

September/October Topic Analysis

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

Definitions:

North Atlantic Treaty Organization: According to [Britannica](#), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (abbreviated to NATO) is a military alliance established in 1949 to create a counterweight to Soviet power. Today, [NATO](#) comprises 30 member countries in North America and Europe and is bound by the principle of collective defense, in which each country is sworn to defend the other member countries if one is under attack.

Substantially increase: Realistically, the term “substantially increase” is unlikely to fundamentally change how the topic is debated; the debate exists over whether an increase is good or bad, not over the scale of the increase. However, teams may want to define this upfront to preempt any debates over what a substantial increase would be. What we should understand is that “substantially increase” implies that there are existing defense commitments in the Baltics.

Defense commitments: Again, the debate is unlikely to focus on what the defense commitments should look like (particularly because we must avoid plans), but it’s important for us to know what the existing defense commitments look like so that we can understand what an increase would likely look like. This map from [NATO](#) helps provide context on all of their ongoing missions.

Baltic states: [Britannica](#) clarifies the Baltic states are the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, three nations that border the Baltic Sea. Debaters should be careful not to conflate the Baltics with the Balkans.

Background:

Another school year is upon us, which means the beginning of another great debate season! The first topic of the year is an interesting one, focused not on the US and its policies but instead on the subject of international relations. NATO has been the subject of a lot of controversy in recent years, so it's beneficial for us to be able to examine it in this way. Additionally, the Baltic states are a region of the world that is not frequently part of foreign relations discussions, so this topic presents an interesting opportunity for us to engage with an aspect of international relations that will be new to many of us.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 with the goal of countering the growing power of the Soviet Union.¹ There are now 30 members of the alliance, joined together through a commitment to preserving peace and defending one another. A key aspect of NATO, as outlined in Article 5 of the Treaty, is the concept of collective defense - the idea that member countries will come to each other's defense if one of them is attacked.² This has been invoked only once, in response to the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001.

Russia currently poses a looming threat to the Baltic states. These nations would be strategically beneficial for Russia to have as allies, or even to take control of.³ Russia has economic incentives to enter the region, due to shipping concerns and oil exports, but it would also be benefitted militarily by being able to push NATO further away from its own soil. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, concerns have been raised that the Baltics could be Russia's next target.⁴

Because the topic pertains to a "substantial increase" in defense commitments to the Baltics, we know that NATO already has operations in the region. After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine's allies, including NATO, realized that they needed to bolster their defenses in the region. In 2017, NATO announced their Enhanced Forward Presence initiative to deploy multinational battlegroups to the Baltics and Poland to secure their defense capabilities.⁵ The fact that so many NATO countries agreed to participate in the EFP initiative

¹ NATO. "Founding treaty." NATO. 24 Sep. 2020. Web. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67656.htm

² 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>

³ 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>

⁴ 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>

⁵ "Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)." NATO. Last accessed 12 Aug 2021. Web. <https://lc.nato.int/operations/enhanced-forward-presence-efp.aspx>

shows the commitment NATO has to ensuring the security of the region.⁶ There is likely to be a lot of debate over whether or not EFP provides enough deterrence against Russia and enough defense for the Baltic states.

⁶ Deni, John R. "NATO's Presence in the East: Necessary but Still Not Sufficient." War on the Rocks. 27 Jun. 2018. Web. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/>

Aff Arguments:

Russian War

From what we can understand even just from the background information on the topic, war with Russia is going to be a huge point of discussion on this topic. There are clear links to help develop this argument, and the impact has the potential to be huge in both scope and magnitude. Numerous analysts have concluded that the Baltics are at high risk for an attack from Russia, and that the threat Russia poses to the region is great.⁷ Russia has spent the past few years greatly bolstering its strength and dominance in Eastern Europe, and their development has seen them grow their forces and diversify their attack options.⁸ The US and Russia both understand the strategic importance of the Baltic states to their respective goals,⁹ and both countries would be willing to go to war to defend their interests in the region.

If Russia decided to attack, it would be devastating for the Baltics. Even though NATO would defend these countries through their Article 5 commitments, it's likely that Russia would be able to do a significant amount of damage to the Baltics before NATO had time to intervene. Multiple studies have concluded that current NATO and Baltic forces would be insufficient in combating Russian aggression in the region.¹⁰ In a 2016 series of war games simulated by the RAND Corporation, Russian forces were able to eliminate or bypass resistance and were at the Baltic capitals within 36-60 hours after the beginning of hostilities.¹¹ Affirming the resolution has the potential to change this. Lithuania's Defense Minister has stated that consistent

⁷ Waller, Nicholas. "How real is the Russian threat to the Baltic States?" New Europe. 8 Apr. 2021. Web. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/how-real-is-the-russian-threat-to-the-baltic-states/>

