. 2 Mar. 2021. <https://imrussia.org/en/analysis/3240-will-russia-help-the-u-s-negotiate-a-nuclear-deal-with-iran>

Sokolsky, Richard and Rumer, Eugene. "U.S.-Russian Relations in 2030." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 15 Jun. 2020. Web. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/15/u.s.-russian-relations-in-2030-pub-82056>

## Pro Evidence

### **Russia has the capacity to overwhelm current NATO defenses in the Baltics incredibly quickly**

Shlapak, David A. and Johnson, Michael. "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics." RAND Corporation. 2016.

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html).

Despite President Obama's bold words in Tallinn, **a series of RAND wargames clearly indicates that NATO's current posture is inadequate to defend the Baltic states from a plausible Russian conventional attack.** The games employed Russian forces from the Western MD and the Kaliningrad oblast—a chunk of sovereign Russian territory that sits on the northeastern border of Poland, along the Baltic Sea coast—totaling approximately 27 maneuver battalions in a short-warning attack to occupy either Estonia and Latvia or both and present NATO with a rapid fait accompli. The strategic goal of the invasion was to demonstrate NATO's inability to protect its most vulnerable members and divide the alliance, reducing the threat it presents from Moscow's point of view. **The scenario assumed about a week of warning, which enabled NATO to flow some reinforcements into the Baltics**—mainly light infantry units that could be speedily air transported, along with airpower. Tables 1–4 list the forces with which both sides were credited at D-Day—when the hostilities began. The two sides adopted strategies that were generally similar across the games played, which are illustrated in Figure 2. The Red players typically made a main effort toward the Latvian capital of Riga, with a secondary attack that quickly secured the predominantly ethnic Russian areas of northeast Estonia, and then proceeded toward Tallinn. The NATO players, recognizing that they had woefully inadequate forces to mount anything resembling a forward defense, sought instead to use indigenous forces to delay Red's advance along major axes while positioning the bulk of their forces in and around Tallinn and Riga in an attempt to sustain a minimal lodgment in and around the two capitals. **The outcome was, bluntly, a disaster for NATO. Across multiple plays of the game, Russian forces eliminated or bypassed all resistance and were at the gates of or actually entering Riga, Tallinn, or both, between 36 and 60 hours after the start of hostilities.** Four factors appeared to contribute most substantially to this result.



## Russia is already provoked - they have other motives for infiltrating the Baltics

Rosu, Cristian. "How real is the Russian threat to the Baltic States?" New Europe. 8 Apr. 2021.

<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/how-real-is-the-russian-threat-to-the-baltic-states/>

**Beyond** the West's **economic sanctions**, which did play a significant part in crippling segments of the Russian economy, and a lot of coverage in the Western media, **Moscow was not subjected to considerable punishment for Russia's actions. There was no actual firm military answer from NATO. This has helped fuel the Kremlin's confidence in its ability to carry out various forms of warfare abroad.** For the Kremlin, external incursions are not just a matter of rebuilding its power and influence nearly thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. **Russia's internal complexities with regards to its economic and political dynamics push the Kremlin to consistently search for temporary silver-bullet solutions. Whenever Vladimir Putin wants to bring people together and relieve social or elite pressure, he** organizes a war meant that **plays on the idea that Russia is under siege.** Putin has been a great exploiter of his and his country's interests and has perfected the poisonous recipe of offering the prospect of a new Russian Empire in the face of growing economic and social unrest. As a result, **Putin's external incursions into neighboring countries and his tsar-like public appearances are meant to mollify the fact that he simply cannot offer Russia a better economic future without reforms that would severely weaken his personal power.** This leads him to formulate policies that focus on returning Russia to the great power status that it enjoyed during the Soviet period.

## Russia poses a significant threat to the Baltics, with diversified resources that NATO cannot currently match in the region

Rosu, Cristian. "How real is the Russian threat to the Baltic States?" New Europe. 8 Apr. 2021.

