

Committee: North American Treaty Organization (NATO)

Country: United States

Delegate: [REDACTED]

School: [REDACTED]



Topic 1: Securing The Suwalki Gap

In today's unstable climate marked by a post-Cold War peak in western-Russian diplomatic tensions, The NATO alliance is faced with a frightening possibility, the loss of three member states via a short and poorly fortified road to defeat. 104 km stands between Kremlin ally Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. On one side are the three Baltic states with immeasurable political and historical value to Russia and on the other, the remaining NATO members. Russia, with more than enough manpower to feasibly exploit this weakness, poses an immediate danger not only to the future of NATO but to the safety of democracy and freedom in Europe.

Russia's Economic and military center remains in worrying proximity to each of the Baltic states and unfortunately the Suwalki choke point by extension, a proximity that is simply not shared by NATO. The Baltic states located in the alliance's far east periphery have often been described as a NATO peninsula of sorts, a region whose acceptance into the Western military alliance went against previous talks between the Soviet Union and the United States over the expansion of NATO. As former Russian satellite states with sizable Russian minority populations especially in Latvia and Estonia, all three nations hold considerable geopolitical and historical value to Russia. The Baltics are simultaneously incredibly vulnerable as any offensive from the far closer Russian Western military district would entail all such Russian advantages as faster deployment of reinforcements, shorter supply lines, and possibly air and artillery superiority¹.

¹ Schmiedl, E. L., Ben Hodges, Carsten. (2022, February 16). *Close to the Wind: Recommendations for Baltic Sea Regional Security*. CEPA.
<https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/close-to-the-wind-recommendations-for-baltic-sea-regional-security/>

According to NATO estimates, Russia could be capable of mobilizing up to 125,000 high-readiness ground troops in the Baltic region within a timeframe of less than 14 days².

Around one-third of these troops would likely be combat-ready within 24-72 hours³.

The highly militarized Kaliningrad Oblast has in recent years deployed numerous A2/AD military components including Air defense systems, counter-maritime forces, theatre offensive strike weapons, cruise missiles, and other precision-guided munitions⁴. Several European military analysts have speculated recent A2/AD developments of the Kaliningrad Oblast have aimed at increasing the maneuverability of long ranged artillery units capable of firing deep into NATO territory, Better synchronizing ground units into stiff defensive lines, and bolstering the territory's air and cybernetic capabilities⁵. From Kaliningrad, Iskander short-range ballistic missile systems could target military infrastructure throughout Poland, Lithuania, and southern Latvia⁶. When accounting for contiguous Russia, artillery capabilities extend to the entirety of the Baltic states with the potential of severely damaging key infrastructure nodes to NATO troop RSOI (Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration)⁷. Well-established mobile artillery positions may be able to severely disrupt even the basic transport of NATO forces to the Suwalki-Baltic region in the event of a conflict.

The nature of the Suwalki region overwhelmingly suggests a blitzkrieg “stab, grab, and hold” offensive would be Russia's most effective route to securing territorial gains against a superior military alliance. Former commanding general of the U.S. army in Europe Ben Hodges estimates that 30,000 troops would be capable of blocking and holding the Suwalki gap, a

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kaliningrad, S., Gap, R., & Chatzitheodorou, C. (n.d.). *Security At The Polish-Lithuanian Border AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953* Written by. <https://finabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/42.-security-at-the-polish-lithuanian-border.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

number which is entirely feasible given Russia's recent buildup of around 15,000 troops within Kaliningrad alone. Any Russian aggression would rely on covert troop transport through Belarus, sufficient troop numbers of at least 30,000 at the Suwalki Gap, and effective Artillery support to severely hamper any attempt at a counteroffensive⁸.

Russia's offensive would likely be described as a *fait accompli* attack, relying on early military gains to then focus all available resources on holding the recently acquired territory. To further complicate matters, Russia as a nuclear power could theoretically threaten nuclear retaliation in the case of any conventional ground offensive into occupied territories, potentially leaving NATO unable to reclaim lost ground.

To many, Belarusian cooperation with Moscow's military operations seems a given, however, it is not far-fetched to suggest a more complicated situation. Similarly autocratic leadership and regular aid Belarus receives from Moscow contributes to a strong political and military alliance between the two nations⁹. The foreign policy of Belarusian premier Alexandr Lukashenko has however drifted towards *de jure* neutrality¹⁰. The country played a huge role in the buildup of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and continues to host Russian-ranged units attacking Ukraine. At the same time, Belarus acted as a mediator during the early months of a war in negotiations between Western leaders and Russian diplomats¹¹. Lukashenko has subtly been striving for slightly more balanced relations with Russia and the West, expressing disagreement with Putin's approach to such geopolitical issues while simultaneously endorsing and facilitating the means of Russian aggression toward Ukraine¹². Minsk as of yet has avoided direct