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

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ Deni, John R.. "NATO's Presence in the East: Necessary but Still Not Sufficient." War on the Rocks. 27 Jun. 2018. Web. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/>

¹¹ Shlapak, David A.. "Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics." RAND Corporation. 2016. Web. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html

deployment of defenses in the Baltics would effectively push Russia back.¹² If more forces were supplied to the region, NATO would be in a much better position to deter Russia.¹³

Cyberwarfare

While cyberwarfare can function within the Russian war argument, it adds a different angle to the discussion and can function as a separate argument as well. There's a precedent for a cyberattack against the Baltics, as Russia hit Estonia with an early and severe cyberattack in 2007 in response to political provocation.¹⁴ Russia has continued to commit cyberattacks against the Baltics ever since, and even conducted cyberattacks against Lithuania as recently as last year.¹⁵ Cybercrime has increased by more than 50% since 2018 and is continuing to rise during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁶ Those specific attacks even afforded Russia the ability to conduct cyberattacks against other countries. The other thing to note is that the Baltics don't currently have sufficient defenses against cyberattacks, as the EFP doesn't have any provisions for cybersecurity.¹⁷ NATO's Secretary General has made it clear that NATO countries consider cyberattacks to be an "operational military domain" and that they should be responded to in the same way as a land, air, or sea assault, greatly increasing the potential for war.¹⁸ Unfortunately, cyberattacks are capable of doing just as much damage as nuclear weapons and can impede access to food, water, and housing, among other necessities, which can lead to death.¹⁹

¹² Judson, Jen. "Do the Baltics need more US military support to deter Russia?." Defense News. 15 Jul. 2019. Web. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/07/15/do-the-baltics-need-more-us-military-support-to-deter-russia/>

¹³ "NATO's Options - Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 28 Mar. 2018. Web. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/nato-s-options-pub-75883>

¹⁴ McGuinness, Damien. "How a cyber attack transformed Estonia." BBC News. 27 Apr. 2017. Web. <https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>

¹⁵ "Report: Russian hackers exploit Lithuanian infrastructure." AP NEWS. 20 Apr. 2021. Web. <https://apnews.com/article/lithuania-coronavirus-pandemic-covid-19-pandemic-national-security-russia-4f643495296f645e8957594034ec0367>

¹⁶ Welscher, Alexander. "More than a virus: pandemic and online security in the Baltic states." Public Broadcasting of Latvia. 12 Apr. 2021. Web. <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/economy/business/more-than-a-virus-pandemic-and-online-security-in-the-baltic-states.a399930/>

¹⁷ Deni, John R.. "NATO's Presence in the East: Necessary but Still Not Sufficient." War on the Rocks. 27 Jun. 2018. Web. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/natos-presence-in-the-east-necessary-but-still-not-sufficient/>

¹⁸ Grady, John. "NATO's Stoltenberg: Sophisticated Cyber Attacks Could Trigger Collective Response." U.S. Naval Institute News. 8 Jun. 2021. Web. <https://news.usni.org/2021/06/08/natos-stoltenberg-sophisticated-cyber-attacks-could-trigger-collective-response>

¹⁹ Straub, Jeremy. "Hackers Could Kill More People Than a Nuclear Weapon." Live Science. 27 Aug. 2019. Web. <https://www.livescience.com/cyberattacks-could-kill-more-than-nuclear-attacks.html>

Reaffirms Commitment

In recent years, the US' relationship with NATO has soured. The Trump administration put pressure on NATO member countries to reach the defense commitment outlined in the Wales Pledge - each country should spend 2% of its GDP on defense. The US is the largest contributor to NATO overall, considering defense spending, personnel, and financial support.²⁰ Since the US' commitment to NATO has been shaky over the past few years, NATO's ability to conduct important missions has been called into question. Substantially increasing NATO's defense commitments to the Baltics would demonstrate to NATO's allies and enemies alike that the organization remains strong and united against any threats it may face. This would also allow many different NATO members to cooperate on missions, making them stronger overall.²¹ Additionally, recommitting western nations to the Baltics can help democratize the region and lead to the development of more inclusive policies and communities.²²

²⁰ BBC News. "Nato summit: What does the US contribute?" BBC News. 14 Jun. 2021. Web.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>

²¹ Schnauffer, Tad A. "The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies - Georgetown Journal of International Affairs." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. 15 Jan. 2021. Web.