<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/how-real-is-the-russian-threat-to-the-baltic-states/>

Though they remain in danger as a result of the geographic positions, as NATO members the Baltic States have a powerful ally that can act as an effective strategic defense buffer in the event that Moscow makes any attempt to launch an incursion into one of the three countries. Furthermore, the Baltics know that Russia has never lacked the theoretical ability to occupy their capitals – Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn. Regardless, **Russia's intelligence services** – the FSB (the successor to the KGB) and GRU – **will try to destabilize the Baltics, even if those actions do not risk sparking a full-blown war with NATO.** The threat from Russia has, in fact, ceased to be a long line of tanks ripping through the countryside of Eastern Europe, in a relentless march towards one of the region's national capitals. Instead, **Moscow's means of applying pressure has greatly diversified in recent years and includes a mix of tactics, disinformation and fake news, propaganda, messianic prophecies, Russian capital, organized crime and money hidden deep in certain offshore fiscal paradises that are at the core of Russia's power that it uses against the Baltics and other countries in Europe. This new mixture is far more powerful than the full scope of Russia's historic military might.**

## There are significant operational challenges with the EFP in its current implementation that undermine its effectiveness

Deni, John R. "NATO's Presence in the East: Necessary but Still Not Sufficient." War on the Rocks. 27 Jun. 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/>

However, NATO characterizes the EFP units as “robust... combat-ready forces,” and here **there are significant questions yet to be answered. Most importantly, it remains to be seen whether the allies can overcome the challenges associated with the aforementioned multinationality that characterizes each battlegroup.** The difficulties of multinationality at the battalion or battlegroup level should have been no great surprise for an alliance that spent years experimenting – with mixed results – with similar arrangements in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, on a recent research trip I conducted to northeastern Europe, it's clear that multinationality is creating a number of problems, especially in terms of equipment compatibility, English-language proficiency, and duplicative capabilities such as medical support. These conclusions are based on an array of discussions I conducted with officers and enlisted personnel, as well as my own observations. **Additionally, so-called “operational limitations” – what we used to call national caveats during NATO's years in Afghanistan – similarly frustrate the effectiveness of the battlegroups. For example, in the event of a clear-cut crisis threatening allied security in Poland or the Baltic States, it's likely the North Atlantic Council – NATO's highest political decision-making body – would act forthrightly and provide the approval necessary for the military units of EFP-contributing states to support and operate with host nation forces. However, if the situation was ambiguous and a host nation decided to take military action absent a North Atlantic Council decision, operational limitations might prevent some contributing state forces from supporting their host nation counterparts. Finally, it's unclear who can order EFP units into action.** NATO says that the four battlegroups are “under NATO command, through the Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters in Szczecin, Poland.” However, I learned during my trip that **EFP battlegroups are in fact embedded within host nation command and force structures, which do not fall under NATO command. This is not merely a misunderstanding over dual-hatting, something NATO militaries are used to dealing with. Rather, it reflects a potentially major disagreement over command and control, and a significant gap between what NATO is putting out publicly and the reality on the ground.**

## **The US needs to reaffirm its commitment to NATO and the Baltics to prove unity within the organization and bolster its legitimacy**

Painter, Sally A. "US must remain committed to NATO and the Baltic States." Atlantic Council. 8 Sept. 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-must-remain-committed-to-nato-and-the-baltic-states/>

**Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have strongly demonstrated their dedication to the transatlantic alliance and have worked diligently to implement systematic reforms on a variety of shared concerns ranging from energy security, transparency, and economic vitality. It is therefore highly unfortunate to witness recent statements and actions taken by US President Donald Trump that do not appear to recognize these important achievements nor the Baltics' role as vital allies.** Recent public comments by the president and in private conversations reported by former National Security Advisor John Bolton indicate that rather than strengthening and appreciating the value of the NATO Alliance, if elected to a second term, President Trump may wish to pull the United States out of the North Atlantic Treaty. This has not gone unnoticed by our European friends. A recent New York Times article notes analysis by the Atlantic Council's Jorge Benitez that some European officials "see the escalation of negative steps, and they are definitely concerned that that negative pattern could continue if Trump is re-elected." This concern is not only worrying to Europeans but also to many leaders in the US Congress. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), a senior member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations warned in the same article that "withdrawing from NATO would be nothing short of catastrophic." The United States has profound interests in maintaining NATO and the sovereignty and security of the Baltic region. **Now is the time for the United States to rise to this leadership role by deepening our commitment to NATO and supporting the Baltic countries to foster a strong and united transatlantic community.** There exists today the opportunity to work on a new US-Baltic Charter to address today's challenges. These could include promoting democracy, free and fair elections, and freedom of the press in the region; combating disinformation; expanding bilateral trade and investment between the United States and the Baltics; and supporting nations that wish to join the Euro-Atlantic family. Just as in 1991, **a show of solidarity by the United States can help strengthen and protect the Baltic States, allowing them to continue to grow and faithfully contribute to the transatlantic community.**