⁸ Kaliningrad, S., Gap, R., & Chatzitheodorou, C. (n.d.). *Security At The Polish-Lithuanian Border AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953* Written by. <https://finabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/42.-security-at-the-polish-lithuanian-border.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

confrontation with Kyiv for a good reason: public opinion. Belarus is and has been an incredibly unstable autocracy¹³. The government regularly relies on rigged referendums and elections to maintain its power and legitimacy including one in February of 2022 that concluded an overwhelming public support for the hosting of Russian nuclear weapons and more consequentially the 2020 Belarusian presidential election¹⁴. The blatant case of election forgery ignited crippling civil unrest that justified Russian military presence in the country as a peacekeeping entity, generally souring public opinion of the Kremlin as well, perceived as the main source of power to their unpopular dictator¹⁵. There are likely many concerns among Belarusian officials about the potential blowback from military involvement in Ukraine. From here the question must be asked, if Belarus is currently unwilling to involve itself militarily in Ukraine due to public opinion, what level of instability might arise from the aiding of a direct armed conflict between two nuclear-armed superpowers? Furthermore, how willing would Lukashenko be to completely squander any hopes of a balanced foreign policy with the West and Russia amid increasing insecurity of the Russian economic market? The Belarus question must be taken into account to develop both diplomatic paths of deterrence and potential military scenarios to consider.

What had begun as a hesitant stance on securing baltic defense capabilities has recently turned to rapid action amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The condemnable operation has only served to further unite NATO as an alliance behind the common objectives of supplying Ukraine and securing its eastern flank through its EFP (Enhanced Forward Presence). As per NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have all received multinational battle battle groups led by The US, Germany, Canada, and The UK. Latvia and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Lithuania have additionally recently received deployments of both HIMAR and NASAM rocket artillery systems¹⁶. Spain has independently deployed 600 elite troops, Leopard 2E battle tanks, and Pizarro IFVs, and under the current policy, it is to be expected that these four allies will receive more military supplies in the future¹⁷. Following the sabotage of the Nord stream pipeline, NATO allies have more than doubled their naval presence in the Baltic Sea, conducting joint naval training exercises with Latvian and multinational special forces¹⁸. New submarine barrages have been deployed to the central Baltic Sea in reaction to the Nord stream sabotage and NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence has gradually diminished many vulnerabilities within the Baltic Region¹⁹. Whether or not the current status is sufficient, NATO must be assuredly prepared both strategically and logistically for the worst-case scenario.

The United States holds a prominent position both within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and Readiness Action Plan. The US leads NATO's international battalion in Poland and in total has over 35,000 troops stationed in Europe as by far the largest manpower contributor to the recent fortification of Eastern European allies including Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania²⁰. In the case of the Baltic states, there continue to be speculations over whether or not America intends to ship anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, however, by far the most valuable commodity contributed as of recently are advanced HIMAR artillery systems. President Biden has on multiple occasions reaffirmed his position that hostility in any violent form towards the Baltic states would result in immediate US-NATO involvement²¹.

¹⁶ *Enhanced Forward Presence-(eFP)-Latvia-EMAD - EMAD*. (n.d.). Emad.defensa.gob.es. Retrieved January 6, 2023, from https://emad.defensa.gob.es/en/operaciones/operaciones-en-el-exterior/31-eFP_Letonia/index.html?__locale=en

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *NATO conducts multinational joint training in Baltic Sea*. (n.d.). Mc.nato.int. <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2022/nato-conducts-multinational-joint-training-in-baltic-sea>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Integrated Mission Strategy U.S. Mission to NATO FOR PUBLIC RELEASE*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 6, 2023, from https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ICS_EUR_USNATO_Public.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

Evaluating Russia's possible methods of offensive into the Suwalki-Baltic region as most preferably a *fait accompli* scenario, we realize the sheer importance that rests upon an adequate response time and overwhelming firepower. One of NATO's most noticeable weaknesses continues to be its reliance on public opinion and meticulous consultation to initiate retaliatory measures²². By creating a collective defense zone consisting of all Polish-Lithuanian border districts in which any hostile attack would initiate an immediate Article 5 voting procedure, NATO could potentially begin deployment of emergency response troops days earlier than normally required, likely also being capable of deploying international air force divisions to defend NATO airspace. The US would also encourage the standardization of aerial and anti-aircraft technology as well as conducting joint bilateral exercises in preparation for a situation in which both nations' air spaces would fall under the same defensive umbrella. Learning from the effectiveness of drone warfare in the cases of the current Nagorno Karabakh conflict and Russo-Ukrainian war in disrupting both artillery and ground force positions, NATO would benefit strategically and logistically from investment in Bayraktar Tb3 drones. Nasam and HIMARS artillery systems in large quantities would also prove necessary to counteract Russian artillery dominance from the Kaliningrad vicinity. The prior solutions all possess deterrent properties to a potential Russian incursion into the Suwalki Gap, measures that express a preferential desire to defend rather than ignite conflict and its disastrous implications. Most importantly, avoidance it be through military or diplomatic means should take the forefront of our strategic objectives.

²² Kaliningrad, S., Gap, R., & Chatzitheodorou, C. (n.d.). *Security At The Polish-Lithuanian Border AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953* Written by. <https://finabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/42.-security-at-the-polish-lithuanian-border.pdf>