<https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/01/15/the-us-nato-relationship-the-cost-of-maintaining-political-pressure-on-allies/>

²² Bergmane, Una. "The Reset of U.S.-EU Relations and the Baltic States." Foreign Policy Research Institute. 22 Jun. 2021. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/06/the-reset-of-the-us-eu-relations-and-the-baltic-states/>

Neg Arguments:

Russian War

The impacts of a potential war with Russia on the Baltics and the rest of the world are so catastrophic that this argument exists for both the affirmation and negation. Teams will likely be locked into a debate over the probability of war and the set of circumstances Russia is most likely to attack under. The argument on the negation is that Russia is currently not looking to launch an attack against the Baltics. There is one analysis in particular by the Strategy Bridge that studies a great deal of the studies that will likely be cited on the aff and explains how they do not consider the political realities of the situation in Eastern Europe.²³ This analysis concludes that the EFP has deepened the ties between the Baltics and the West, showing Russia the kind of enemy they will be reckoning with if they choose to attack. There are plenty of reasons that Russia would not choose to attack the Baltics - just because they are powerful doesn't mean that war is in their strategic interest.²⁴

To give this argument more offense in the round, teams may choose to argue that war is actually more likely with an increase in defense commitments. A significant increase in defense commitments may send a signal to Russia that NATO perceives their operations as hostile and is preparing for war. Russia claims that their recent military buildup is a response to the threat NATO poses to them in the region.²⁵ With further defense commitments, Russia would be further provoked to continue building up their military force and potentially attack. This puts other countries at risk as well, as Russia claims its buildup on Ukraine's border is a response to NATO's actions.²⁶

EFP is Sufficient

Teams on the negation also have the option of agreeing that Russia is likely to commit acts of aggression that could lead to war in the status quo, but that existing defenses already provide enough security for the Baltics. Many of the studies showing that Russia could greatly

²³ 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>

²⁴ 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/>

²⁵ 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>

²⁶ 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>

hurt the Baltics pre-date the beginning of the EFP initiative, proving that defense capabilities have increased in recent years. Teams may choose to argue that the EFP initiative is sufficient for defense reasons, deterrence, or both. Evidence suggests that even if the EFP does not provide enough defense for the Baltics, it still deters Russia from ever attacking them.²⁷ Additionally, the EFP is not the only existing defense mechanism in place; there are plenty of structures that have been established and improved since the EFP to emphasize the strength of the Baltics and their abilities to respond to Russian aggression.²⁸ Estonia has spent the past decade modernizing their cyber arsenal and building incredibly strong defenses against cyberattacks, helping them to develop the world's greatest cyber defenses that other NATO members continue to learn from.²⁹ The three Baltic nations have worked together in recent years to combat Russia's cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns online to better ensure stability and further cooperation.³⁰

Undermines US Strategic Interests

If the US and its NATO allies want to cooperate with Russia in pursuit of strategic goals, they need to maintain a level of dialogue with Putin's government. Affirming the resolution would make this much more difficult, as it would send a signal to Russia that the US and NATO view them as a hostile actor that needs countering rather than conversing with. Continuing a healthy dialogue between the US, NATO, and Russia is key to maintaining global peace for the foreseeable future.³¹ A key aspect of this is returning to the JCPOA, or the Iranian Nuclear Deal. Russia wants the US to return to the deal and work on nonproliferation, but if NATO took a defensive stance against Russia in the Baltics, it would undermine potential collaboration on this issue and make dialogue essentially impossible.³² NATO needs to work with Russia on

²⁷ Kristek, Michael R. "The nature of Russia's threat to NATO's enhanced forward presence in the Baltic States." Calhoun, the Naval Postgraduate School. 7 Feb. 2018. Web.

https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/56748/17Dec_Kristek_Michael.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁸ 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>

²⁹ Kottasová, Ivana. "How Russian threats turned this country into the go-to expert on cyber defense." CNN. 18 Jun. 2021. Web. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/18/tech/estonia-cyber-security-lessons-intl-cmd/index.html>

³⁰ Kojala, Linas. "Baltic Security: The Same Challenges Remain, Even During a Pandemic." Foreign Policy Research Institute. 8 Jun. 2020. Web. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/05/baltic-security-the-same-challenges-remain-even-during-a-pandemic/>

³¹ 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>

³² Vera Michlin-Shapir. "Will Russia help the U.S. negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran?" Institute of Modern Russia. 2 Mar. 2021. Web. <https://imrussia.org/en/analysis/3240-will-russia-help-the-u-s-negotiate-a-nuclear-deal-with-iran>

nonproliferation in order to keep nuclear war a low-probability event.³³ Additionally, if NATO and the US reaffirm their commitment to nonproliferation, it will allow them to keep Russia and China at bay in the long term.³⁴

³³ Baklitskiy, Andrey. "Saving the JCPOA: the EU has to work with Russia and China." European Leadership Network. 23 Apr. 2018. Web. <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/saving-the-jcpoa-the-eu-has-to-work-with-russia-and-china/>

³⁴ Choksy, Jamsheed K. "Iran Needs the Nuclear Deal to Keep Russia and China at Bay." Foreign Affairs. 28 May 2021. Web. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2021-05-25/iran-needs-nuclear-deal-keep-russia-and-china-bay>