**For deterrence of Russia to work, NATO must increase its forces in the Baltics**

Kühn, Ulrich. "NATO's Options - Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 28 Mar. 2018. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>

**If NATO wants to deny Russia the ability to successfully attack one or more Baltic states, it has little choice but to deploy forces on a much larger scale than it currently does.** Such forces could be deployed gradually to avoid giving Russia a casus belli and to make such deployments more palatable to skeptical NATO members. **The 2017 RAND study proposed deployments of around 35,000 personnel, with an additional reinforcement capability of up to about 70,000 personnel; this would certainly prevent a Russian military fait accompli and force Moscow to fight a bloody and drawn-out conventional war, should it attack.** These deployments would also, perhaps, eliminate most of the difficulties—and some of the resulting escalation pathways—that stem from the alliance's current need to reinforce troops rapidly and on a large scale in a crisis. In addition, **these troop deployments would raise the costs to Moscow of deliberately forcing a military crisis with NATO.**

## **Russia is modernizing its military so fast that NATO needs to increase its support to the Baltics to keep pace**

White, Sarah. "Russian Aggression in the Baltics Will Not Look Like Crimea." Real Clear Defense. 21 May 2021.

[https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/21/russian\\_aggression\\_in\\_the\\_baltics\\_will\\_not\\_look\\_like\\_crimea\\_778176.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/05/21/russian_aggression_in_the_baltics_will_not_look_like_crimea_778176.html)

Ultimately, **Russia's increasing military sophistication means that the U.S. and NATO should now be prepared to modernize proportionally to help defend the Baltic states and treat the potential for the eruption of conflict in the Baltics as a threat in the near term.** Fortunately, NATO has modernized its defenses in Northern and Eastern Europe, with the F-35 fighter supplementing or replacing older fleets in several countries, including two of the Baltics' Nordic neighbors, Norway and Denmark, along with Poland. In Poland, one of NATO's "frontline" states due to its proximity to Russia, the F-35 is in especially urgent demand. The F-35 is especially important in deterring Russian aggression because not only does it collect more intelligence than other tactical aircraft, it is invisible to Russian radar. Poland has also purchased Patriot missiles from the U.S., which it will be receiving within the next few years, and neighboring Romania has received them as well. Poland is currently in discussions to acquire the M1 Abrams tank, also produced by the United States; if successful, it would be the first European country to do so. The M1 Abrams would both replace Poland's 500 Soviet-made tanks and eliminate its problem of not being able to join France and Germany's Main Battle Tank coalition. Though none of the three Baltic states has acquired the F-35, it was recently deployed there for the first time when four Italian F-35s arrived at Estonia's Amari Air Base to take over the BAP mission from Germany in April. **Despite the readiness of Baltic security forces, BAP is the closest thing that the three countries have to an air defense system, but it has been criticized as insufficiently able to respond to simulated Russian air attacks.** **Therefore, the development of a domestic air defense system in Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia, if not the outright sale of the F-35 to one of them, would be more reason to make Russia think twice before launching a conventional attack.**

**The Baltic states have specifically stated their desire for further US and NATO support**

Judson, Jen. "Do the Baltics need more US military support to deter Russia?." Defense News. 15 Jul. 2019. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/07/15/do-the-baltics-need-more-us-military-support-to-deter-russia/>

**For the Baltic states, the desire for steadier and more robust American presence to deter Russia is high.** Ever since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, NATO and the U.S. military have drastically bolstered their presence in Eastern Europe to include deploying NATO rapid response forces, embedding units under the command of Baltic states' forces, building up arsenals of equipment, deploying a heel-to-toe rotational U.S. armored brigade combat team and conducting increasingly complex exercises. The deployment of the enhanced forward presence, or EFP, battalions in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, for instance, have significantly reduced the risk of military conflict in the Baltic region, Lithuanian Defence Minister Raimundas Karoblis recently told Defense News and a group on an Atlantic Council-organized, fact-finding mission in Lithuania. "On the other hand, let me be very clear: **[The] U.S. is the most powerful ally and its deterrent effect is not comparable to other allies,**" he told Defense News in a statement. **"I am convinced that Russia would not dare to test NATO if U.S. military units are deployed on [a] persistent basis in the three Baltic states."**

## Con Evidence

### **Russia has made it abundantly clear that they would regard additional NATO deployments to the Baltics as aggression rather than deterrence**

Milevski, Lukas. "NATO's defence policy dilemma in the Baltic States." *Security and Defence Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2017, pp. 51-68. doi:10.5604/01.3001.0010.8471. <https://securityanddefence.pl/NATO-S-DEFENCE-POLICY-DILEMMA-IN-THE-BALTIC-STATES,103196,0,2.html>

Returning to the present day, current Russian rhetoric conveys the same pattern of thought as that which reigned in 1983. Even before his third term as President, Putin invoked the analogy of the Second World War to justify significant military modernisation and reform. "We cannot afford to repeat the tragedy of 1941, when the lack of readiness of the state and the Army for war led to the vast loss of human lives." **Russian General Yuri Yakubov has suggested that "[i]f heavy U.S. military equipment, including tanks, artillery batteries and other equipment really does turn up in countries in eastern Europe and the Baltics, that will be the most aggressive step by the Pentagon and NATO since the Cold War."** **The Russians have publicly stated that NATO deployments to the Baltic States would be regarded as aggressive actions-not as moves meant to reinforce deterrence.** The Russians, after all, also regard the colour revolutions which occurred in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine as American-backed coups and fear that the West is conspiring to bring about a coup or revolutionary violence in Russia as well. In an interesting historical parallel, the Soviet Union also feared the presence of German troops in the Baltic States during the interwar period, and the scenario of a German-led Baltic regional alliance against the Soviet Union dominated Soviet war plans during the period. Russian rhetoric, directed to both international and domestic audiences, therefore conveys an important message about their perceptions. Whether **these messages** are truthful or not is a separate question, but they **are officially and vociferously publicised domestically and internationally.** **Russia**, in its previous incarnation as the Soviet Union, **has in fact previously felt threatened by similar configurations of power in the Baltic region.**



## Increasing military presence would undermine NATO unity and provoke Russia

Kühn, Ulrich. "NATO's Options - Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 28 Mar. 2018. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>

While such measures might mitigate the short-term risk of deliberate Russian escalation, they would create a number of severe political trade-offs. First, **a deterrence-by-denial approach would risk overstretching the delicate political consensus among NATO members about conventional deterrence and assurance. A number of member states, perhaps led by Germany and France, would not support such a policy and would seek to block it. Even more importantly, perhaps, not even the Baltic states are supportive of such a maximalist approach.** While many **Baltic officials and experts** would like to see greater U.S. military engagement in the region, some of them **are highly skeptical of the assumptions underlying the RAND war games and think that they are too pessimistic about Baltic defenses.** While they would like to see a strong, unified allied response to the growing threat from Russia, they also recognize the need to avoid unnecessarily escalating general tensions with Russia. Also, against the background of often contentious debates within NATO about financial and military burden sharing, **it would not be clear at all who would provide the necessary funds and forces for such a large military footprint.** Neither the United States nor most other allies currently seem to be both willing and capable. Second, **instead of preventing deliberate Russian escalation this deterrence-by-denial approach could, in fact, reinforce Russian perceptions of insecurity.** Russia would be loath to accept a NATO force that size so close to its borders. **Moscow might seek to prevent NATO force deployments** through various means, including, not inconceivably, **by considering the preventive use of force** (that is, Russia might wage a war because it could only see its position deteriorating in the future). **This risk might become more acute in the early stages of a crisis when Russia could misinterpret the large-scale movement of sizable forces,** such as the 70,000 personnel reinforcement the RAND study suggested, **as NATO preparations for a preemptive attack on Russia.** Third, **large-scale conventional deployments could help further solidify Russian reliance on its nuclear deterrent and could even serve to lower Russia's threshold for nuclear use, making the early employment of nuclear weapons more likely.**

## The Baltics have built up significant defenses against Russian cyberattacks and are in a strong position

Kojala, Linas. "Baltic Security: The Same Challenges Remain, Even During a Pandemic - Foreign Policy Research Institute." Foreign Policy Research Institute. 8 Jun. 2020.

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/05/baltic-security-the-same-challenges-remain-even-during-a-pandemic/>

**Fighting disinformation attacks remains a crucial aspect of Baltic security.** For example, in late April, Lithuanian National Defense Minister Raimundas Karoblis, Lithuanian media outlets, state institutions, and addressees at the NATO headquarters in Brussels received a falsified email from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announcing an alleged decision to withdraw NATO troops from Lithuania. In other instances, fake news was spread about a U.S. soldier allegedly infected with the coronavirus in Lithuania, and the allegedly expressed intention of the Ministry of National Defense not to halt international military exercises. In late May, some Russian-backed media outlets in Baltic and Eastern European countries reported false information that the Canadian-led NATO battle group in Latvia had “a high number” of cases of the deadly virus. **These instances fit into a pattern of previous attempts seeking to discredit NATO in the eyes of the Baltic citizens,** as well as seeding doubt about the Baltic countries’ full-fledged membership in the alliance. However, **Baltic states are relatively well prepared for this kind of threat. Due to multiple previous instances of disinformation attacks, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians have become resilient. A number of initiatives,** such as Lithuanian “elves”—volunteers who set out to combat Russian online trolls—**seek to tackle the problem.** With the use of artificial intelligence tools, “the elves” can filter around 30,000 internet articles daily and identify the most extreme cases of disinformation or propaganda. It acts as an early warning system, swiftly identifying and responding to disinformation threats. Recently, the initiative gained international recognition and expanded to Latvia and Estonia. **Hence, the efforts of malign actors are usually ineffective in significantly shifting the public opinion. For instance, the population of the Baltic countries are among the most supportive of membership in the EU and NATO.**

## The Baltics, particularly Estonia, have some of the best defenses against cyberattacks in the world

Kottasová, Ivana. "How Russian threats turned this country into the go-to expert on cyber defense." CNN. 18 Jun. 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/18/tech/estonia-cyber-security-lessons-intl-cmd/index.html>

When people like the German Chancellor Angela Merkel or the King of Belgium want to learn more about cybersecurity, they go to Estonia. The Baltic country runs on the internet. From filing taxes and voting, to registering the birth of a new baby, nearly everything a person might want or need from the government can be done online. It's an approach that's incredibly convenient for Estonia's 1.3 million people -- but it also requires high level of cybersecurity. Luckily for its residents, **Estonia is punching way above its weight when it comes to online safety. It regularly places on top of security rankings. Its capital city of Tallinn is home to NATO's cyber defense hub, the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. When it took up the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council last year, it made cybersecurity one of the policy priorities.** "Estonia digitized a lot sooner than other countries, it was focusing on things like online schooling and online government services and it took a more proactive approach to technology," said Esther Naylor, a international security research analyst at Chatham House.

## The EFP has had a very positive impact on the Baltic states and has undermined Russia's efforts to spread misinformation

Maguire, Steven. "The Positive Impact of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence." The Strategy Bridge. 3 Sept. 2019. Web. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/9/3/the-positive-impact-of-natos-enhanced-forward-presence>

Within the information sphere **the forward presence has had a highly positive impact.** One writer concluded the Baltic States were “especially vulnerable” to Russian disinformation because of the split loyalty many Russian speakers may have. Russia's initial response was largely in the information space with false reports planted through local media and attempts to manipulate Russian speaking populations into opposition. In one example, British soldiers in Estonia were filmed fighting outside a fast food outlet in an attempt to discredit the mission. Russia's aim was to destabilise domestic politics and undermine national resilience. This was a poor attempt because it quickly revealed that the attack was provoked by Russian agents and widely discredited undermining Russia's cause. **Russia's ultimate objective is to undermine an opponent's desire to fight thereby generating greater domestic and political leverage. In the case of the Baltic States, however, the deployment of NATO land forces has enhanced a national sense of self-determination in a strong show of modern deterrence.** Deterrence is a competition of political ideology as much as it is a battle for traditional borders. **International involvement, through the Enhanced Forward Presence, has seen a rise in national self-confidence on NATO's eastern flank and a subsequent reduction in the fear of Russian aggression. Numerous high profile events demonstrate this dynamic.** This, coupled with a rising level of support for NATO, binds the Baltic States to the West politically and socially. If Russia continued to have a distinct information effect within the Baltic States, it would be reasonable to expect rising levels of partisan violence and separatism. The absence of such activity, in contrast to the prevailing mood before 2017, is often ignored. The higher living standards and political freedoms of the West as compared to those in Russia seem to be the driving factor in this debate. In a 2016 interview the Director of Narva College was asked what would happen if Narva was to hold a new referendum on remaining in Estonia. The Director responded, “Anyone with any common sense...would want to live in Estonia.” **The role of NATO's forward presence in maintaining and improving this sense of national identity and security should not be underestimated.**

**Russia claims its military actions are merely a response to the perceived threat from increased NATO activity in the region - this justification would likely be used for more Russian military actions if we affirm**

Galen Carpenter, Ted. "Is NATO Provoking the Russian Military Build-up in Kaliningrad?" Cato Institute. 14 Dec. 2020. Web. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/nato-provoking-russian-military-build-kaliningrad>

**Vladimir Putin’s government defends the Kaliningrad buildup as a response to NATO’s increasingly menacing behavior along the borders of the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, that justification has some merit. NATO has engaged in an alarming number of provocations in recent years.** The political decision to expand the alliance to incorporate not only the members of the defunct Warsaw Pact, but also the three Baltic states that had been part of the USSR, was itself a decidedly unfriendly act. But **NATO has engaged in a number of specific military actions that have exacerbated tensions. The number and size of NATO military exercises along Russia’s western frontier have surged in recent years.** Indeed, in January 2020, the alliance conducted its largest exercise in 25 years. In early June, **Russia offered to scale-back its maneuvers for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak, if the Western allies did likewise. Russian military leaders complained that NATO simply “stonewalled” the offer.** In addition to the proliferation of NATO “war games,” **there has been a dramatic increase in the number of incidents in which NATO aircraft — especially U.S. reconnaissance planes — have approached the Russian border to test the country’s air and sea defenses.** Moscow has reacted angrily to such conduct, not only intercepting those aircraft but “buzzing” them and engaging in other unsafe practices. There have been dozens, if not hundreds, of interceptions of U.S. and NATO military planes annually in recent years, principally in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions. Russian warships also have shadowed their NATO counterparts, and Russian planes have repeatedly buzzed and harassed U.S. and NATO ships.

## The US and NATO need to continue a dialogue with Russia in order to maintain world peace in the long term

Sokolsky, Richard and Rumer, Eugene. "U.S.-Russian Relations in 2030." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 15 Jun. 2020. Web. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/15/u.s.-russian-relations-in-2030-pub-82056>

**It is precisely because the U.S.-Russian relationship is likely to remain contentious that Washington and Moscow need to manage their differences. To steady the relationship, both countries will need to resume a high-level dialogue on issues that divide them.** This effort would not be a panacea for the current troubles, but it could create opportunities, however limited, for cooperation. U.S. priorities for a renewed dialogue should be:

- avoiding a U.S.-Russian conflict in the Euro-Atlantic area and reducing the risks of inadvertent escalation;
- retooling strategic stability in response to the erosion of arms control and the development of new military technologies;
- cooperating to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons;
- preserving peace and stability in the Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf;
- preventing China from establishing hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region; and
- managing U.S.-Russian competition in cyberspace and in space.

**To begin the slow process of rebuilding a degree of trust, the two countries should develop a framework for cooperating where their interests overlap and for managing disagreements before they escalate.** In the U.S. approach, small, pragmatic steps should be given precedence over big, ambitious goals. Whether these opportunities can be exploited will depend on the leadership, will, and vision of leaders in both countries, who must overcome a wall of mutual mistrust and the resistance of publics, politicians, and legislatures.